

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS DEPUTY COMMANDER
SEVENTH AIR FORCE/THIRTEENTH AIR FORCE, THAILAND (PACAF)
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96237



REPLY TO
ATTN OF: CD

22 Jan 1972

SUBJECT: Letter of Commendation

TO: Mr. John Ford
Chief Pilot Helicopter
Air America

1. I wish to convey my personal appreciation and commendation to two of your helicopter crews for their exceptional aerial skill in the rescue of the crew members of an RF-4C, Bullwhip 26, on 20 January 1972.
2. The efforts of Messrs Lee Andrews, Nicki Fillipi and Ron Anderson in AA Helicopter XWFPH, and John Fonberg, William Phillips and Bob Noble in AA Helicopter 8513F, were truly outstanding. In spite of a known 37MM high threat area and small arms fire, these crew members disregarded their own personal safety to perform a heroic recovery. The quick response to the distress call and actual recovery in near record time were unquestionably instrumental in saving the lives of the USAF RF-4C crew members.
3. The professional aerial skill and performance of an act beyond their call of duty most favorably reflect great credit on the dedication and high experience of your personnel.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "DeWitt R. Searles", is written over the typed name.

DeWITT R. SEARLES, Major General
Deputy Commander

Copy to: Mr. C. J. Abadie, Jr.
Base Manager
Air America

4 - 5/7/72

AIR AMERICA

May 11, 1975

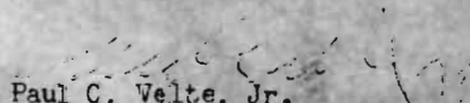
On 29 April 1975 Air America, Inc. was tasked to effect the evacuation of Saigon, Vietnam, a difficult and hazardous mission that required a maximum effort for all concerned.

I would like to convey at this time my personal thanks along with those of our various customers and the Board of Directors of Air America, Inc. for an outstandingly successful accomplishment of that mission.

The performance of our flight crew members again reflected what can be accomplished by a dedicated professional group acting together as individuals and as a team.

I realize that each and every one of you will be departing this Company in a very short time, but before doing so I want you to know as a member of that group that your participation in this humanitarian act stands out in the highest traditions of the American spirit. Again thanks for an outstanding job well done.

Sincerely,


Paul C. Velte, Jr.
Chairman of the Board of Directors
and
Chief Executive Officer

FINAL FLIGHTS



Last day at Tanarong staff house: about April 1, 1975
waiting for GTD.



B03	LS26	UNFRIENDLY
B09	LS187	UNFRIENDLY
B11	LS247	UNFRIENDLY
B21	LS11	UNFRIENDLY - DO NOT EVEN OVERLY
B23	LS205	CLOSED - UNFRIENDLY ACTIVITY
	LS111	UNFRIENDLY
A30	LS195	UNFRIENDLY
A30	LS248	UNFRIENDLY
A30	LS119	UNFRIENDLY
A15	L61	CLOSED - UNF ACTIVITY
A21	LS186	UNFRIENDLY
A17	LS234	UNFRIENDLY
A22	LS174	UNFRIENDLY
B19	LS-13	UNFRIENDLY
		C13 LS234 UNFRIENDLY
		C12 LS234 UNFRIENDLY
		C12 L85 UNFRIENDLY

Final Flights:

Air America and the Collapse of South Vietnam, 1975

by William M. Leary

Air America had fallen on hard times as Vietnam welcomed the Year of the Rabbit at the beginning of 1975. The airline that had been secretly owned by the Central Intelligence Agency since 1950 was a far cry from the giant air complex of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1970, the airline operated a fleet of 146 aircraft that included Boeing 727s, DC-6s, C-46s, C-47s, C-123s, Twin-Beech Volpars, Pilatus Porters, Helio Couriers, and a variety of helicopters. It employed over 500 pilots, primarily in Southeast Asia. In June 1974, however Air America shut down its operations in Laos, where it had been serving as a paramilitary adjunct to the native forces that were fighting the CIA's "Secret War." Three months later, the CIA confirmed an earlier decision to sell the air complex, setting the date for its demise as June 30, 1975. Morale among Air America employees was at low ebb, as pilots and technical personnel left in large numbers, anticipating the company's closure. Meanwhile, flying continued, primarily helicopter operations for the International Commission of Control and Supervision (ICCS) -the agency created to monitor the peace agreement of 1973 -and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). But the end was clearly in sight, both for the airline and for the country. In the summer of 1974, the U.S. House of Representatives had voted a sharp reduction in aid to South Vietnam. Shortly thereafter, President Richard M. Nixon had been forced to resign in the wake of the Watergate scandal. An evacuation plan for South Vietnam -initially labeled TALON VISE but later changed to FREQUENT WIND -was in place, with U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin in charge. In the fall of 1974,

Vice Admiral George P. Steele, commander of the Seventh Fleet, had met with Martin to review the plan. "Do not worry, Admiral," Martin had reassured Steele. "I will initiate the evacuation in good time. I understand the necessity for doing so."

In mid-December 1974, the North Vietnamese launched a winter-spring offensive against Phuoc Long province. The purpose of the operation was less to acquire control of territory in the south than to test the willingness of the United States to respond to a blatant violation of the peace agreement. There was little alarm in the U.S. Intelligence community to the fighting in Phuoc Long. A National Intelligence Estimate on December 23 forecast that Hanoi would avoid the "risks and losses" of a major offensive and work to achieve its goals through a "political-military campaign." An all-out offensive, the intelligence community believed, would not be likely before early in 1976.

Not for the first time in the Vietnam War, the intelligence crystal ball proved cloudy. Phuoc Binh City fell to the NVA on January 7, 1975, the first provincial capital to pass into the hands of northern forces since the ceasefire of 1973. As it was clear that Washington would not act, the Politburo in Hanoi approved a plan for widespread attacks in the south in 1975, followed by a general uprising in 1976. The offensive would begin in the long-contested Central Highlands.

Campaign 275 opened on March 1, 1975. Within two weeks, the NVA offensive had made such progress that President Thieu or-

dered the Central Highlands abandoned. At the same time, NVA forces were pouring south of the DMZ, heading from Hue and Da Nang. Manus Burke, the senior Air America pilot at Da Nang, had only four helicopters to meet the growing airlift demands caused by the NVA offensive. On March 23, Air America evacuated key personnel from Hue and Quang Nhai. On the 25th, while engaged in the evacuation effort, an Air America helicopter was fired on by supposedly friendly South Vietnamese troops. It took hits in the rotor blade spar and engine but managed to limp back to Da Nang. Clearly, Burke reported to Saigon, the situation had reached "a critical state," and that panicking South Vietnamese troops posed as great -if not greater-danger than the NVA.



