

AIR AMERICA: CONSOLIDATED PBV-5A CATALINAS by Dr. Joe F. Leeker

First published on 15 August 2003, last updated on 24 August 2015



An Air America PBV-5A, believed to be B-825, coming in to land on one of the islands off the Chinese coast
(photo kindly submitted by Leif Hellström)

The types of missions flown by Air America's PBV-5As:

Air America's PBV-5As were both based on Taiwan and assigned to contract N(713)55-169-9-64 between CAT and the Naval Auxiliary Communication Center (NACC), a CIA front company used for special operations out of Taiwan. It seems that there were two types of missions: to support Chinese Nationalist positions on islands off the coast of Mainland China and "to lift Nationalist Chinese navy old time morse L/MF radio operators off Taiwan, then fly them low up the coast of Mainland China (moonlit nights, of course, with flat sea conditions), land in the water, put out the L/MF WWII type radio antennas on balloon hoists, then open the net to the left behind agents for intel".¹ But the aircraft were seldom used – for example only 150 hours from May 63 to April 64.² "The PBVs were out of Taipei. [...] Don Teeters was the pilot. He was also the Chief pilot in the Head office in Taipei at 46 Chung Shan Peiliu. No scheduled flights, but they were on demand."³ "Quemoy was a small Nationalist held island about 500 miles off of Taiwan where they used to fire artillery shells into the mainland and the mainland firing into the island. We would fly there pretty regularly with the PBV B-825 and B-831."⁴ "The story was: 'Gimo' sent his laundry to China to get it done."⁵ But the PBVs were also used to support agents in Southern China.⁶

Statistics according to official Air America documents:

- Summary of aircraft as of 1 February 66 (in: UTD/Herd/B2): 2
- Inventories of 31 March 72 > 30 November 72 (both in: UTD/CIA/B1F10): 1 > 0

¹ Brian Sullivan, in: *Air America Log*, September 1999, p. 6.

² Minutes ExCom-AAAC/AAM of 28 April 64, in: UTD/CIA/B7F3.

³ E-mail dated 21 January 2006 kindly sent to the author by Ward S. Reimer.

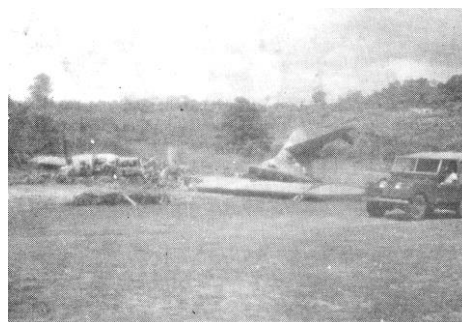
⁴ E-mail dated 24 January 2006, kindly sent to the author by Ward S. Reimer.

⁵ E-mail dated 21 January 2006, kindly sent to the author by Ward S. Reimer.

⁶ Interview with Connie Seigrist, dated 1 June 2006.

The individual aircraft histories:

Type	registration / serial	c/n (msn)	date acquired	origin
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CAT PBX-5A B-819

at Taipei in October 1953
(UTD/Kirkpatrick, slide A 3221)

the wreck at Manado about 13 May 58
(photo kindly submitted by Leif Hellström)

Cons. PBX-5A	B-819	851("55")	(1951)	previously BuA 08032, then NC49692, then F- BDRN of TRAPAS (Transports Aériens du Pacifique Sud)
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Service history: The registration XT-819 was probably reserved in February 51 for a PBX-5A to be owned by Western Enterprises Inc. (WEI) and to be flown by CAT. It was only in July 51 that CAT found F-BDRN at Noumea (Joe Orlovski, Letter dated 3 July 51 to Joe Rosbert, in: UTD/Rosbert/B2F1). CAT apparently used WEI-owned PBX-5A B-819 as early as August 51 (Holober, *Raiders of the China Coast*, p.79), and B-819 was still WEI-owned in July 53 (Leary, Manuscript, p.343, in: UTD/Leary/B19F2). In 1953, WEI sold B-819 to CAT Inc., who already owned the aircraft in January 54 (Monthly Report of CAT's Operations Division for January 54, in: UTD/Leary/B21F1). On 1 March 55, CAT Inc. sold PBX-5A B-819 to AACL (Bill of Sale in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no.2), who leased it to CAT. In December 57, the Chinese Civil Aviation Administration requested to use CAT's PBX aircraft for search and rescue purposes; this was approved on 20 December 57 (Minutes of Meeting of ExCom-CAT Inc/AACL of 30 December 57, in: UTD/CIA/B6F2). A photo can be found in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B18, p. 70. Since mid-April 1958, it flew for the PERMESTA rebels against Sukarno on Sulawesi, Indonesia, as part of the AUREV (Revolutionary Air Force); the pilot was Connie M. Seigris (Leary/LeSchack, *Project Coldfeet*, pp. 109-13).

