

# Air America at the Bay of Pigs

by Dr. Joe F. Leeker

Last updated on 23 August 2010



Several C-46s and one C-54 lined up at Retalhuleu airfield in 1960/1  
(with kind permission from Janet Ray Weininger)

## A) Preparations at Retalhuleu: dropping supplies to Cuban rebels in 1960/1

Already in late 1959, the CIA began plotting to overthrow Fidel Castro, when it had become clear that the Cuban leader embraced Soviet-style Communism. Before Major Aderholt left for Okinawa in January 1960, he already worked on the air portion of a CIA plan to invade Cuba, in which he identified the Alabama National Guard to train aircrews of Cuban exiles. But this plan, which called for bombers and sustained air strikes, was cancelled.<sup>1</sup> On 17 March 1960, President Eisenhower officially set the wheels in motion ordering the CIA to organize, equip and train a group of Cuban exiles in a foreign country for future guerrilla operations. This paramilitary force was trained at Fort Gulick, an inactive US military base in Panama, and equipped with “a small air supply capability under deep cover as a commercial operation”.<sup>2</sup> This may have been the original purpose of Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez of Panama, the CIA front that later managed the *Fuerza Aérea de Liberación*. This original plan called for air drops of ammunition and arms for anti-Castro groups and for on-the-beach-landings of small groups of Cuban exiles only. Then, in the summer of 1960, the plan was expanded to provide for a real invasion of Cuba, which was to become Operation *Pluto*, the fiasco of the Bay of Pigs. But even before that tentative invasion of April 61, Air America aircraft were involved in the preparation of this invasion. In July 1960, the first CIA instructors arrived in Guatemala.<sup>3</sup> As to the air drops, the Presidential briefing paper of August 1960 outlined the plan of operations as follows: “The initial phase of paramilitary operations envisages the development, support and guidance of dissident

---

<sup>1</sup> Trest, *Air Commando One*, pp. 9+83.

<sup>2</sup> CIA proposal of 17 March 1960, quoted by Prouty, *JFK. The CIA, Vietnam, and the plot to assassinate John F. Kennedy*, p.123.

<sup>3</sup> Fursenko / Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, p.83.

groups in three areas of Cuba: Pinas del Rio, Escambray and Sierra Maestra. These groups will be organized for concerted guerrilla action against the regime.”<sup>4</sup>

It is known that most of the pilots who flew in the *Bay of Pigs* operation against Cuba in April 1961 were Cuban exiles who had been engaged by the Double-Check Corporation.<sup>5</sup> A list of all Cuban pilots involved in that operation can be found in document no. 141164 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp). Already in August 1960, Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez of Panama had announced to Air Asia Company Limited that they wanted to purchase four of Air Asia’s C-46s. So in their letter dated 12 August 60, Air Asia offered them Conditional Sales Contracts for 4 C-46s at a price of \$ 75,000 each; Air Asia would ferry the aircraft “to an airport designated by you in North America” at \$ 1,25 per statute mile, adding: “We offer certain of our technical personnel and ferrying crews for the inauguration of your operation of these aircraft.”<sup>6</sup> By September 60, two “squadrons” of transports (C-46s and C-54s), were being put together. Two out of four Air America C-46s<sup>7</sup> and two USAF C-54s from Florida arrived at Retalhuleu, Guatemala, (code-named “JMMadd” by the CIA and called “Rayo Base” by the Cubans) in September 60, together with 2 dual control TB-26s belonging to the Alabama ANG, but painted as cover in the colors of the Guatemalan Air Force; a third dual control TB-26 later arrived from Eglin AFB, Field Three.<sup>8</sup> Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez, with whom Air Asia had a long-time contract,<sup>9</sup> also served as cover, as quite a lot if not all former Air America aircraft used in the anti-Castro operation had been registered to them since October 1960. The transport pilots were trained by Air America pilots Connie Seigrist and William Beale<sup>10</sup> who had ferried Air America C-46 B-864 from Taipei to San José, Guatemala, between 3 and 9 September 60 and

---

<sup>4</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no. 36, p. 14, that is p. 22 on the website.

