

Scheduled Air Services Ryukyus

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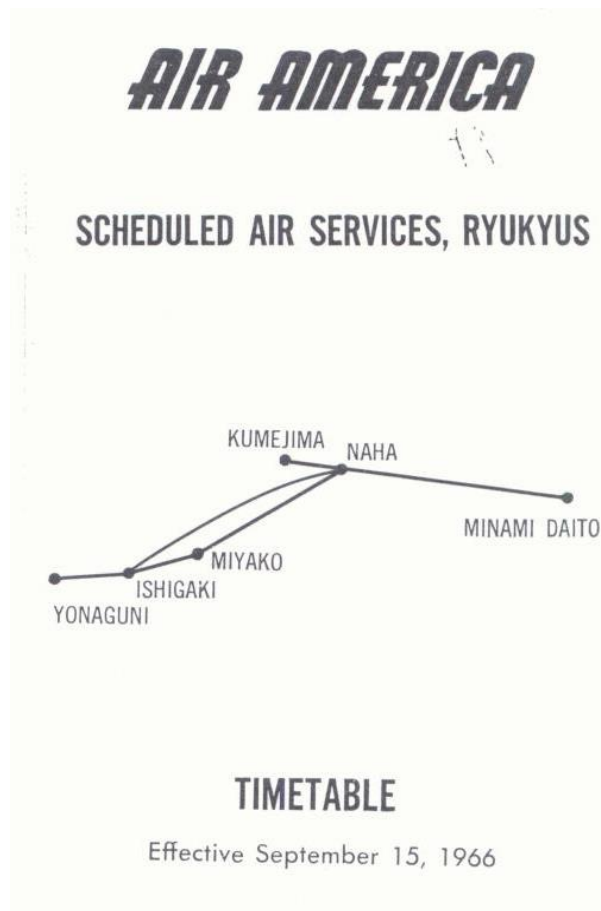
The management and crews of *Scheduled Air Services Ryukyus* at Christmas 1965
(former photo no. 1WL1-9-8-PB1, preserved at UTD/Leary/B76F8)

On 1 July 1964, a subsidiary company of Air America called *Scheduled Air Services Ryukyus* began scheduled passenger and cargo operations out of Naha, Okinawa. The service started with one C-46F (N67985) on 1 July 64, a second C-46F (N67984) was added on 1 November 64. Both C-46s had a modified hydraulic system that allowed the gear to retract faster, so that they could operate out of the 3,900-foot coral strips with a load and comply with FAA requirements.¹ In February 65, Beech 10-2 N343T was added. Both C-46Fs and the Beech were painted in a different color scheme compared to the rest of the fleet: While regular Air America C-46s were all silver and while regular Air America C-45s were silver with a blue cheatline in which the name appeared in white, aircraft used in the Ryukyus had a dark blue cheatline and a silver upper fuselage; the name appeared in white letters above the cheatline, making the aircraft look like real airliners. “Prior to the establishment of SASR, Civil Air Transport had been chartering a C-46 aircraft to Okinawa Tourist Agency for flights to Miyako and Ishigaki. This was extremely unsatisfactory as the flights were unscheduled, ran only when enough passengers were rounded up to run a full flight, had no base radio facilities, etc.etc.”² On my arrival in Taipei from Hong Kong”, SASR’s former manager Dan

¹ Dale D. Williamson, interview made by William M. Leary at Bellevue, WA, on 13 July 1987; Professor Leary’s notes are preserved at UTD/Leary/B43F5.

