

# VIET-NAM BULLETIN

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION OF THE EMBASSY OF VIET-NAM  
2251 "R" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008 (Telephone: 234-4860)  
CIVIL AVIATION IN VIET-NAM (11-70)

## CIVIL AVIATION IN VIET-NAM

Stimulated by war's demands, aviation in Viet-Nam has come into its own as an industry vital to the needs of a developing nation.

From a regionalized country where few travelled beyond their village or district borders, South Viet-Nam in two decades has become a nation of people on the move—people liberated from the traditional confines of their bamboo hedges by inexpensive transport, including the airways.

Today planes ranging from single-engine Bird Dogs to jet airliners swoop over areas where Viet Cong harassment can stop trains, buses barges and truck convoys. Commercial planes on domestic runs carry nearly 4,200 passengers a day as well as imported goods and urban products,

including the capital's daily newspapers to the far corners of the Republic of Viet-Nam.

The war has forced the Vietnamese and their allies to upgrade airports, build new bases and establish the technical and electronic facilities necessary to handle the surge in air traffic. Now in-country air transport and aerial combat support operations gradually are decreasing as troops are redeployed to the United States, but the industry's basic infrastructure has been built and civil aviation is expanding. With increasing security in the countryside, the people are becoming more mobile.

Vietnamese from all walks of life are taking to the skies in steadily rising numbers: one million on domestic airline routes in the 1957-1966 decade, one million in 1967 alone, 1,146,518 in 1968, 1,510,700 in 1969.

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*Reprinted from Viet-Nam: Yesterday and Today, Vol IV No 6 (June 1970), a publication of the Embassy of Viet-Nam in London.*

## Cheap Travel

Low fares are charged by the national airline—four piastres per passenger kilometre. These fares encourage Vietnamese businessmen to fly to commercial trading centres from one end of the country to the other. Professors use Air Viet-Nam to commute to and from university campuses in four cities as much as 760 kilometres apart. Officials from central government ministries regularly inspect offices and project sites in two dozen provinces. And peasants who only recently progressed from ox-cart to bus travel are now boarding planes, clutching watermelons and live ducks and rice cakes, to make Tet visits to relatives living hundreds of kilometres away over the lunar new year holidays.

## Airports

South Viet-Nam has more than 500 airports and heliports serving the needs of a country with 1,550,000 servicemen and 16,400,000 civilians. Most are military units fields or primitive landing strips, but 24 airports are important enough to the civilian life of the nation to be served by Air Viet-Nam on a regular daily basis. And some, like those in Saigon and Danang, are huge complexes with jet runways and modern technical workshops—joint military-civilian airdromes capable of handling one landing or take-off every 40 seconds.

Tan Son Nhut, the main gateway to Viet-Nam, visited by 23 foreign airlines, is three bases on one 227-hectare site. With two paralleled jet runways both over 3,040 metres long, Tan Son Nhut handles traffic—roughly 75 per cent military, with the civilian percentage gradually climbing—that has increased sixfold in the past decade. It is the home base of Air Viet-Nam.

Besides Tan Son Nhut's domestic and international facility, the airports at Dalat, Hue, Qui Nhon and Ban Me Thuot come under the jurisdiction of the Directorate of Airbases (DAB), and

are controlled by Vietnamese technical personnel from the Directorate of Civil Aviation (DCA) assisted by U.S. military and Federal Aviation Administration advisers. DAB funds have been used to finance repairs at Tan Son Nhut and to build new airports nearing completion at Chau Doc and Bao Loc.

The Directorate of Civil Aviation, also part of the Ministry of Communications and Post, has a staff of 740, including 240 technical personnel. It operates with a 150-million-piastre annual budget.

## Air Viet-Nam

Air Viet-Nam's 34 aircraft fly 40 and sometimes up to 50 domestic runs daily as well as three international runs. From Saigon the national airline flies to 23 other airports in Viet-Nam which see a combined total of nearly seven million landings and take-offs a year.

International flights connect Saigon with Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Vientiane, Manila, Hong Kong, Taipei, Osaka and Tokyo.