That same day, a meeting was held at CIA headquarters in Washington to discuss Air America's ability to respond to the increasing demands for air service. Paul Velte, Air America's chief executive officer, reviewed the company's equipment status for his CIA superiors. Air America owned and operated 12 Bell 204B/205 helicopters, civilian models of the military's UH-1B/D Hueys. In addition, the company had on loan from the military 16 UH-1 Hs. Eleven of the "bailed" Hueys were on the ICCS lease, while 5 were on a USAID lease. Three of the 11 ICCS helicopters were currently in use for the commission's diminishing requirements, while the other 8 were in flyable storage. It would be difficult to place these 8 Hueys back in service because spare parts for them came from the Department of Defense and were not available on short notice.

The most immediate problem, however, was not aircraft but pilots. Air America, Velte explained, had 77 pilots, both rotary wing and

fixed wing, including supervisors. The rotary wing pilots were flying 120 hours a month, the maximum allowable under the USAID contract. Also, the contract called for two pilots per helicopter. Because of the company's uncertain future, pilots and technical personnel were in the process of leaving for other jobs. The first thing to be done, Velte said, was to clarify the identity of the new contractor. Current employees could then apply for jobs with the replacement company. Personnel agreeing to stay with Air America until June 30 would be offered special bonuses. Also, contractual restraints for two pilots and 120 hours should be lifted. While these measures might not completely solve the problem, they certainly would help. Velte then told his superiors that he would leave shortly for South Vietnam to assess the situation and take all necessary action.

Frank Snepp, the CIA's principal analyst in Saigon, had become increasingly concerned about the rapidly deteriorating military situation. Government defenses in the northern half of the country, he told Station Chief Thomas Polgar on March 25, were nearing total collapse. "The entire complexion of the Vietnam War," he observed, "has altered in a matter of weeks, and the government is in imminent



danger of decisive military defeat." Polgar, however, refused to become alarmed. He agreed with Ambassador Martin's policy of encouraging the Saigon government to continue resistance in hopes of securing a negotiated settlement. Above all, Americans must not give any indication that they considered the situation hopeless. As refugees poured into Da Nang, Burke prepared for the worst. He cut personnel to a minimum, with one pilot and Filipino flight mechanic per aircraft. He asked for volunteers who would be willing to remain and face the hazards of the final evacuation. His four helicopters would be kept fully fueled and ready for immediate departure.

The evacuation of Da Nang began on March 28. By the morning of the 29th, Burke reported, the city was "a shambles," with abandoned aircraft, tanks, trucks, and other vehicles scattered about. In the midst of the evacuation effort, a World Airways Boeing 727 appeared overhead. Burke tried to contact the pilot to warn him not to land, but did not get a response. As soon as the 727 set down, it was engulfed by a swarm of ARVN and civilian refugees. The runway on which it had landed -17-Left- was soon littered with bodies and overturned vehicles. Burke again attempted to contact the airplane and direct it to 17-Right, which looked clear, but heard nothing.

By the time the 727 taxied to the front of the control tower, both runways had become unusable. "It looked hopeless," Burke reported. The only option was to use a taxiway. The aircraft started to roll, narrowly missing a stalled van on the side of the taxiway. A motorcycle struck the left

wing, and the driver was hurled into the infield. Somehow, the 727 struggled into the air after plowing through various small structures at the end of the field. As Deputy Ambassador Wolf Lehmann later commented about this incident, the attempted evacuation by 727 was "irresponsible, utterly irresponsible, and should never have taken place."

The sudden collapse of South Vietnam's military forces caused American military authorities to review their evacuation plans. The original scheme, published on July 31, 1974, had contained four options. Evacuation would be conducted (1) by commercial airlift from Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport, (2) by military aircraft from Tan Son Nhut, (3) by sealift from ports serving Saigon, and (4) by helicopters to U.S. Navy ships standing offshore. It now seemed that detailed planning for the helicopter option should go forward.

Air America obviously would be a crucial part of any emergency helicopter evacuation from downtown Saigon. Rooftops that might be used for the evacuation could not support the heavy Marine Corps aircraft. Only Air America could do the job. Following discussions with Var M. Green, vice president for Vietnam, and Chief Pilot Carl Winston, Air America agreed to take 13 UH-1 Hs out of flyable storage. With a total of 28 helicopters, Air America pledged to have 24 of them available at any given time. Because of the shortage of pilots, many of these helicopters would have to be flown by a single pilot. "This was risky," the U.S. Air Force account of the final evacuation observed, "but Air America was accustomed to such risks and expressed no reservations about that aspect of the Saigon air evacuation."

On April 7, veteran helicopter pilot Nikki A. Fillipi began a survey of 37 buildings in downtown Saigon to assess their viability as helicopter landing zones (HLZs). The survey led to the selection of 13 HLZs. Fillipi then supervised crews from the Pacific Architect & Engineering company in removing obstructions that might interfere with safe ingress/egress to the HLZs. An "H" was painted on the rooftops to mark the skids of Air America's helicopters, indicating that aircraft could land or take off in either direction with guaranteed rotor clearance. During his meetings with the Special Planning Group that would be in charge of the helicopter evacuation, Fillipi emphasized that three requirements had to be met if Air America was to complete its assigned tasks in the evacuation plan. The Air America ramp had to be secured; helicopters needed a safe supply of fuel; and, to avoid confusion, Air America had to maintain its own communication network, linking with Marine Corps helicopters only through UHF guard frequency. He was assured that all three requirements would be met.

CEO Velte arrived in Saigon on April 7. He consulted with Fillipi on the evacuation planning to date. He then contacted military authorities and asked if they could provide additional pilots to allow double crewing of the helicopters for the emergency. He received a sympathetic response, and a message was sent to CINPAC. Requesting the temporary assignment of 30 Marine Corps helicopter pilots so that each Air America aircraft would have a copilot. When Ambassador Martin saw the cable, however, he "hit the ceiling," and sent a "flash" message canceling the request.

Martin's precipitous action was characteristic of what was becoming an increasingly bizarre attitude on the part of the U.S. Embassy as the NVA drew closer to Saigon. Even Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was becoming concerned with Martin's actions. "Faced with imminent disaster," Kissinger later wrote, "Martin decided to go down with the ship. He was reluctant to evacuate any Americans lest this contribute to the disintegration of the south." "I considered Martin's stonewalling dangerous," Kissinger recalled. On April 9 he told Ben Bradlee, executive editor of the Washington Post, that "we've got an Ambassador who is maybe losing his cool."