² There may also have been political reasons. Dale Williamson, who later flew for SASR, reports that the Okinawa businessman who ran that early service, although a rightist himself, had leftist associates in some of

Lawson recalls, “I was introduced to a folder entitled ‘Project White Island’ as it was then called. Initially, it only called for flights from Naha to Miyako, Ishigaki and return. As you can see from the enclosed flight schedule, these were extended to Yonaguni, Kume Jima, and Minami Daito. There was a semblance of airports at all these islands consisting mostly of only a coral runway. These runways were left over from WW2 and had been used for fighter aircraft and Kamikaze flights.”³ The primary reason for creating *Scheduled Air Services Ryukyus* was political: “President Kennedy had previously stated that Japan held a ‘Residual Interest’ in the Ryukyus. The war in Viet Nam was heating and Okinawa was a major support area for this effort. There was a growing leftist movement (via the Okinawan Teachers



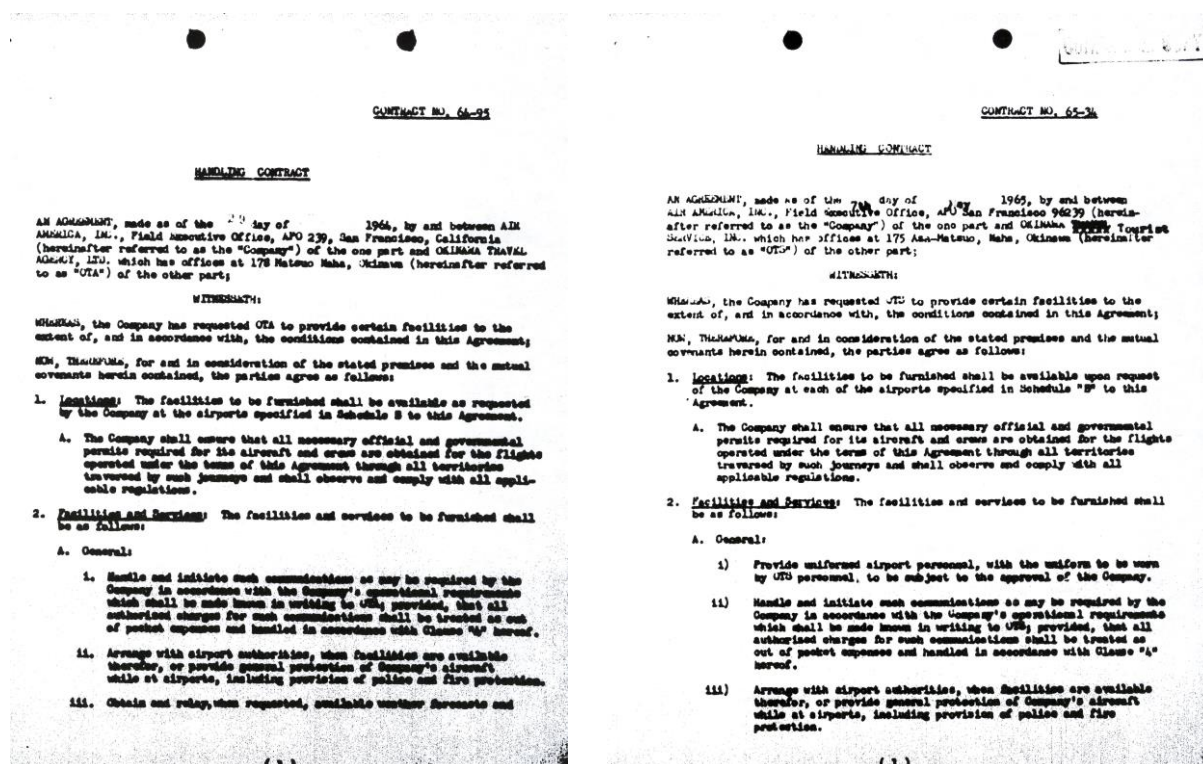
SASR timetable effective 15 September 66, in: UTD/Leary/B48F2

Association) to return the islands to Japan and throw the Americans out. In any event, a

his enterprises, which lead to the decision to terminate the arrangement. The easiest way to accomplish this was to replace Civil Air Transport with Air America, which operated under Part 121, requiring 75 percent American ownership (Dale D. Williamson, interview made by William M. Leary at Bellevue, WA, on 13 July 1987; Professor Leary’s notes are preserved at UTD/Leary/B43F5).