<sup>5</sup> Hagedorn / Hellström, *Foreign Invaders*, p. 126.

<sup>6</sup> Letter dated 12 August 1960, written by Air Asia to Los Hermanos, preserved at UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4; the C-46s offered were manufacturer’s serial numbers 22252 (B-870), 22362 (B-864), 22366 (B-866), and 22451 (B-850). In his letter to George Doole dated 16 September 60, Vice-President Operations Robert Rousselot explains that they had selected B-866 as the 4<sup>th</sup> aircraft for Los Hermanos, because it was the only cargo C-46 owned by Air Asia that remained, while the other C-46s were plush aircraft and were used for the “Around-the-Island” service (B-856) or under the *Booklift* contract (B-844, B-846, B-848, B-854, B-858, and B-860) in September 60 (Letter dated 16 September 60, sent by Robert Rousselot, Vice-President Operations, to George Doole, Managing Director, at UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no. 4).

<sup>7</sup> C-46s B-850 and B-864 departed Tainan on 3 September 60 and arrived at Oakland on 6 September, B-866 left Tainan on 18 September and arrived at Oakland on 21 September, and B-870 left Tainan on 24 September and arrived at San Antonio on 30 September 60; the point of hand-over for the C-46s was San Antonio (Memorandum dated 7 October 60, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no. 4). At that time, the paperwork for 3 of the C-46s had not yet been ready for transaction (Memorandum dated 24 October 60, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no. 4). So, B-850 was officially deregistered only on 19 October 60, B-864 of CATCL was deregistered on 21 September 60, reregistered to Air Asia as B-874 the same day and deregistered on 19 October 60, while B-866 and B-870 were deregistered on 3 November 60 (Memorandum dated 15 November 60, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4), but the aircraft were deleted from all Company reports as follows: B-850 and B-864 on 7 September 60, B-866 on 23 September 60, and B-870 on 29 September 60 (Memorandum dated 21 November 60, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4).

<sup>8</sup> Seigrist, *Memoirs*, p.48, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9; Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.65.

<sup>9</sup> List “Aircraft status” as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1. The termination date is given as “indefinite”.

<sup>10</sup> Their codenames were “Connie Simpson” and “William Wells” (Cable dated 17 October 60 from MADD to “Director”, CIA document no. 0000141138, at <http://www.foia.ucia.gov/scripts/cgiserv...ber=0000141138>).

then on to Retalhuleu, Guatemala, and training began with the C-46s.<sup>11</sup> Later, former Air America pilot Douglas R. Price joined the training team at Retalhuleu. The flight training first consisted of landings and emergency procedures and was carried out at San José airbase.<sup>12</sup> Doug Price and Ken Milan had ferried another Air America C-46 from Taiwan to Guatemala.<sup>13</sup> Eddie Sims, Frank Hughes, Bill Welk, and Hal Wells were also reported to have been among the ferry crews.<sup>14</sup>