The military's efforts to press Martin were proving fruitless. On April 12, the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade sent a delegation to consult with the ambassador on the evacuation plan. Martin told them that he would not tolerate any outward signs that the United States intended to abandon



South Vietnam. All planning would have to be conducted with the utmost discretion. General Carey, the Marine commander, upon receiving this information, flew to Saigon the next day to see Martin. "The visit," Carey reported, "was cold, non-productive and appeared to be an irritant to the ambassador."



The military situation continued to worsen as North Vietnamese forces encircled the capital. On April 21, President Thieu resigned. That same day, the Marines established a forward headquarters at the DAO. The DAO complex, together with Air America area across the street, were designated as the main departure points for a helicopter evacuation to the fleet. A battalion-sized security force would guard the DAO complex, while a battalion command group and one company would be sent to the Air America area.

The Defense Attache also sent a message to Washington, requesting permission to bring a platoon of marines to Tan Son Nhut at once to control the growing crowd of fixed-wing evacuees. Lest Ambassador Martin's sensitivities be upset about the presence of additional U.S. military personnel, Air America helicopters were used on April 25 to bring in 40 marines, dressed in civilian clothes, from the U.S.S. Hancock, standing offshore. Once inside the DAO complex, they were able to don their combat gear.

On April 28, as the situation around Saigon continued to worsen, Velte learned that General Carey had decided not to provide a security force for the Air America ramp at Tan Son Nhut. This came as a shock. Only the previous week, Carey had assured Velte that he would send marines to secure the ramp. Velte asked the ambassador to intervene and reverse the decision, emphasizing that the security of the Air America area had been a prerequisite for the company's successful participation in any emergency evacuation plan. There was no immediate response from the embassy.

THIS STORY
CONTINUED ON DVD.

The late William M. Leary, Ph.D., served as the E. Merton Coulter Professor of History, Emeritus, at the University of Georgia. Dr. Leary was considered the world's foremost specialist on Air America. His 2005 lecture was central to the McDermott Library's Civil Air Transport-Air America Collection and Memorial located on the third floor of McDermott Library. Leary has written histories of the China National Aviation Corp., Civil Air Transport and the U.S. Air Mail Service. In 1995 he received the Central Intelligence Agency Studies in Excellence Award for an Outstanding Contribution to the Literature of Intelligence. He served as the Charles A. Lindbergh Professor of Aerospace History at the National Air and Space Museum, Washington D.C. in 1996-97.

AFTER ACTION REPORT

Evacuation of Nha Trang Rvn March/April 1975

When I arrived at the office on Mar 1975 Captain Winston asked me if I would go to Nha Trang as temporary Scr as E. G. Adams was absent on leave. There was trouble expected at Da Nang and someone was needed at Nha Trang to coordinate commo, traffic, etc. between Saigon and Da Nang. I returned home for my suitcase and departed by aircraft for Nha Trang. On my arrival, I checked into the Pacific house.

The Con Gen at this time was processing their Vietnamese employees for evacuation to Saigon. Most of these people had arrived from other places, I.E. Pleiku, Kontum, etc. They were being ticketed at the Con Gen building.

The next day Da Nang started to evacuate and the city panicked. Capt. Burke was at Da Nang, and had 3 or 4 choppers. I spent the next 2 days trying to get fuel and radio relay for the choppers at Da Nang. We had to keep 2 Volpars in orbit to relay from Burke to me, and I relayed to Saigon. The Con Gen at Da Nang, Mr. Francis had been on board Burke's chopper but when they landed at Marble Mountain the Con Gen got off and talked to the Vietnamese region commander's aide. The Con Gen told Burke that the region commander was going to commit suicide and he, the Con Gen, had to go to him. The Con Gen departed in a Vietnamese chopper. This later caused considerable concern at the U.S. embassy until the Con Gen finally got a message through that he was safe on board a ship heading South. The choppers were shuttling to Cu Le Re Island. I sent a steel fuel container with 500 gallons of Jp to the island by caribou. The first night of the Da Nang fall, passengers came into Nha Trang by

chopper and fixed wing. One French teacher had been picked up by a chopper and moved to the island. He came to Nha Trang by Volpar. I interviewed him along with a CBS photographer who had been on board Mr. Daly's World Airways 727. He got off and could not get back on. He said he ran to the tower and called for help. One of our choppers landed and picked him up. I put these people on a flight to Saigon.

The second day we were requested to send the choppers back to Da Nang to look for the Con Gen also an A40b customer was on board a barge at Da Nang and was requesting water be dropped as the Vietnamese on the barges had no food or water. I asked for a caribou and a40b sent plastic containers from Saigon. There was one drop made which I believe was unsuccessful as the containers broke on impact with the water.





The next day another attempt was made to drop water, this time canteens tied together with floatation. This attempt aborted due to heavy rains in the area which apparently solved the water problem to some extent. The Da Nang Con Gen later arrived at Cam Ranh Bay and was flown to Nha Trang. He had a long talk with Mr. Spears, the Nha Trang Con Gen and then departed for Saigon by Volpar. At Nha Trang there seemed to be a sense of panic building up. Everyone seemed to be tense. I came out of the Pacific house to go to the airport on my second morning, and a mob had materialized in front of the Con Gen gate all wanting to be manifested to Saigon when I saw this I returned to my room, got my suitcase and from then on I slept at the airport.

I was concerned about fuel as always. The fuel truck would stop servicing at the first sign of trouble. I called Saigon for empty drums which they sent, however, they were too dirty and could not be used as we had no way of cleaning them. I then requested fuel drums from the Con Gen. He got some for me and we started filling them for later use. I then started trying to find a place to store fuel for use by the choppers in case we lost our fuel at Nha Trang the a40b regional representative told me that he had a place near Cam Ranh at the province chief's compound which was the most secure place possible. I started dispatching choppers with fuel drums, we got 20 drums there in the first day. The next day the first chopper ar-

rived with fuel and the "secure" place was abandoned. The fuel could not be loaded back aboard choppers so we planned on using it ASAP. We used about 3 drums and the other 17 drums were stolen.