³ Letter dated 24 January 1988, sent to Prof. William Leary by SASR’s manager Dan Lawson, preserved at: UTD/Leary/B48F2.

decision was made to bring the semi isolated islands into a larger knit association.”⁴ So when Air America opened its scheduled air service in the Ryukyuan Islands, it also opened the way for a new generation of young Ryukyans to learn the skills of the air world. A group of Ryukyans were sent to the Air Asia maintenance base at Tainan to learn mechanical skills; radio operators and station personnel were also trained; and then there were Ryukyuan flight attendants like Miss Toshiko Kameda, Miss Yuiko Tsuda, Miss Katsuko Zamami, Miss Toshiko Higa, and Mr. Shoki Janado who were hired by Air America’s *Scheduled Air Services Ryukyus* and trained according to rigid FAA regulations.⁵ Several facilities were furnished to Air America by the Okinawa Travel Agency Ltd (OTA) according to contract no. 64-95 dated 29 May 1964, and the same contract also provided for ground handling, ground protection of the aircraft including provision of police and fire protection as well as communications and arrangements with airport authorities when necessary. On 7 May 1965, a similar contract – no. 65-34 – was made with the Okinawa Tourist Service Inc of Naha, Okinawa, and this new contract also included a new service to be furnished by OTS, that is “Provide uniformed airport personnel, with the uniform to be worn by OTS personnel, to be subject to the approval of the Company.”⁶



Contract no. 64-95 with the OTA (29 May 64) and no. 65-34 with the OTS (7 May 65)
 (both in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 31)

⁴ Letter dated 24 January 1988, sent to Prof. William Leary by SASR’s manager Dan Lawson, preserved at: UTD/Leary/B48F2.

⁵ (Anonymous), “Meet the stewardesses of AAM’s Scheduled Air Services, Ryukyus”, in: *Air America Log*, vol. I, no. 1, 15 February 1966, p.3, and (Anonymous), “New members of the SASR family in Naha”, in: *Air America Log*, vol. I, no. 2, 15 March 1966, p.3 (both in: UTD/Hickler/B7F7A).

⁶ Contract no. 64-95 with the OTA (dated 29 May 64) and no. 65-34 with the OTS (dated 7 May 65), both in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 31.

Due to an urgent need to get the project underway, operations were commenced before the Company had resolved all of the problems which are of course encountered in inaugurating a new service. As a result, SASR's early operation of the Ryukyu service encountered delays and similar problems for which it was strongly criticized by the local press. By February 65, the Company was getting on top of the operation, surveying all of the airports. Air America even installed radio equipment at three new points to which it was to inaugurate service in the near future. However, the Ryukyu service proved to be a high cost - short haul operation that did not meet expenses. Already in February 65, it was estimated that after operations had stabilized, Air America would lose about \$ 115,000 annually at the fares accepted by the Ryukyu's Command, but the needed fare increases proposed by Air America had been vetoed by the Command.⁷ This poor economic situation was particularly true as the Company was required to provide service and ground facilities, such as radio equipment, at certain of the low traffic generating out-islands. As can be seen in the Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc of 25 February 65, 4 May 65, and 6 October 65, Air America reported a load factor of 75% for the Ryukyu Island service in January 65; in March 65, it was 84%, and in September 65, the operation was a loss of \$19,500 monthly.⁸ Once again, the Company asked operations to be "placed on a sound economic basis by increasing fares to a reasonable level and improving airport facilities so as to permit full payload operations".⁹ In addition to that poor economical situation, *Scheduled*



Scheduled Air Services Ryukyus Ten-Two N343T at Okinawa in the mid-sixties
(UTD/Paradise)

Air Services Ryukyus always received bad press among the locals. Dale Williamson, who became SASR's chief pilot in October 1965, thinks that the reason for this was that SASR was considered to be responsible for removing the Okinawa businessman who, thru the

⁷ Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc of 2 February 65 (in: UTD/CIA/B7F4).

⁸ Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc of 25 February 65 (in: UTD/CIA/B7F4), 4 May 65 (in: UTD/CIA/B7F4), and 6 October 65 (in: UTD/CIA/B7F4).

