

ROYAL LAO AIR FORCE: FAIRCHILD C-123K PROVIDERS

by Dr. Joe F. Leeker



RLAF C-123K “617” at Vientiane in 1973
(UTD/Anthony/F9)

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The types of missions flown by Air America’s C-123s:

The C-123 was one of Air America’s work horses in Laos and had been introduced in 1962. In 1968/69, all of Air America’s C-123B aircraft were modified to C-123K models. In 1973, all remaining Air America C-123Ks were given to the Royal Lao Air Force and painted in RLAF colors, but during the first half of that year, a number of them were used out of Udorn in a flight training program for Laotian pilots. At the same time, the number of C-123Ks operated, maintained or supported by Air America in Laos, was reduced to 7 on 1 July 73, then to 4 on 1 August 73, and the last three C-123Ks which had been used at Vientiane for training Royal Laotian Air Force pilots as a part of Air America contract F04606-71-C-0002, i.e. “617”, “671”, and “576”, were definitely handed over to the Laotians on 30 November 1973.

However before those last C-123Ks were handed over to the RLAF, a decreasing number of C-123Ks had been used in a training program for RLAF pilots between 16 April and 30 September 73 (Letter dated 24 March 1973, sent by James Cunningham to Paul Velte, in: UTD/CIA/B31F4). This program is well described by G. L. Christian: “One of Air America’s current tasks in Laos is to train four groups of eight Royal Lao Air Force pilots, who have been C-47 pilots, on the much heavier, four-engine (two Pratt & Whitney R-2800 reciprocating engines and two General Electric J-85 auxiliary jet engines) C-123K aircraft. The program is headed by Air America’s ACP-HA (Assistant Chief Pilot-Heavy Aircraft) Captain W. J. Cooper; Administrative Manager of the Lao Pilot Training Program Captain E. G. Adams. Other Air America pilots involved in this training program are: Captains E. H.

Mooreland, A. J. Rischman, E. P. Thurston and R. G. Vikre. According to Captain Cooper, the real objective of the RLAf Pilot Training Program is to make all-around pilots out of the 32 trainees. To this end, they will each receive both transition training and instrument training, including instruction in air drops. Duration of each class is 55 hours of flight time plus ground school. Shown on these pages are photos of Captain Adams checking out RLAf Lieutenant Colonel Chanpheng, head of the first group of trainee pilots and the first RLAf pilot to check out on the C-123K; he is the pilot who presumably will become the Squadron Commander of those RLAf pilots who check out on the training program.” (Christian, “AAM is training RLAf pilots in C-123K flight training program”, in: *Air America Log*, vol. VII, no. 7, 1973, pp. 4/5). For more details, see my file about Air America’s C-123s (see <http://www.utdallas.edu/library/collections/speccoll/Leeker/index3.html>).



Captain Adams (r.) congratulates Colonel Chanpheng on the successful completion of the latter’s check flight (*Air America Log*, vol. VII, no. 7, 1973, p. 5)

The individual aircraft histories:

Type	registration / serial	c/n (msn)	date acquired	origin
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Fairchild C-123K	“616”	20065	May/June 73	USAF 54000616
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Previous history: assigned to contract AID-439-342 with Air America on 23 February 72 (Implementation Order dated 23 February 72); current with Air America on 30 April 73, assigned to contract F04606-71-C-0002 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14).

Service history: probably given to the Royal Lao Air Force in May or June 73; not current with Air America on 1 July 73 (Assigned aircraft of 1 July 73, in: UTD/CIA/B31F10).

Fate: taken over by the Air Force of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR) in 1975; seen at Vientiane on 4 October 77, still as “616” (Telex no. 01391 dated 5

October 77 sent by the US Embassy, Vientiane, to the Secretary of State, Washington, online at <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=231599&dt=2532&dl=1629> , kindly sent to the author by Sid Nanson on 30 December 2014).



Former Air America C-123K “386” in RLAF colors
(*Air America Log*, vol. VII, no.6, 1973, p.8)

Fairchild C-123K “386” 20270 June 73 USAF 56-4386

Previous history: assigned to contract AID-439-342 with Air America on 1 July 70 (Implementation Order dated 1 July 70); still current with Air America on 30 April 73, assigned to contract F04606-71-C-0002 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14).