At the time I moved to the airport called in the ten employees and recommended they sleep at the airport. They all moved in and pa&e gave me mattresses and sheets. They also gave us c-rat ions and other canned food. I sent manny down to pick up these items. The chopper pilots were all sleeping at the pacific house. I planned on being able to fly down to the Con Gen pad and pick up the crews in case of trouble. All the time I was a Nha Trang we were dispatching items of equipment not needed and also employees and their dependents. This was hampered by the Con Gen not allowing me space on the aircraft. I finally started getting an aircraft for my own use.

The following events occurred on the day that Nha Trang was evacuated and not necessarily in this order:

1. Woke up at about 5:30 and called to the pacific House to see if someone could bring coffee and breakfast.
2. A 40b customer across the way came over and told me the Viet Cong were only about 1.2 miles up the road and the evacuation was going this day. He said he was now destroying his papers and equipment. He told me I could have anything I needed. He was gone by 10:30 and abandoned his office and warehouse.
3. Con Gen had not informed me of their plans to evacuate. I got a call and they asked me to get all available aircraft from Saigon. This I did and also requested a C-46 for my own use.
4. Vietnamese started arriving at the airport looking for rides. I went out and put

- a new lock on the AAM gate and locked it as the guard was not on the job.
5. I previously had requested barbed wire to help control crowds. I never received this wire. We placed chains across to keep vehicles out of the operations area.
 6. The Pol driver told me that he was on his last tank of gas and would not be getting anymore. He said he would stay on the job until all fuel was gone if I would promise his family a ride to Saigon. I did this and he worked as he promised.
 7. A mob had gathered by the time the first airplane arrived. They were already getting unruly. I talked to some Vietnamese marines who spoke English. They were armed and were there to get a ride to Saigon. They agreed to stay and control the crowd if they were promised a ride. They stayed all day and did an outstanding job. Late in the afternoon, however they left unannounced and all control was gone. DC-6s of Birdair came in all day. When one was on the ground I would call in a C-46 and load company cargo and pax. This worked most of the day.
 8. VNAF helicopters started departing. Two had a mid-air just above the ground and crashed into the revetments.
 9. Had two Vietnamese employees who did not want to go to Saigon. I borrowed money and paid them their final pay. One was a male radio operator and the other was the one-armed cleaning woman. All other employees and dependents were sent to Saigon.
 10. I put the finance records into the baggage compartment of a helicopter. This insured that we would not lose them.
 11. Two days before, I surveyed the roof of the pacific house for a chopper pad. This was prepared but on the day of evacuation the Vietnamese breached the fence and crowded the roof pad so it was only used for a couple of trips. Another pad had been prepared in the parking lot at the Con Gen this was used all day with armed U.S. Marines controlling the mob.
 12. Two times during the day while AAM choppers were shuttling personnel from the Con Gen pad to the airport I made the choppers shut down as our mob at the airport was getting enormous. Each time Mr. Spears became frantic and called me to have the choppers keep shuttling as the mob at the Con Gen was getting uncontrollable.
 13. Chopper pilots reported small arms in different areas of the town. One reported the prison gates were open and the prisoners were looting the prison. I could hear firing from different locations all day.
 14. VNAF aircraft started shuttling military and their dependents across the runway from AAM. This finally spilled over to our operation when vehicles full of Vietnamese started coming to our aircraft for rides.
 15. Air Vietnam quit coming into the city due to the mobs so hundreds of Vietnamese came to our end of the field. This compounded our already enormous problem.
 16. The last 2 DC-6 aircraft came in and were completely mobbed. I had a Caribou and C-47 sneak in while they



were on the ground. They were completely mobbed. I got all the employees left on the caribou and decided it was time for me to go. The mechanics pulled me into the door as the mob was trying to hold my legs. As the airplane was taking off I saw hundreds of people walking down the taxiway toward AAM.

17. A flying tiger DC-8 was dispatched from Saigon. However, by the time he arrived overhead Nha Trang was airborne and my opinion was that it was unwise for the (DC-8) to land. A 14-foot step had to be found for people to board and this would have been impossible to do with the huge unruly mob.
18. Once during the day just when a DC-6 was loaded and taxiing for takeoff, the tower said the field was closed. It was

determined that someone in Saigon had ordered this. The field was later opened after repeated calls to Saigon.

19. We got out all of our employees and most of our important parts and equipment.
20. The Vietnamese radio operator agreed to stay on the job and call us when possible. He called one time the day following the evacuation and said that everything was quiet downtown and at the airfield. We never heard from him again.

It is my opinion that all the evacuations AAM participated in were caused by the embassy personnel ordering Vietnamese evacuated, thereby creating panic among the Vietnamese people.

Captain Edward Reid, Jr.
Air America, Inc.



AFTER ACTION REPORT

AIR AMERICA SVND EVACUATION SUMMARY

In early April 1975 the AAM SVND evacuation contingency plans were fairly well finalized. These plans included coordination with the DAO evacuation command center (ECC) AAM Captain Filippi was the primary coordinator between AAM and ECC. AAM captain Marius Burke was the man assigned to organize and formalize the AAM employee evacuation plans, as would relate to getting the foreign employees from their living quarters to the AAM TSN compound for onward evacuation out of Vietnam. In my job capacity, I had dealings with all factions of the company/ evacuation/ contingency plans.

In my support to Captain Filippi AAM provided the technical assistance to the setting up of an alternate flight watch facility at an office nearby the DAO ECC. AAM would provide the primary vhf/am and vhf/fm radios if and when the AAM operations function could not operate. We also provided the DAO ECC with our ICCS colored Dayglo green paint, so that they could paint the letter H on their designated roof tops. These LZ pads were to be utilized for all the U.S. mission personnel pickup points in the case of an evacuation.

Captain Filippi also brought a group of three U.S. Marines to my office on or about 25 April. The Marine officer in charge was interested primarily in the perimeter security of the AAM compound. He stated that he would be the officer responsible for providing security of our facility and that upon the evacuation of our AAM compound, his U.S. marine group would destroy (blow up) the AAM facilities. We discussed the weak points in our perimeter, such as the company passenger terminal building and gates. Also we

agreed that the rolling gates utilized across our southwest taxiway entrance was a weak point that would be difficult to seal off from refugees and/or armed desperate Vietnamese military personnel. It was decided that AAM would use metal conex containers to barricade the taxiway and place a double row of concertina wire on top of them to stem infiltration. This would be done after our fixed wing aircraft had departed or if the airport conditions prevented our fixed wing aircraft from taking off. In preparation we later positioned about 10 conexs near the taxiway and some 4 rolls of concertina wire. The terminal building would be planned to be blocked on the ramp side by vehicles and the entrance gate from the street to our employee vehicle parking lot was to be barricaded by the 2 Isuzu buses operated by AAM. The Marine officer said he would like me to make the necessary preparations and he would return in a few days to see what progress we had made. He nor any of the other marines ever visited me again and I heard nothing further about their plans.