⁹ Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc of 6 October 65 (in: UTD/CIA/B7F4)

Okinawa Tourist Agency, had run the operation before the arrival of the Americans.¹⁰

Air America pilot Jim Pearson, who flew for SASR, recalls: “I got involved at the beginning due to having a US FAA ATP license and a C-46 type rating. My first duties were to test flight N67985 as it was reconverted to a T-Cat C-46 with US registry. Then I was tasked training the first officer, Benjamin Franklin. After this I was ordered to fly 985 to Naha and begin moving all the necessary equipment down island in order to fly scheduled passenger flights under FAR 121 Scheduled Flag operations and then do the proving flights. In this endeavor I found the FAA very supportive. Seems that the Feds in DC were very busy passing razor blades as this was the first FAR Part 121 Scheduled Flag certificate issued in over 20 years and it was to utilize the vintage C-46 which by now was not in use by any US operators. The FAA office in Tokyo was also very supportive. After flying down Island with them they realized that the C-46F with a 14 knot max crosswind component was not going to make it. They observed many of our flights and actually allowed us to fly in a 45 knot cross wind. Of course they implied they would not affirm this officially. After a rough start we got on top of the mechanical problems and out on time picked up to over 90% on time. I was very pleased to see the picture of the cabin staff. I did not know the pilots or two of the cabin staff as they came on board after I left to go back to Laos.”¹¹

“I looked at the picture and recognize all most all the staff except the Captain and First Officer and one of the Stewardesses. At the precise moment in time, Dale Williamson was the Chief pilot of the SASR Operation but was not in the picture. I do not know who the Captain pictured is or the First Officer. [...] It was Christmas 1965. I was the first Pilot to be assigned to SASR along with Benjamin Franklin. The flying time limits were addressed by Taipei sending pilots TDY from TAC to keep my flying time within FAR Part 121 limits. Chuck Grant, Dale Williamson, Ron Sutphin, Johnny Lee and Chuck Cameron were all sent down TDY. Finally due to my lack of Seniority Chuck Grant was permanently based in Naha as the Chief Pilot. During Thanksgiving and again at Christmas of 1964 and again at New Year’s 1965 Chuck Grant the Chief Pilot scheduled me to fly on all of the trips on all three holidays and did not share the Holiday time off with me. I worked all of the Holidays. [...] Omar smartly landed about a few hundred feet short of the runway at Ishigaki Island and badly damaged the landing gear on one of the C-46s. This brought Capt Dale Williamson down to Naha as the Chief Pilot and in summer of 1965.”¹²

“In retrospect I can only say that my one year tour at Naha was the most pleasant even with the rough flying conditions and the cabin staff were outstanding in all respects. One incident of note. Out of Ishigaki Island the steward Mr Oshiro I think, who married Miss Tsuda, came forward with a Doctor’s release to fly a baby to Naha for medical attention. The note mentioned Emphesima. I had no idea what it was so continued normal operations. We flew low altitude from Ishigaki back to Miyako Jima, no problems. Out of Miyako Jima we climbed to Eight thousand on airways. After a few minutes Mr Oshiro came forward and told me it looks as the baby has died!!!! Told Mr Ingoglia to take over and I ran into the back to see what we could do. The parents were frantic. I asked Mr Oshiro to bring the O2 bottle and asked him if he could administer mouth to mouth to the baby. My cursory look and the fact the child was cold and not breathing confirmed he was gone. I asked Mr Oshiro – as unpleasant as the thought was – would he please take a breath of pure oxygen and breathe it

¹⁰ Dale D. Williamson, interview made by William M. Leary at Bellevue, WA, on 13 July 1987; Professor Leary’s notes are preserved at UTD/Leary/B43F5.

¹¹ E-mail dated 7 September 2012 sent by Jim Pearson to Tom Ziemba who kindly forwarded it to the author.