Fate: destroyed at Mapanget airfield, Manado, Sulawesi, Indonesia, by AURI B-25s and P-51s on 13 May 58 (Connie Seigris, *Memoirs*, p. 42, in: UTD/Leary/B21F11, and Leary/LeSchack, *Project Coldfeet*, p. 111; Conboy / Morrison, *Feet to the fire*, pp. 123-27, and Leif Hellström, "Air war in Paradise. The CIA and Indonesia 1958", give 15 May 58; a photo of the wreck was published there on p.34).



CAT PBY-5A B-825 at Tainan in the fifties, with blisters and Navy blue
(UTD/Kirkpatrick/B18)

Cons. PBY-5A	B-825	1803	(31 Mar. 59)	leased from Air Asia; acquired by CAT Inc. in July 52; previously BuA 48441, then N4856V
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Service history: acquired by CAT Inc. in July 52 at a price of \$ 39,000 (Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors of CAT Inc of 21 July 1952, in: UTD/CIA/B4F6A); acquired by Air Asia in “44/5”, that is in May 55 according to Air Asia’s Statement of Property of 31 March 65 (preserved in: UTD/CIA/B26F5); in December 57, the Chinese Civil Aviation Administration requested to use CAT’s PBY aircraft for search and rescue purposes; this was approved on 20 December 57 (Minutes of Meeting of ExCom-CAT Inc/AACL of 30 December 57, in: UTD/CIA/B6F2); dark blue; a photo is preserved in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B18, p. 70; used as a replacement aircraft for B-819 to support the PERMESTA rebels on Sulawesi, Indonesia, since mid-May 58; returned from Menado, Sulawesi, to the Philippines on 21 June 58; current in May 63, sale refused (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 14 May 63, in: UTD/CIA/B7F2); current Sept. 63 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept. 1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); at Tainan for overhaul since 7 September 63 (AAM Aircraft Availability for 1 July 63, 15 July 63, and 21 September 63, in: UTD/Walker/B25F8) and still on 1 February 64 and on 1 April 64, while operating officially under the NACC contract (AAM aircraft availability of 1 February 64, in the possession of Ward Reimer who kindly faxed it to the author on 17 February 2004; Operations Circular of 1 April 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B8F4); due for major overhaul in May 64 (Minutes ExCom-AACL/AAM of 28 April 64, in: UTD/CIA/B7F3); still at Tainan for overhaul on 7 July 64 while with NACC, that is while assigned to contract N-(713)55-169-9-64 (Aircraft status as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); probably, during the major overhaul between 7 September 63 and late 64 or early 1965, B-825 lost its blisters and was repainted light grey or silver; B-825 struck a sunken unmarked object at Taiwan on 28 February 65 (Aircraft accidents 1965, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2); repaired; based at Taipei between 3 May 65 and 1 January 66 (Planned Aircraft Assignments, Memos of 3 May 65, 22 May 65, 27 October 65, and 1 January 66, all in: UTD/Walker/B12F3+4 and B7F8); based at Taipei and operated under contract N(713)55-169-9-64 on 1 November 65 (Aircraft status as of 1 November 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); based at Taipei for contract

N(713)55-169-9-64 on 8 April 66 (Aircraft status as of 8 April 66, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1) and on 4 May 66 (Aircraft status as of 4 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2); on 15 May 66, the nose wheel collapsed on take-off from Taipei (Aircraft accidents 1966, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2); repaired; a photo taken probably at Tainan in the mid-sixties (there is a PC-6 in the background) can be found in UTD/Foster/B1; at that time the aircraft was all silver; unassigned and on long term storage at Tainan in May 68 (Aircraft status as of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2).