Major (USAF) Cook was the man in DAO who provided me with the 300 fuel drums and one each Esso refueler of AVGAS and one of JP4. He told me that DAO EEC would also have an Esso re-



fueler of JP4 parked in the DAO compound area.

We in AAM also doubled our delivery service of Esso Mogas to ensure that we would have maximum fuel for our generators and vehicles.

In addition we obtained an extra potable water trailer from PA&E and serviced it as a standby.

We also purchased about 425 cases of military "C" rations from PA&E in case we needed food for our employees. In this same purchase were numerous cases of other canned foods that PA&E had for sale. All of this was stored in our supply area for possible issue/use.

I had several informal meetings with the third country national (TCN) employees. I strongly recommended that they double up in their

living quarters outside the airfield. Captain Burke and I made several flights together in April, along with the designated spokesman of the Filipinos and Chinese employees. Our purpose was to determine which TCNs lived where in town and which rooftops were the most suitable for use. We formally identified 3 rooftops around the area of Truong Minh Giangtroung Minh KY for the balance of the TCN employees. Those who were not reasonably close to these rooftops, were told to move in closer. These rooftops (LZ pads) were then designated for each employee, by location, for pickup. A name and address list of all foreign employees was given to Captain Burke for planning purposes. The majority of our helicopter pilots were given area familiarization flights so that they knew all the DAO and employee pickup pads.

A vhf/am and vhf/fm (portable) radio was given to the Chinese employees in Cholon and the same was provided to the TCN group or Filippinod. These radios would enable them to have radio contact with the AAM TSN operations office and with company aircraft as may be required. Each LZ was given a radio call sign. Mr. P.Y. Lin acting manager of supply and Mr. Sam Talapian foreman of electronics was designated as the TCN group spokesman. In addition we proceeded to paint the AAM Dayglo green H on those approved rooftops.

About the middle of April, Captain Burke and I became more concerned about the overall war situation around Saigon and we recommended that all TCN employees move into the warehouse type buildings behind the former Citca hangars which was within the AAM compound. A number of the TCN employees started to move into those rooms. About 23 or 24 April, I insisted that all TCNs move to those buildings, and I was assured by Mr. P.Y.



Lin that all those employees living in Cholon would be moved to the Citca buildings by the night of 26 April, as the security of the Cholon area was quite questionable.

On the morning of 29 April when we were preparing to evacuate all TCNs, I was given a name list of three TCNs that were still housed in town. There were 7 Chinese in Cholon and 11 Filipinos in the Troung Minh Giang area. Eventually the AAM helicopters picked up all the Filipinos and 6 of the Chinese. I had talked by radio at 1500I with P. Y. Lin and confirmed that the six Chinese in Cholon would go to the Chinese hospital and get out the seventh Chinese employee, Mr. W.A. Peng then they were all to proceed to any of the alternate rooftop LZ pads for pickup by using their portable vhf/fm radio. In the end result, I learned a few days later that W.A. Peng did not get evacuated. The reason why is unknown to me at this writing. I suggest that P.Y. Lin make a statement on why they did not or could not get Peng out.

In retrospect I would say that AAM evacuation plans went fairly smooth and that we were very fortunate that only one employee failed to get out of Vietnam and none of our employees were injured. All of this is in spite of the fact that the U.S. Marines never arrived in the AAM compound, to secure/destroy it.

I went by AAM helicopter, from my living quarters (259 Troung Quoc Duong) to AAM TSN at about 0930I on Tuesday 29 April 1975.

We operated from AAMTSN until about 1230I at which time CEO gave the order to evacuate the AAM compound, due to lack of security (no U.S. Marines) and VNAF penetrating our area with cars, Hondas, local dependents,

etc. CEO said we were to regroup at the DAO ECC.

Prior to abandoning the AAM area, CEO approved the dispatching of AAM fixed wing aircraft to carry the non-essential employees to friendly countries. We proceeded to load all such employees and launched the aircraft ASAP. In a short period of time, we had all those employees that were present and some unknown locals who infiltrated our groups, on the fixed wing aircraft and airborne.

I might mention that it was very difficult to control the boarding of passengers and to determine who was AAM employee or dependents, because we had very little help at the aircraft entrance doors. I don't know who, if anyone did authorize the departure of some of the Americans, i.e. Charlie Meyers, Harvey Kohler, Dick Fisher, George Keller, etc. on the fixed wing aircraft. We could have really utilized those Americans to control passenger loading, the taxiway gates and the refueling problem.

Shortly after arriving at AAMTSN I was notified that VNAF pilots were stealing our GFE UH-1H helicopters from the ICCS ramp. To the best of my knowledge they stole 5 UH-1H aircraft from the ICCS/as ramp and one AAM 204b helicopter from the AAM ramp itself. These VNAF people were well armed and desperate.

With the incoming rockets and VNAF infiltrating our ramp area, there was no time to collect or destroy essential records. We



were hopeful that we could rescue the AAM compound and operate from it, once the marines arrived to secure the area. It was planned and I was so briefed by DAO and the U.S. Marines that the AAM compound would be secured by the U.S. marines and upon our departure, they would destroy (blow up) the AAM facilities. Unfortunately for all concerned, the U.S. Marines did neither.

Upon arrival at the DAO ECC Dick Wengenroth, Stan Huster, Ron Lietchy, Paul Disciullo and myself assisted the AAM helicopter pilots with their arrivals and departures, at the DAO tennis court pads.