Service history: given to the Royal Lao Air Force in May or June 73; not current with Air America on 1 July 73 (Assigned aircraft of 1 May 73, in: UTD/CIA/B31F10).

Fate: taken over by the Air Force of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR) in 1975; possibly became one of the 3 C-123Ks of Lao Aviation (RDPL 3 4084, RDPL 3 4088, or RDPL 3 4089) reported for the 1979-87 period (for details see below).

Fairchild C-123K “545” 20206 June 73 USAF 55-4545

Previous history: C-123B 55-4545 was officially transferred from 347th TCS, Pope AFB, to outside the USAF on 16 March 1962; leased to Air America as “530”; rereg. as N5005X with Air America in 1962; cancelled from the US Civil Aircraft Register

on 13 June 66; reserialled as “545” with Air America in June 1966; still current with Air America on 30 April 73 and assigned to the Lao pilot training program.

Service history: given to the Royal Laotian Air Force in June 73; at Long Tieng in RLAf colors in June 73 (photo in UTD/Jenkins); not current with Air America on 1 July 73 (Assigned aircraft of 1 July 73, in: UTD/CIA/B32F10); see also Carroll, *World Air Forces Directory 1998-99*, p. 275.

Fate: taken over by the Air Force of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR) in 1975; seen at Vientiane on 4 October 77, still as “545” (Telex no. 01391 dated 5 October 77 sent by the US Embassy, Vientiane, to the Secretary of State, Washington, online at <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=231599&dt=2532&dl=1629> , kindly sent to the author by Sid Nanson on 30 December 2014).

Fairchild C-123K “636” 20085 July 73 USAF 54-0636

Previous history: flew Luang-Prabang-Udorn with Air America on 13 November 68 (Log book of D. Keele, in: UTD/Keele/B1F6); still current with Air America on 1 July 73 (Assigned aircraft of 1 July 73, in: UTD/CIA/B31F10).

Service history: probably given to the Royal Lao Air Force in July 73; not current with Air America on 1 August 73 (Assigned aircraft of 1 August 73, in: UTD/CIA/B31F10);

Fate: taken over by the Air Force of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR) in 1975; to the Royal Thai Air Force as B.L.4K-19/19 on 6 February 76; struck off charge on 28 January 77 (Martin Best/Steve Darke, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 13 February 2012).

Fairchild C-123K “577” 20026 July 73 USAF 54-0577

Previous history: assigned to contract AID-439-342 with Air America on 21 February 73 (Modification no. P00071 dated 9 March 73, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 23); still current with Air America on 1 July 73 (Assigned aircraft of 1 July 73, in: UTD/CIA/B31F10).

Service history: probably given to the Royal Lao Air Force as “577” in July 73; not current with Air America on 1 August 73 (Assigned aircraft of 1 August 73, in: UTD/CIA/B31F10).

Fate: taken over by the Air Force of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR) in 1975; possibly became one of the 3 C-123Ks of Lao Aviation (RDPL 3 4084, RDPL 3 4088, or RDPL 3 4089) reported for the 1979-87 period (for details see below).

Fairchild C-123K “546” 20207 July 73 USAF 55-4546

Previous history: assigned to contract AID-439-342 with Air America on 29 March 73 (Modification no. P00078 to contract AID-439-342 dated 29 March 73, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 23); current with Air America on 1 July 73 (Assigned aircraft of 1 July 73, in: UTD/CIA/B31F10).

Service history: given to the Royal Lao Air Force as “546” in July 73; a drawing of RLAf C-123K “546” in camouflage can be seen in: Conboy, *War in Laos*, p. 37; not current with Air America on 1 August 73 (Assigned aircraft of 1 August 73, in: UTD/CIA/B31F10).

Fate: taken over by the Air Force of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR) in 1975; seen at Vientiane on 4 October 77, still as “546” (Telex no. 01391 dated 5 October 77 sent by the US Embassy, Vientiane, to the Secretary of State, Washington, online at <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=231599&dt=2532&dl=1629> , kindly sent to the author by Sid Nanson on 30 December 2014).

Fairchild C-123K “556” 20217 1973 USAF 55-4556

Previous history: put into service under contract AID-439-342 with Air America out of Vientiane on 7 May 68; still current with Air America on 1 August 73 (Assigned aircraft, in: UTD/CIA/B31F10).