Air America PBY-5A B-825 at Tainan in the sixties, light colors and without blisters
(UTD/Foster/B1)

Fate: authorization to sell the aircraft was given on 22 August 67 (Minutes ExCom-AAACL/AAM of 22 August 67, in: UTD/CIA/B8F2); still in storage at Tainan on 19 July 71 (Memorandum of 19 July 71, in: UTD/Herd/B2); still stored in September 71, (Memorandum of 29 September 71, p. 4, in: UTD/CIA/B19F8); still on the inventory of 31 March 72, but not on the inventory of 30 November 72 (both in: UTD/CIA/B1F10). When it was scrapped, it had already lost its blisters and was (photo in: Rosbert, *The Pictorial History*, p.232).

Cons. PBY-5A B-831 879 (31 Mar. 59) leased from Air Asia; previously BuA 08060, then N1278N

Service history: acquired by CAT in November 58 as a replacement aircraft for B-819; delivered from California (Minutes ExCom-AAACL/CAT of 2 December 58, in: UTD/CIA/B6F2); the price was \$ 40,000 plus \$ 9,500 for conforming B-831 to CAT Specifications (Minutes ExCom-AAACL/CAT of 2 December 58, in: UTD/CIA/B6F2; Minutes ExCom-AAACL of 7 April 59, in: UTD/CIA/B6F4); acquired by Air Asia in "48/3", that is in March 59 according to Air Asia's Statement of Property of 31 March 65 (in: UTD/CIA/B26F5); painted in light colors; a photo taken at Hong Kong Kai Tak airport in the late 50ies was published in Legg, *Consolidated PBY Catalina*, p. 147; current in May 63, sale refused (Minutes ExCom-AAACL of 14 May 63, in: UTD/CIA/B7F2); current in Sept. 63 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept. 1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); was based at Tainan on 1 July 63, but was based at Taipei on 7 September 63 (AAM Aircraft Availability for 1 July 63, 15 July 63, and 21 September 63, in: UTD/Walker/B25F8) and still was on 1 February 64 and on 1 April 64, operated under the NACC contract (AAM aircraft availability of 1 February

64, in the possession of Ward Reimer who kindly faxed it to the author on 17 February 2004; Operations Circular of 1 April 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B8F4); still based at Taipei with NACC (contract N-(713)55-169-9-64) on 7 July 64 (Aircraft status as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); due for major overhaul in May 64 (Minutes ExCom-AACL/AAM of 28 April 64, in: UTD/CIA/B7F3); based at Tainan between 3 May 65 and 27 October 65, in storage in October 65 and January 66 (Planned Aircraft Assignments, Memos of 3 May 65, 22 May 65, 27 October 65, and 1 January 66, all in: UTD/Walker/B12F3+4 and B7F8); based at Tainan and operated under contract N(713)55-169-9-64 on 1 November 65 (Aircraft status as of 1 November 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/ B1F1) and on 8 April 66 (Aircraft status as of 8 April 66, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); put into long term storage at Tainan in April 66 (Aircraft status as of 4 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2).

Fate: authorization to sell the aircraft was given on 22 August 67 (Minutes ExCom-AACL/AAM of 22 August 67, in: UTD/CIA/B8F2); scrapped and de-registered off its nationality markings on 25 April 1968 (e-mail dated 20 March 2003, kindly sent by Mr. Chang Kuo-Cheng, Director General, CAA, Republic of China, to the author); not current on 1 May 68 (Aircraft status as of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2).

A photo showing 2 PBV-5As, one black and one light, is on the video tape made by Ed Eckholdt (at 1.14.21 minutes). One PBV was overhauled in 1964, the overhaul of the other one being postponed, as the PBVs had been used only for 150 hours from May 63 to April 64.⁷

Air America's contribution to the *Bay of Pigs* operation against Cuba in 1960/1: PBV