AAM Captain Filippi told me that we needed to obtain JP-4 fuel for the helicopters and he asked me where was the DAO fuel truck. I explained that I knew DAO USAF Major Cook had an Esso truck as part of the DAO ECC planning but I was not involved in their (DAO) planning. Not knowing where the DAO truck was positioned, Dick Wengenroth and myself took a DAO truck and hotwired the ignition and proceeded to drive around the DAO building 5000 compound but were unable to find the JP-4 truck. Then I asked Captain Filippi to obtain a few U.S. Marines from ECC and we could go to the AAM ramp and bring out some of the 225 drums of JP-4 we had there. Captain Filippi could apparently get no U.S. Marines designated for this assignment. So I went and got one of the AAM pilots to fly over the DAO area, with Dick Wengenroth and myself searching for the JP-4 truck. We spotted it at the lot around the corner of the BX stop and shop building. We returned to the ECC and attempted to locate the JP-4 truck ignition keys. No one knew where the keys were, so we flew to the BX LZ pads and walked to the lot where the JP-4 truck

was parked. The lot gate had a padlock on it which we broke off. Within about 20 minutes we had hotwired the JP-4 truck ignition wires, but the truck battery was so weak the engine would not start. We considered towing the JP-4 truck using a nearby tow truck, but as the JP-4 truck was a hydromatic if we could not start the JP-4 truck engine, then we would not be able to pump the JP-4 from the truck. We then returned to DAO ECC by AAM helicopter. We could not find any DAO vehicles with a large enough battery to suit the JP-4 truck needs. So again we flew to the BX LZ pads with the thought of taking the battery from nearby Isuzu bus and use it for the JP-4 truck. This time Stan Huster accompanied Chuck Wengenroth and myself. We switched the batteries, only to find out the bus battery was dead. We then went back to DAO ECC and again requested Capt. Filippi to provide us with a few U.S. Marines so that we could obtain JP-4 fuel drums or the standby Esso JP-4 truck from the AAM compound. As we again could not get any U.S. Marines, for security we elected not to re-enter the abandoned AAM compound for fuel. Later while listening to the AAM helicopter pilots talking to the AAM om at DAO by radio, it was readily evident that our pilots were carefully monitoring their fuel onboard and programming their roof top pickups of people, to enable refueling at the U.S. ships off Vung Tau, where the majority of their passengers were being taken. The AAM helicopter pilots did a great job in fuel management as well as some "can do" flying.

As best I recall the U.S. military helicopters started arriving at the DAO BX LZ pads about 1500h. The majority of their passengers were local refugees who had been programmed out by prior USAF C-141 and C-130.

At about 1615L CEO instructed some of us to use one of the two AAM helicopters at DAO and proceed to the U.S. ships. This group along with myself was dropped off at the U.S.S. Vancouver, LPD-2. This group of AAM employees consisted of Stan Huster, Paul Disciullo, Ron Leitchy, Capt. Chester Folck, Dick Wengenroth, E. L. Angeles, Vic Ballesteros and later we were joined by Ed Twifford. The Vietnamese flight mechanic with us on n47004 helicopter was Mr. Can, (I believe) and he was taken to the refugee side of our ship and I never saw him again.

Our ship, the U.S.S. Vancouver, finally sailed for Subic Bay Philippines on 1 May about 1915L, and we arrived in Philippines about 2130L on 3 May.

Although we were all processed through U.S. and Philippine customs and immigration by about 2330L the same night at cubic point naval base gym, we were returned to the U.S.S. Vancouver for the night because the weather at Manila eliminated us from flying there that night.

On the morning of 4 May we were flown to manila by U.S. military helicopter and sent to the Carlton hotel to check in with CEO and VP. We arranged our own flight bookings and flew from Manila to Hong Kong the same afternoon and checked into the pre-arranged rooms at the Hong Kong Sheraton hotel about 1650L. We reported to the AAM offices at the peninsula hotel on the morning of 5 May.

B.D. Mesecher,
Director—Technical Services
Air America, Inc.



THE AFTERNOON OF APRIL 28 I TOOK THE [DANANG] RADIO OPERATOR AND HER YOUNGER SISTER TO THEIR HOUSE ON [TRU MINH KY] AFTERWARD, I WAS RETURNING TO MY HOUSE ON [CHI LANG] TO CARRY LUGGAGE - ETC. OUT TO THE AIRFIELD. AT THAT TIME 1700 HOURS THE [A-37S] BOMBED [TSN] I IMMEDIATELY RETURNED TO [TSN] AIRFIELD AND ABANDONED MY LUGGAGE AT [CHI LANG] THERE WAS NOT TIME TO RETURN AND RECOVER ANYTHING. THE NEXT MORNING MYSELF AND [CARPENTER] MADE THE FIRST FLIGHT INTO [259] AND FLEW 8 PILOTS OR SO OUT TO THE RAMP. WE THEN MADE A TRIP TO [DAO] AND PICKED UP 7 AND FLEW TO THE [BLUE RIDGE.] AT THAT TIME [CARPENTER] AND [ANGLES (FM)] CHOSE TO REMAIN ON THE SHIP. I FLEW THE REMAINDER OF THE DAY SOLO - SHUTTLING FROM THE EMBASSY ROOFTOP TO SHIP WITH INTERMESHED TRIPS TO [DAO, LZ, 23, 259] AND INTERSHIP TRANSPORT, LANDING ABOUT 1850 ON THE HANCOCK] MY DEPARTURE FROM [SAIGON] WAS ABOUT 0900 WITH ABOUT [5] TRIPS TO VARIOUS SHIPS] I DON'T KNOW THE STATUS OF THE [DANANG OPERATOR (RADIO)] OR HER SISTER.

[CAPTAIN COALSON (19491)]
AIR AMERICA, INC.

AFTER
ACTION REPORT

A Belated Thank You to the Pilots of Air America

I want to thank the Air America pilots for rescuing me from the rooftop of the American Embassy in Saigon in the early evening of 30 April 1975. I had served in Vietnam from 1 November 1972 to that last day in April 1975. My name then was Joan Fritz.

Before I was rescued, I had the pleasure of working with the Air America pilots on the radio. About a week before Saigon fell, I was asked to work in the office that coordinated with the Air American pilots. The chief there, O.B., had broken his glasses and could not read; and it was too late for him to get new prescription glasses. So, I became his eyes. He taught me to work the radio and write down the tail numbers of planes when they took off and landed. O.B. had, among other duties, the responsibility of preparing and checking over many different lists involving Vietnamese and other personnel scheduled to be rescued and ferried out of the country. I recognized the importance of his work, and I was happy to be able to assist him.