Service history: probably given to the Royal Lao Air Force as “556” (?) in 1973; not current with Air America on 1 November 73 (F.O.C. of 1 November 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

Fate: taken over by the Air Force of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR) in 1975; possibly became one of the 3 C-123Ks of Lao Aviation (RDPL 3 4084, RDPL 3 4088, or RDPL 3 4089) reported for the 1979-87 period (for details see below).

Fairchild C-123K “576” 20237 30 Nov. 73 USAF 55-4576

Previous history: C-123B 55-4576 was officially transferred from 347th TCS, Pope AFB, to outside the USAF on 16 March 1962; leased to Air America as “540”; rereg. as N5006X with Air America in 1962; cancelled from the US Civil Aircraft Register on 13 June 1966; reserialled as “576” with Air America in June 1966; used by Air America out of Vientiane 1-30 November 73 for Royal Lao Air Force training (F.O.C. of 1 November 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

Service history: probably given to the Royal Lao Air Force on 30 November 73; in RLAf colors on the tape “Unveiling the memorial”.

Fate: taken over by the Air Force of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR) in 1975; transferred to the Royal Thai AF as “B.L.4K-20/19”, code “54576”, on 6 February 76; then to code “576A” in 1976 (Martin Best/Steve Darke, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 13 February 2012); seen at Bangkok on 10 May 83 and in February 85 (see *Air-Britain News*, July 85, p. 272); struck off charge on 12 October 90 (Martin Best/Steve Darke, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 13 February 2012); seen at Bangkok disused in July 94; seen at Bangkok in October 95 (c/n confirmed; see *Air-Britain News*, January 96, p. 71); still stored there in May 97 (*Air-Britain News*, February 98, p. 251); part of the Jesada Technical Museum, Nakhon Chaisi (*Air-Britain News*, March 2011, p. 386).

Fairchild C-123K “617” 20066 30 Nov. 73 USAF 54-0617

Previous history: C-123B 54-0617 was transferred from overhaul at FAC, Crestview, to TL (= Air America) on 16 December 65; used out of Vientiane 1-30 November 73 for Royal Lao Air Force training (F.O.C. of 1 November 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

Service history: given to the Royal Lao Air Force on 30 November 73; at Vientiane in Royal Laotian Air Force colors in 73; a photo is preserved in: UTD/Anthony/F9; not current with Air America on 1 November 73 (F.O.C. of 1 November 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

Fate: taken over by the Air Force of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR) in 1975; possibly the C-123K “718” that was reportedly seen at Vientiane on 4 October 77 (Telex no. 01391 dated 5 October 77 sent by the US Embassy, Vientiane, to the Secretary of State, Washington, online readable at <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=231599&dt=2532&dl=1629> , kindly sent to the author by Sid Nanson on 30 December 2014);

Fairchild C-123K “671” 20120 30 Nov. 73 USAF 54-0671

Previous history: in use with Air America out of Vientiane at least between 31 November 65 and 23 November 68, when still a C-123B; used out of Vientiane 1-30 November 73 for Royal Lao Air Force training (F.O.C. of 1 November 73, in:

UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

Service history: probably given to the Royal Lao Air Force on 30 November 73;

Fate: taken over by the Air Force of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) in 1975; possibly the C-123K "678" that was reportedly seen at Vientiane on 4 October 77 (Telex no. 01391 dated 5 October 77 sent by the US Embassy, Vientiane, to the Secretary of State, Washington, online readable at <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=231599&dt=2532&dl=1629>, kindly sent to the author by Sid Nanson on 30 December 2014); but possibly "671" came to the R. Thai AF in later years, as a C-123 wreck showing the serial "671" was used 1990 in the movie "Air America" for the crash at "Tango 7".

Fates:

C-123K Providers RDPL 3 4084 (was at Singapore-Seletar on 26 March 79 [*Aviation Letter*, no.172, p. 5]), RDPL 3 4088, and RDPL 3 4089 were reported to be with Lao Aviation at least between 1980 and 1987 (*JP Airline-fleets international*, 1980 to 1987/8 editions), probably former Air America aircraft (see also *Air-Britain News*, April 81, p. 115).

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