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Air America's Role in Evacuation Operations in Laos - 1970

The resources of Air America in Laos were heavily taxed in the first part of 1970. The North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao offensive necessitated evacuation of entire villages and areas, and the relocation of troops as well.

The first critical period was the evacuation of the Plaine des Jarras in early February. Precise statistics can never be assembled since all aircraft were used to the limit of their Available Cabin Load (ACL) without regard to the mission for which they had originally been dispatched. This meant that Porter aircraft for example dispatched to points in the general area for specific support missions would be diverted on the return flight to move refugees from one landing site in the path of the coming enemy force to a relocation or refugee center. Figures are of course available for the refugees and material moved by the larger aircraft specifically dispatched for the relocation mission. These figures show that in the brief period February 5 to the 10th Air America flew:

- 56 C-130 sorties into and out of LS-275 and LS-276 the principal marshalling points for refugees. Each sortie carried about 150 passengers plus their personal effects estimated at 12-15,000 pounds.
- 38 C-123 K sorties carried 2,350 refugees plus 121,000 pounds.
- 15 C 7A sorties to the Plaine des Jarres brought out 350 refugees and 28,500 pounds.

Ten days later the C7A aircraft were assigned 16 sorties to bring 330 refugees and military personnel out of L-03 to LS-113. This effort also brought over 9,000 pounds of cargo.

When the enemy moved on LS-20 and LS-20A there were two critical periods, 17 to 20 March and 1 to 3 April. Refugees had to be evacuated, troops moved up, cargo of critical material had to be relocated. During these periods in addition to the nonscheduled movement of smaller fixed-wing aircraft,

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- 16 C-130 sorties were scheduled and five of them were for the movement of 750 Lao troops with their weapons and equipment into LS-20A. On the backhaul 183,000 pounds of cargo were brought out.
- 18 C-123 sorties evacuated 1,855 refugees and 65,000 pounds of cargo from LS-20.
- 24 C7A sorties brought 750 passengers and 23,000 pounds of cargo out of LS-20.
- 21 additional C-123 sorties brought 320 passengers and 75,500 pounds of cargo out of LS-20A to LS-272, the new USAID refugee center.
- 14 additional C7A sorties took 66 passengers and 16,500 pounds of cargo from LS-20A to LS-272.

While not as impressive in statistical terms as the role of the larger Air America aircraft, the smaller aircraft such as the Porter performed outstanding service in bringing refugees out of small, irregular and indeed substandard airfields where no other aircraft could operate.

Air America personnel at all levels were deeply involved in these critical evacuation operations. Supervisors volunteered for and were assigned as Air Controllers on the Plains des Jarres and at the points where refugees and their supplies were being reassembled. The Medical Staff assisted by the Fire Brigade took care of the many wounded, injured, and aged refugees. Flight Crews worked tirelessly from dawn to dusk without relief, and often without meals in order to get the maximum use of the available aircraft. Air America traffic personnel were sent to LS-20A to assist in expediting the turn-around of aircraft and on-loading of Agency cargo and personnel. In Vientiane the entire remaining traffic complement of Air America turned out to assist the Vientiane Metropolitan Police and the Royal Laotian Army in the off-loading, relocation, and settlement of refugees as they arrived at the Air America terminal.

In a meeting with the Board of Directors of Air America in Washington, the Director stated that it would not have been possible to accomplish so much with the limited resources available in Laos had it not been for the existence of Air America.

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