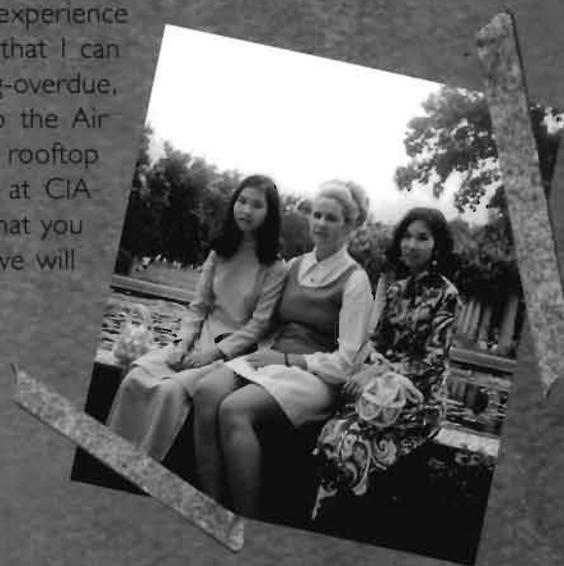
One rather comical part of my rescue occurred when the chopper pilot took a map out and started looking at it over the water. I did not want to ask him if he knew where he was going, so I more tactfully asked him whether he had ever landed on an aircraft

carrier before. He said that he had done so a few times, and I was greatly relieved to hear the news! The Air America chopper flew me to the U.S.S. Hancock. While safely aboard the U.S.S. Hancock, I observed some other non-Air America helicopters landing on the deck of the carrier. Apparently there was not room to accommodate all of these helicopters, so after the passengers and pilots exited them, the helicopters were pushed overboard. (No, they didn't sink the Air America choppers!) I was aboard the aircraft carrier for about six days before we arrived at Subic Bay in the Philippines.

As I flew out of Saigon on that Air America chopper, I remember thinking to myself, this is the end of the movie. And I thought then – and I continue to think today – about all the men and women who served in Vietnam in any capacity over the years. Supporting U.S. efforts in Vietnam was a sometimes painful but ultimately great experience for me. I am grateful that I can finally give my long-overdue, heartfelt Thank You to the Air America pilots for my rooftop rescue. My colleagues at CIA and I honor you for what you did for all of us, and we will never forget. ♪ ♪

Sincerely,

Joan Peterson



FLIGHTS YET TAKEN



Note: With the declassification of thousands of pages of Air America Corporate and CIA formerly-classified documents, historians will be able to read and review information previously not available, allowing a more rounded and fuller history of Air America. An example of this is the following article written by Larry D. Sall, Ph.D., Dean of Libraries at The University of Texas at Dallas. Dr Sall reviewed declassified accident report files including the only known hijacking of an Air America plane. This is not only a fascinating article but an example of the stories to be written with the release of these documents. Also included in this section are some examples of the various documents that have been released to the public.

The Crash of Civil Air Transport Flight B-908

By Larry D. Sall, Ph.D.,

Dean of Libraries at The University of Texas at Dallas

About 5:30 on the afternoon of June 20, 1964, a Civil Air Transport C-46, Flight B-908, took off from Suinan Airport at Taichung on the island of Taiwan with 52 passengers and a crew of five. Less than 15 minutes later, all on board perished when Flight B-908 crashed into a rice paddy a few miles north of the Suinan airfield. In just released files from the Central Intelligence Agency, the story of this tragic event is detailed. According to newspaper accounts at the time, this was the first crash of a scheduled domestic flight that Civil Air Transport had experienced.

Why did the CIA maintain files on this Taiwanese accident? What could have been its interest in such a tragedy that it felt compelled to keep such extensive files? The answer to both questions is straight forward; CAT was owned by the CIA and had been since the Korean War. CAT was an asset to the agency, used to maintain a presence and an influence in East Asia. When not operating during the day as a civilian airline, the CIA used CAT's personnel and equipment for clandestine missions.

CAT was established following World War II in China by General Claire Chennault and his associate Whiting Willauer to provide air transport in China, a country wracked by civil war and the devastation left by the Japanese invasion. When the Korean Conflict began, there was a serious absence of American airlift capacity in that part of the world, so seeking a solution to the problem, the CIA purchased CAT under the cover of a private corporation. Thus the CIA came to be operating a civilian airline in Asia and so needed

to be closely involved in the investigation of the crash of Flight B-908.

Both the Taiwanese authorities and the American authorities carefully studied the circumstances leading to the crash and its aftermath. Among the first questions were: what were the conditions at the time of the crash and could they have been a contributing factor? The flight took off in daylight, in clear weather over flat terrain, and according to eyewitnesses the takeoff appeared entirely normal. As Flight B-908 flew past the airfield, the pilot indicated everything was normal and said he would see the tower personnel the next day.

Taking off to the south and heading on a round island route with its next stop scheduled to be Taipei, the plane made a 180-degree turn to the east and headed north when suddenly it veered sharply to the west and began a steep descent from an altitude of approximately 1500 feet. Flight B-908 struck the ground at an angle of about 30 degrees with its nose and left wing down. The C-46 was destroyed by the impact with only the tail section remaining more or less intact. The wreckage was scattered over a 200-300 meter square area in a rice paddy and a ditch.

Farmers working nearby heard the plane descending and saw it crash. The consensus was that the plane was fully intact before impact; there was no sign of smoke or fire prior to impact, and the engines did not sound unusual. First on the scene were the farmers who could find no sign of survivors; they also reported that fire broke out in some

places in the wreckage, but these fires did not spread and soon died out. When the local police arrived shortly after the crash, they took charge of the scene. Chinese Civil Aviation Authorities did not reach the area until about twelve hours later. CAT personnel arrived soon after and were kept from handling the remains or wreckage while the Chinese officials pursued their initial investigation.

In its own report CAT noted that the "sudden transition from normal climbing flight in the direction of Taipei to a sharp turn to the left and diving into the ground almost certainly establishes only two possible causes:

- a. A sudden and major mechanical trouble which made it impossible for the pilots to control the aircraft.
- b. Sudden incapacitation or restraint of both pilots which rendered them unable to control the aircraft through some act of other aircraft occupants."

After an exhaustive investigation of the plane's mechanical condition, both prior to and following the crash, the only significant questions were the condition of two control cables found broken following the crash, a claim that the left engine was over speeding at the time of the crash, and the condition of the pilots. CAT's analysis of the propeller hubs and gears indicated both propellers were set at the proper pitch, and other clues including reports from people on the ground found no indication that either engine was performing outside of expected parameters.

The broken control cables were sent to laboratories in the United States for analysis. The normal stress on the cables when functioning was about 20 pounds while the cables themselves were rated to handle 1000 pounds. Also it was noted that during the crash the cables had cut into the fuselage. While after

their initial investigation Chinese officials regarded the broken cables as contributing factors, further tests indicated the cables broke during the crash when subjected to extreme stress. Also, even if the cables had broken in flight, according to CAT the two onboard pilots would have been able to control the aircraft with little difficulty. In addition CAT's report stated that had an engine over accelerated, as was initially suspected by the local authorities, both pilots would have had no trouble dealing with that issue either.