It is known that most of the pilots who flew in the *Bay of Pigs* operation against Cuba in April 1961 were Cuban exiles who had been engaged by the Double-Check Corporation.⁸ In addition to the combat and air drop missions of the operation, an American-manned PBV patrolled the waters south of Cuba for a total of 57 hours during five days on air-sea rescue and communications relay duty.⁹ This aircraft was PBV-5A HP-289 (c/n 22022), officially owned by Turismo Aéreo SA. It had been fitted with electronic equipment at Miami in early 1961 and was named "Swan Island". Its intention was to fly at altitude around the invasion area of Cuba and to transmit radio broadcasts back to the CIA HQ at Langley, Virginia.¹⁰ While it was based at Puerto Cabezas, it flew as "289".¹¹ Air America pilot Connie Seigrist sometimes flew it to deliver or pick up prisoners to the jungle prison.¹² During the Invasion, the American crew of this PBV consisted of former Air America pilot Don Teeters, as well as of Philip Gibbony, Philip Ingoglia, John S. Lewis, Joel F. Kilgore, Harry P. Rahm, and Joe M. Skipper. This crew flew missions in the PBV on 15, 17, 18, and 19 April 1961.¹³ After the *Bay of Pigs* operation had failed, PBV-5A HP-289 was delivered to Miami, where it was sold to Atlantic General Enterprises as 5Y-KUD in August 63 and then to the Caribbean Seafood

⁷ Minutes ExCom-AACL/AAM of 28 April 64, in: UTD/CIA/B7F3.

⁸ Hagedorn / Hellström, *Foreign Invaders*, p. 126.

⁹ *Inspector General's Survey of the Cuban Operation*, dated October 1961, that is CIA document no. 129914 at: http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000129914.pdf, Chapter N: Americans in combat, § 6, p.141 of the manuscript, p.149 on the website.

¹⁰ Legg, *Consolidated PBV Catalina*, p.101.

¹¹ Photos in the file "83 photographs identified as JMTIDE", that is doc. no. 133203 at the CIA's website at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000133203.pdf.

¹² Seigrist, *Memoirs*, pp.51/2, in: UTD/Leary/B21F11.

¹³ Memorandum "JMGLow Bonuses" dated 7 September 1961, that is document no. 141130 at the CIA's website at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000141130.pdf.

Production Corp. as HR-236 in December 65 without moving from Miami, and then became N6108, TG-BIV, N5404J and ZK-PBY (not taken up), until it was lost in the Pacific Ocean on 16 January 94.¹⁴

Problems and errors:

It has been reported that PBY-6A N48129 (ex BuA 64071) was operated by Air America. This is very unlikely. During the sixties this particular PBY-6A (former BuA 64071) was registered as N6457C to Sonora Flying Service of Columbia CA, who used it as a fire-fighter, and then to Calypso Air Charters of Miami.¹⁵ Only in 1968/69, was it re-registered as N48129 to Carl W. H. Jurgens of Dominica.¹⁶ In the mid-seventies, the aircraft became N101CS with the Cousteau Society.¹⁷ So the period of a use by Air America would have been between 1968/69 and 1975. But the official Flight Operations Circulars of Air America covering that period, which are preserved at the Air America Archives, do not mention a PBY-6A N48129. During that period of time, one of Air America's two PBY-5As had been scrapped and the other one was on long term storage. So, probably N48129 never left the Caribbean area and never flew with Air America.

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¹⁴ Robbins, *Air America*, p.65; Hagedorn/Hellström, *Foreign Invaders*, pp.126-31; Hagedorn, *Centr.Am.*, p.148; Leary, *Project Coldfeet*, pp.113-19, Legg, *Consolidated PBY Catalina*, pp. 54 (with a photo of 5Y-KUD), 98 (including a photo of TG-BIV of Troya SA), 99 (with a photo of HR-236), and 101. The FAA's US Civil Aircraft Register of 1 July 1969 gives N6108 (c/n 22022) as owned by Steward Davis Inc., Long Beach, CA. It also flew as "24-P-4" in the movie *Tora! Tora! Tora!*, a photo is in Legg, *Consolidated PBY Catalina*, p.41; in June 1988, it was sold as N5404J, before the New Zealand Catalina Group acquired it in 1993 allocating the registration ZK-PBY. However, it ditched into the Pacific Ocean near the Christmas Islands between Hawaii and Tahiti on 16 January 94 during delivery to New Zealand as N5404J; a picture of the sinking N5404J is in Legg, p.270.

¹⁵ FAA, *US Civil Aircraft Register* of 1 January 68, p. 1036.

¹⁶ FAA, *US Civil Aircraft Register* of 1 July 69, vol. II, p. 863.

¹⁷ Legg, *Consolidated PBY Catalina*, p. 267.