Air Viet-Nam, with gross receipts in 1967 of U.S. \$220 million, is reported to lose money on its domestic service, break even on its international service and make money on its Tan Son Nhut repair and maintenance service for visiting airlines and military units. Although receipts have gone up since that year, the ratio of income sources probably remains the same.

From modest beginnings in 1951, when it was incorporated with a capital of 48 million piastres, owned half by the Vietnamese government and half by French interests, the national airline has developed into a viable organization with a capital of 1,700 million piastres, now 92.75 per cent owned by the government.

Air Viet-Nam has made big gains in 18 years. It was started with three DC-3s and three char-



The National Flag Jet Carrier



Air Vietnam's engineers overhauling aircraft engines

tered Bristol B-170 freighters. The airline's staff rose from 566 in 1961 to 2,420 in 1966 to 3,000 in 1969. The fleet now includes two Boeing 727 jets, one DS-6, six DC-4s, seven DC-3s and four Cessna 185s owned outright, and it charters five DC-6s, four C-46s, three DC-4s and two Beechcraft.

The 1,510,700 domestic passengers, 113,910 international passengers and 16,600 charter passengers carried by Air Viet-Nam in 1969 represents a 31 per cent increase over 1968's total. Cargo carried rose seven per cent to 11,085,800 kilos. This included 8,430,800 kilos of domestic cargoes—a 34 per cent increase.

On 1969 charter flights, however, passengers dropped 19 per cent and cargoes 43 per cent. Air Viet-Nam's commercial director, Nguyen-Xinh-Hao, attributes this decline not only to improved service on regularly scheduled flights, making a number of special charters unnecessary, but also to improved highway and rail facilities as a result of increased security in the countryside and major road and railroad rebuilding programmes.

About half of Air Viet-Nam's 3,000 employees work at the Tan Son Nhut technical centre, which handles the lucrative repair contracts from international civilian airlines and the U.S. Air Force. In 1968 these employees worked 1,341,667 man hours, including 344,395 on military aircraft. Equipment at the centre is valued at 445,816,900 piastres excluding ramp vehicles but including 247,977,000 piastres worth of equipment to service the airline's two Boeing 727s.

A third Boeing jet is being chartered this year for domestic runs linking Saigon with Nha Trang, Pleiku, Da Nang and Hue, and this should increase domestic passenger loads. Jet service between Saigon and Da Nang has been part of the regular Air Viet-Nam schedule since November, 1968.

Regular domestic runs will not be augmented in 1970, however. The only addition planned for

the year is an increase from two to three flights weekly on the Saigon-Hong Kong-Taipei-Osaka-Tokyo run. Present services are just about meeting demand, but the principal reason for holding domestic service to its present level is shortage of aircraft. As it is, says Hao, one aircraft averages 250 flying hours per month and we can fly only eight hours a day. We want to buy more modern equipment, such as Fokker Friendships, to reduce the number of chartered aircraft and to build up our own fleet. But these are very long-range plans. For Air Viet-Nam, 1970 will be a year of standardization, consolidation and stabilization.

As part of the consolidation programme, Air Viet-Nam will move from its present headquarters on Saigon's Nguyen Hue Street to a new 50 million piastre building under construction on Phan Dinh Phung Street in the Dakao section of the capital. The Nguyen Hue building is being converted into a booking office and passenger service centre for international travel.

#### Tan Son Nhut Service

At Tan Son Nhut, building programmes are going on almost continuously. A new 30-metre U.S. \$400,000 control tower, jointly financed by the Vietnamese and U.S. governments, should be ready by June, 1970. Radar and other electronic equipment being used in the present tower will be stored for use as spares or installed in control towers at other airports.

By the end of 1970 construction of two new terminals at Tan Son Nhut will be completed. They are a 77 million piastre terminal for domestic passengers and a 38 million piastre one for military use, with costs shared by the Vietnamese and U.S. governments. On their completion U.S. \$800,000 will be spent to modernize the present terminal for the sole use of international passengers.

These terminal improvements are being made to handle anticipated traffic in the next five years.