Upon discovering that pilot Bengee Lin's body was not strapped into his seat, the Chinese authorities initially believed that he had behaved in an overconfident manner that could have led to the crash. This was further investigated by CAT. The crash was so violent that the pilot's seat was completely torn apart, which CAT felt explained why the pilot's body was not found with the seat. Also both pilots were extremely competent and experienced.

So if there was no "sudden and major mechanical trouble," what might have caused the "sudden incapacitation or restraint of both pilots?" The two pilots, Bengee Lin, the Pilot in Command, and M. H. Kung, Second in Command, had extensive C-46 experience. Pilot Bengee Lin had 17 years of flight experience, having logged 11,881 hours, 4,914 of them in a C-46. M.H. Kung had been a



professional pilot for 19 years with 13,074 hours logged of which 9,270 were in a C-46. Both pilots were in good physical condition according to their most recent examinations, and both were regarded as mentally healthy. The likelihood that both would collapse simultaneously would have been remote in the extreme.

If the pilots were not incapacitated by individual physical maladies, and mechanical problems had been ruled out, that left the most troubling possibility: the pilots had been rendered "unable to control the aircraft through some act of other aircraft occupants." The likelihood that this was the

case became stronger when two .45 caliber automatic pistols were found in the wreckage. The hammer was found in the cocked position with the carriage forward on one of the pistols. Two radar manuals were found in the debris the day after the crash. The inside pages of both manuals had been hollowed out in the shape of a .45 caliber automatic. Neither pistol was found with the manuals.

Lt. Tseng Yang, an engineering officer in the Chinese Navy, had checked out the manuals from the library of the Chinese Navy's Peng Hu Ship Building Yard No. 2. Also, two pistols had been reported missing from the Armory of the Peng Hu Ship Building Yard No. 2.



What was Lt. Tseng's story? He was listed as a passenger on Flight B-908 along with a civilian companion, Wang Tseng Yee. On June 17 a civilian, Wang Tseng Yee, made reservations for himself and Lt. Tseng Yang to fly the following day to Makung/Taipei. However, on the 18th Lt. Tseng changed the reservation to June 20th. That day Lt. Tseng checked in about 3:30 p.m. in the afternoon wearing his navy uniform and with no checked luggage.

One conclusion can be drawn immediately; Lt. Tseng had no intent of returning the manuals to the library as they had been ruined before being taken on the plane. Lt. Tseng would also have had access to both the pistols and the manuals, immediately pointing suspicion at him. Because both Lt. Tseng and Wang Tseng Yee had booked the flight for each other, the circumstantial case against them as co-conspirators is extremely strong. During the investigation of the crash site, while the victim's bodies were being recovered, one body with its abdomen ripped open was found near the pilots' bodies. It was passenger Wang's body, and according to the medical examiner, the nature of Wang's injuries indicated he was standing at the moment of impact.

The Chinese medical examiner, Dr. W. S. Cheng, noticed "a small hole at the right side of the face" of Pilot Bengee Lin in a photograph made by the Chinese security division at the crash site. He also observed that "approximately from that hole a large part of the front of the face and skull was thrown open and to the left and upward." Dr. Cheng also reported that following the cremation of Co-pilot M. H. Kung, a three-inch spike was found in the ashes. The source of the spike was unknown.

It appears from the evidence that for reasons unknown, Lt. Tseng and passenger Wang attempted to take control of Flight B-908 shortly after takeoff. In that attempt the pilots were incapacitated; possibly Pilot Bengee Lin was shot and Co-pilot Kung was stabbed. In any event, both pilots were rendered incapable of flying the plane, and it crashed. What the motive of the alleged hijackers may have been is not clear. That they were suicidal is a remote possibility, but a more likely possibility was that they wanted to take the plane to the Chinese Mainland which was just across the Taiwan Straits from Taichung. In any event, 55 innocent people died as a result of this act of terror, including 19 Americans, a Korean flight attendant, and 35 Chinese people.



Copy #3

B-908 CRASH

SECURITY REPORT

CONFIDENTIAL

A. Conduct of Crash Site Investigation

1. Subsequent to notification of the crash of B-908, a Security representative arrived at the crash site at 0040 hours local time 21 June 1964 to assist CAT's Man. Dir. and members of CAT's Accident Investigation Team (AIT). In the interim, arrangements were being made through U.S. Government Navy and Air Force units to immediately dispatch medical aid to the crash site, in the event survivors existed, to augment the CAT medical aid accompanying the AIT.
2. The crash site was cordoned off by local police. Liaison was effected with the Chief of Police, Taichung Hsien Police Bureau and the Chief, Feng Yuan Sub-Police Bureau, who were the two officers responsible for necessary security measures at the crash site. Permission was granted to allow the AIT members and the CAT official photographer to conduct a preliminary examination of the site.
3. Observation indicated that there were no survivors and the remaining parts of B-908 were distributed over an area estimated to be 200-300 meters square. The bodies of the victims were littered throughout the rice paddy area, beyond immediate recognition, and personal effects were widely spread over the crash site.
4. CAT and Air Asia representatives were prohibited by police from touching the victims or wreckage prior to the contemplated arrival of the coroner and procurator in the early morning of 21 June 1964. Photographs, however, were taken by the CAT photographer.
5. Although the coroner and procurator did not arrive until 0745L 21 June, preliminary preparation was made in the interim with regards to blankets, plastic bags and ropes as well as providing laborers to effect the removal of the corpses at such time as post mortem examinations were conducted and proper judgments made by the coroner and procurator. While awaiting the latter two officials, anxious relatives, newspapermen and others voiced loud and emotional disapproval of the delay.
6. Although effective liaison developed with the police and facilitated the movement of CAT and Air Asia representatives in the inquest area, at 1900L 21 June local police advised that they were withdrawing from the crash site. In order to preserve the remaining wreckage, arrangements were made by CAT to maintain a 10 man police force to insure proper protection of the wreckage so that investigation could be properly facilitated.
7. A searching examination was continued by CAT, Air Asia, and government personnel at the crash site until 26 June. Mine detector teams furnished by Taiwan General Garrison Headquarters along with AIT and Security team members and locally hired diggers, examined every piece of earth, rice paddy field and ditches. Where reactions were received on the mine detector meter, the laborers immediately dug into the soil.
8. On 26 June, the wreckage of B-908 was removed to Tainan with Air Asia personnel acting as guards to protect the materials removed.