¹² E-mail dated 8 September 2012 sent by Jim Pearson to Tom Ziemba who kindly forwarded it to the author.

into the child until we could give it to a doctor. We call Naha Tower and asked them to please have a Dr standing by for our arrival and we pushed the nose down with power on and pushed the speed up to around 220 and got her down on the deck ASAP. An ambulance met us and we discharged the baby to a US Military Doctor and I watched him. He looked at me and shook his head: NO. The poor creature was gone. – The next day when I reported to the aircraft the loaders wanted to know where to put the remains, front or rear belly. I saw the parents watching and said: NO, please load the white coffin in the right rear cloak room and seat the parents in the seat immediately in front of the cloak room and not to use it for any other items. When they deplaned in Ishigaki Island, I went to the outside of the airplane and joined the parents, while the baby was offloaded. Then as reverently as I could I bowed to them and said ‘Gomenasai’ and shook hands with the father.”¹³ – “I was transferred back down to VTE. By this time I was actually becoming attached to the operation and the people of the Ryukyus, but the fighting was in Laos.”¹⁴

Effective 7 March 66, Air America revised its scheduled air services within the Ryukyus to better serve the travelling public; the revised schedules provided more available seats for passengers between Naha and Miyako and more non-stop services between Naha and Ishigaki. Effective 7 March 66, the following Naha-Miyako and Naha-Ishigaki services were offered:

Flight 1	LV NAHA	0900L	AR MIYAKO	1025L	Daily
	LV MIYAKO	1040L	AR ISHIGAKI	1115L	Daily
Flight 2	LV ISHIGAKI	1135L	AR MIYAKO	1210L	Daily
	LV MIYAKO	1225L	AR NAHA	1335L	Daily
Flight 3	LV NAHA	1500L	AR MIYAKO	1625L	Daily
Flight 4	LV MIYAKO	1640L	AR NAHA	1750L	Daily
Flight 5	LV NAHA	1200L	AR ISHIGAKI	1345L	MON/WED
Flight 6	LV ISHIGAKI	1405L	AR NAHA	1535L	MON/WED
Flight 7	LV NAHA	1200L	AR ISHIGAKI	1345L	FRI/SUN
	LV ISHIGAKI	1425L	AR YONAGUNI	1500L	FRI/SUN
Flight 8	LV YONAGUNI	1515L	AR ISHIGAKI	1550L	FRI/SUN
	LV ISHIGAKI	1630L	AR NAHA	1800L	FRI/SUN

Scheduled Air Services Ryukyus schedules effective 7 March 66
(*Air America Log*, vol. I, no. 2, 15 March 1966, p.4, in: UTD/Hickler/B7F7A)

On 10 March 1966, the Company presented the High Commissioner with a letter pointing out the losses which the Company was incurring in the operation of the Ryukyus scheduled air service and the steps that had to be taken by the Government authorities to put services on a sound and economic basis. These steps included the installation and operation of proper navigational aids and related communications equipment as required by FAA, a fare increase and the extension of runways at several points. The Company advised the High Commissioner that unless a firm program for implementation of these needed improvements

¹³ E-mail dated 7 September 2012 sent by Jim Pearson to Tom Ziemba who kindly forwarded it to the author.

¹⁴ E-mail dated 8 September 2012 sent by Jim Pearson to Tom Ziemba who kindly forwarded it to the author.

was developed by 30 June 1966, the Company would take steps to terminate its service.¹⁵ Other points served were Minami Daito and Kume Jima. The timetable of 15 September 66 gives a more complete picture of SASR's scheduled operations:

FLIGHT SCHEDULE

Schedule Subject to Change Without Notice All Times Shown are Local Times

105*	103*	101*	7	5§	3	1	FLIGHT	2	4	6§	8	102*	104*	106*
Beech Ten-Two	Beech Ten-Two	Beech Ten-Two	Super C-46	Super C-46	Super C-46	Super C-46	AIRCRAFT	Super C-46	Super C-46	Super C-46	Super C-46	Beech Ten-Two	Beech Ten-Two	Beech Ten-Two
TUE THU FRI SAT SUN	TUE THU SAT	TUE THU FRI SAT SUN	FRI SUN	MON WED SAT	Daily	Daily	DAYS	Daily	Daily	MON WED SAT	FRI SUN	TUE THU FRI SAT SUN	TUE THU SAT	TUE THU FRI SAT SUN
1600 1645	1350 1530	0930 1015	1200 ↓ 1345 ↓ 1425 1500	1200 ↓ 1345	1500 ↓ 1625	0900 ↓ 1025 ↓ 1040 1115	Lv MINAMI DAITO Ar Ar NAHA Lv Lv KUME JIMA Ar Ar MIYAKO Lv Lv ISHIGAKI Ar Lv YONAGUNI Ar	1335 ↑ 1225 1210 1135	1750 ↑ 1640	1535 ↑ 1405	1800 ↑ 1630 1550 1515	1115 1030	1340 1200	1745 1700

* Carriage on these services is subject to the normal baggage allowance, except that baggage accompanying passenger on the same flight will be limited to 17" x 10" x 9" in dimensions and 10 kilograms in weight. Excess in volume will be carried subject to availability of space and excess in weight subject to aircraft loading limits.

§ May flag-stop at Miyako.

SASR timetable effective 15 September 66, in: UTD/Leary/B48F2

And as Air America affirmed: "When sufficient need exists for additional seats, Air America has in the past and will continue to operate extra services."¹⁶ At that time, Dan Lawson, Air America's manager at Naha, could already say that the Company has an enviable record of reliability. As a keen booster of tourism within the islands, he affirmed: "There's more to the Ryukyus [...] than just the main island of Okinawa. There is a real unspoiled beauty on the outer islands. Much tourism development is needed. But it will come, mark my word."¹⁷ In the summer of 1966, Air America even organized a "Project Information" at Ishigaki Island. A SASR C-46 was flown to Ishigaki City airport, arrived at 1200 and remained there until 1800. During that period 900 to 1,000 persons visited the aircraft, and Air America personnel like First Officer G. R. Griscom and Assistant Station

¹⁵ Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc of 6 April 66 (in: UTD/CIA/B8F1).

¹⁶ (Anonymous), "Air America revises services in Ryukyus", in: *Air America Log*, vol. I, no. 2, 15 March 1966, p.4 (in: UTD/Hickler/B7F7A).

¹⁷ (Anonymous), "Naha AAM manager smiles away woes", in: *Air America Log*, vol. I, no. 2, 15 March 1966, pp.1+3, quotation p.3 (in: UTD/Hickler/B7F7A).

Manager H. Higa explained the details of the plane, refueler, anemometers, radio equipment, etc. At the same time, Ishigaki was holding a Commerce and Industry Festival sponsored by the Yaeyama Chamber of Commerce, and the Chamber officials were only too happy to accept Air America's offer to bring an aircraft over from Naha to be put on public demonstration. After the display, Air America played host to 25 Ishigaki VIPs, agents, businessmen and members of the press, at a dinner. During the dinner a question and answer session was held. The project received very good press, radio and television coverage. Okinawa Television presented a three-minute program three times during the evening.¹⁸



Scheduled Air Services Ryukyus C-46F N67985 on Okinawa in May 67
(UTD/Tolton, slide 5)

Yet, all that success did not prevent that one year later, on 30 June 1967, *Scheduled Air Services Ryukyus* had to close its doors, and on 1 July 1967, the service was taken over by the Convair 240s and a Beech 18 of Southwest Airlines.¹⁹

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¹⁸ (Anonymous), "Air America holds 'Project information' at Ishigaki Island", in: *Air America Log*, vol. I, no. 3, August 1966, p.2 (in: UTD/Hickler/B7F7A).

¹⁹ Davies, *Airlines of Asia*, p.484. On 30 June 67, SASR's last flight was flown by chief pilot Dale Williamson (Dale D. Williamson, interview made by William M. Leary at Bellevue, WA, on 13 July 1987; Professor Leary's notes are preserved at UTD/Leary/B43F5).