In June, 1970, a U.S. \$250,000 feasibility study financed by U.S. AID will be launched to assess the Saigon's area's domestic and international air traffic requirement for the next 20 years. Projected urban development and the proximity of the Bien Hoa air base, presently used just for military operations, will be considered in the study.

It is designed to determine whether Tan Son Nhut should be expanded or whether a site for a new airport should be selected. At the same time a U.S. \$650,000 feasibility study, also financed by U.S. AID, will begin on all aspects of communications in the Republic of Viet-Nam, including aviation's requirements.

These two studies are part of the overall post-war planning programme. This also includes plans for an aeronautical training centre. The centre would run classes for air traffic controllers, electronics specialists and maintenance personnel.

### **Training Programmes**

Training is an essential part of today's planning. A U.S. AID team, the Civil Aviation Assistance Group (CAAG), has been working in Viet-Nam since 1956. In early 1967 it was expanded under U.S. AID administration and financed by a U.S. Defence Department budget. Today CAAG includes 62 air traffic control, radar and electronics advisers from the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in Washington, five specialists from the Philippines and four from Taiwan.

They give trainees selected for advance study at the FAA's school in Oklahoma City three years of on-the-job training in the radar operations control centre at Tan Son Nhut. The trainees come to the CAAG programme from a small training school near Tan Son Nhut run by the DCA; it gives training in theory to 40 students every 18th month. At Tan Son Nhut the CAAG advisers and the U.S. military personnel train them to install, operate and maintain the highly

sensitive electronic equipment used in tracking aircraft, and to cope with the heavy traffic loads carried by the airport's control tower. Then they go on to Oklahoma City. This year 44 Vietnamese will be trained there; air traffic controllers will spend three to six months at the FAA school and those studying electronics and radar will stay six months. In the past four years, 70 air traffic controllers, 14 airport engineers and 15 meteorologists have been trained in the United States and returned to Viet-Nam for DCA duty.

A CAAG spokesman says it will be another two or three years before enough Vietnamese specialists are trained to replace the military personnel working at Vietnamese airports. The DCA estimates a need for 168 electronics specialists; there are now 71 on the job. It believes the industry will require 271 air traffic controllers; it now has 34.

Training of airline personnel also is planned. In August, 1969, five Pan American Airways specialists came to Viet-Nam under a contract signed with Air Viet-Nam to begin a study of the airline's future requirements. They prepared a training schedule based on Air Viet-Nam's needs. The U.S. \$2 million, three-year schedule calls for setting up an airline training school in Saigon and also provides for Air Viet-Nam senior personnel to study in the United States.

One of the biggest faults in the Air Viet-Nam structure listed in the Pan Am survey report is the lack of middle-level management and executive staff. The Pan Am team leader, W. F. Wallace says the airline grew so quickly there has been no time to train personnel at these levels. The proposed training schedule would concentrate on in-country training of middle-level personnel as well as advanced courses in the U.S. on computer programming and economic analysis as applicable to Air Viet-Nam's operations. About 500 Air Viet-Nam personnel would be trained in three years under the proposed plan.



# AIR VIETNAM FORCES AHEAD

By TITO V. CARBALLO



Air Vietnam — the Republic's flag carrier, operating under most unusual conditions during the past seven years has shown remarkable growth.

Statistics, service, and fleet-wise, the RVN airline has good prospects of securing an advantageous place among the high ranking regional carriers.

The airline was established in October 1951, as a result of the Franco-Vietnamese Joint Declaration, as a joint stock company with an initial capitalization of 18 million VN piasters.

During its initial years, the Air Vietnam fleet consisted of three DC-3 and three DC-4 aircraft for passenger transportation, and three Bristol cargo airplanes to handle freight.

At that time, Air Vietnam was operating the whole length and breadth of Vietnam. The airline then was operating daily services to Hanoi and Haiphong to the north, and covered major cities in the

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Air Vietnam Boeing 727 passengers disembark upon arrival at Tan Son Nhut airport (above). Nguyen Tan Viet (middle at left), Air Vietnam president, arrives from recent airlines conference in Bali.

south such as Dong Hoi; Hue; Tourane; Qui Nhon; Nha Trang; Dalat; Ban Me Thuot, etc.

After a critical period of five to six years, following the Geneva Conference during which its activities were reduced by more than 50 per cent, Air Vietnam worked its way up again as of 1960.

In 1962, the airline's capital stock was raised up to 48 million piasters, 93.75 per cent of which was actually held by the Government of Vietnam.

In order to meet with the ever-growing passenger and freight traffic demand, particularly on its domestic network, Air Vietnam with its capitalization boosted, almost doubled its fleet with chartered aircraft. By the end of 1967, its operating fleet was composed of 42 airplanes.

The following figures show Air Vietnam's rapid growth during the past seven years:

Year	Passengers	Kilometers Flown	Passengers/Kilometers Carried	Freight Ton/Kilometers Performed
1961	106,462	2,003,101	51,636,144	476,735,713
1962	209,142	3,435,509	88,403,245	638,462,364
1963	237,499	3,919,353	101,368,767	752,585,581
1964	305,109	4,520,019	134,029,318	1,113,887,678
1965	623,914	8,641,740	259,250,847	3,276,622,173
1966	757,049	10,496,452	304,896,212	3,863,113,178
1967	1,118,034	12,326,223	425,637,599	4,325,063,173

Faced with growing passenger traffic, Air Vietnam replaced its Caravelle aircraft with two Boeing 727s. The change marked an important turning point in the airline's history as it can now compete with other regional high-ranking carriers.

Up to 1967, the pattern of Air Vietnam domestic network was focused on Central Vietnam, the main cities along the northern coastal region and the high plateau.

Air Vietnam now serves 23 cities, including such important centers of the Delta Region as Soc Trang, Vinh Binh, Vinh Long, and Long Xuyen, which under normal peacetime transport conditions would have never seen any air service.

Without being as spectacular as its domestic operations (eight times in six years in terms of passenger/kilometers flown), Air Vietnam international operations nevertheless grew steadily during the last few years.

In 1965, the airline inaugurated its flights to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Taipei was opened up in December 1966. With the acquisition of two Boeing 727 jet aircraft — Air Vietnam opened its Manila flight in April 1968, followed by Osaka and Tokyo in August of the same year.

The RVN flag carrier now operates six-weekly flights to Bangkok; five flights to Hongkong out of which two are extended to Taipei, Osaka, and Tokyo; and twice a week to Kuala Lumpur/Singapore.

Pnompenh/Bangkok services will be soon increased from three to four services per week. Seoul, Djakarta, and Bali may be next steps of development within this year.

Apart from its regular services, Air Vietnam operates chartered flights in and out of Hongkong, Taipei, Bangkok, Singapore — as well as special services during summer vacations, Christmas and New Year holidays.

To ensure air safety — the Air Vietnam Technical Center was activated at the same time that the airline started operation. Originally limited to the routine maintenance of Air Vietnam's own fleet since 1959, the Technical Center expanded its services.

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Today Air Vietnam Technical Center services (minor and major repairs) all types of aircraft owned by foreign companies, such as Royal Air Cambodia; Royal Air Laos; Vietnam Air Force; and U. S. Air Force.

In 1966 — Air Vietnam Technical Center was officially qualified by the U.S. Federal Aviation Agency as being able to carry out repair work on all types of U. S. aircraft which call at Saigon. The RVN airline hopes to turn its Center into one of the greatest air technical centers of Southeast Asia.

The following are the other plans of Air Vietnam which the airline hopes to realize in the near future:

1. Purchase of more modern equipment to replace remaining conventional aircraft;
2. Extension of its network to Korea, Australia, and the United States; and
3. Build more hangars and workshops for the Technical Center.

In line with its concept of public service, Air Vietnam has spared no efforts to provide adequate transport facilities to the general public within the country.

At the same time, the RVN flag carrier is working toward the consolidation of its position as a regional carrier serving «the Vietnamese way» the whole of Southeast Asia and Australasia.



Arrivals from one of 23 cities which Air Vietnam serves with its domestic flights, limited as recently as 1967.

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Viet-Nam Info Series 41  
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