Retalhuleu air base, which was used to supply the Cuban exile force that was training in the mountains on the Pacific Coast of Guatemala at “Trax Base”,<sup>15</sup> was located 33 miles from the Pacific coast and 3 miles from Retalhuleu.<sup>16</sup> Before the construction of Retalhuleu base was completed in mid-September 1960, the C-54s coming from Opa Locka landed at San José, Guatemala, and the pilots were housed at “Helvetia”, a coffee plantation located close to Retalhuleu at over 2,800 feet above sea level and owned by Roberto Alejos, the right-hand man to the president of Guatemala. The cover story for the pilots was that they were supposed to be American construction technicians.<sup>17</sup> Connie Seigrist arrived at Retalhuleu airfield with his C-46 in mid-September 1960 just during the opening ceremony, and as there were many media people, the real purpose of “Rayo Base” had to be hidden. He recalls: “Beale and I flew 864 (the B- had been removed) to Retalhuleu arriving at a scheduled precise time during the opening ceremonies. The Agent that had briefed us beforehand wanted us to keep a low profile due to cameras of the news media covering the event and, most important, to let the ceremonies be a Guatemalan affair. As soon as we parked, the Agent opened the cabin door, placed a very large stalk of bananas that had been put aboard in San Jose directly in the cabin door to be seen but also so no one could climb aboard, and then he descended the steps to become available to answer any questions if asked. At this point I can’t recall if it was former Agent Morales from Phoenix or Col. Tony Batres from the Guatemalan Air Force that was performing this duty. I do remember they both were very busy seeing all was orderly concerning the aircraft. President Ydigoras of Guatemala was in charge of the ceremonies assisted by his wife, and a few other dignitaries. The President completed the ceremonies very quickly. Tony came back aboard and instructed us to leave. I looked out where the President and his entourage were standing. I stated if we start our engines we are really going to dust them off. Tony said never mind that consideration because some of the group and news media are talking about getting aboard. The President doesn’t want them to know but he doesn’t want them to board and has quietly instructed me to tell you to leave immediately. We did that, started engines, dusted the group unmercifully, took-off, and returned to San Jose with our stalk of bananas. The next day the news media reported we had just flown the first load of bananas from Retalhuleu to the USA.”<sup>18</sup> Later, in case of an emergency landing, the crews had to say that they worked in Guatemala for a

---

<sup>11</sup> Leary / LeSchack, *Project Coldfeet*, pp.113/4; Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.64.

<sup>12</sup> Leary / LeSchack, *Project Coldfeet*, pp.113-16; Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.64.

<sup>13</sup> E-mail dated 12 October 2006, kindly sent to the author by Doug Price.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with George Stevens conducted by Prof. William Leary at Santa Barbara, CA on 11 September 1985, written resume, at: UTD/Leary/I B13F9.

<sup>15</sup> Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, p.17; Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.45.

<sup>16</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.51.

<sup>17</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.41/2, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Seigrist, *Memoirs*, p.48, in : UTD/Leary/I B11F9.

freight company owned by Mr. Roberto Alejos and that that company was engaged in transporting fish to the USA.<sup>19</sup>

But the four original C-46s received from Air America – B-850, B-864, B-866, and B-870; another Air America C-46, B-858, appeared in Guatemala only once<sup>20</sup> – were soon struck by several accidents and had to be supplemented by C-46s from other sources: In March 1961, Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez informed Air Asia that C-46 msn 22366 (former B-866) had been destroyed by a crash with subsequent fire. As a first reaction, on 4 April 61, Air Asia requested immediate payment of the remaining balance of \$ 51,000 for this aircraft, and in a second letter also dated 4 April 61, Air Asia offered Los Hermanos to sell them another C-46, that is serial no. 32942 ex 44-77546.<sup>21</sup> This aircraft (N9894Z) had been bought by Air America's and Air Asia's Managing Director George Doole from Southern Air Transport on 31 March 61.<sup>22</sup>

MEMORANDUM OFFICE  
PRECEDENCE  
RECORDED  
20 April 1961  
TAPPEI  
REF No. MD-61-648

TO: President - TPE  
Treasurer/Controller - TPE (Via Pres)

FROM: Vice Chairman - DGA

SUBJECT: Supplement to Contract No. 64-074 - Addition of Aircraft No. 32942

We attach a copy of MD-61-650 dated 4 April which provides for the addition of subject aircraft. We have previously forwarded you the original of the Bill of Sale for this C-46D, which was formerly Air Force No. 44-77546.

We have also informed you of our payment from this location of Southern Air Transport, Inc.'s invoice No. 1777 for \$19,500, which was the purchase price of the aircraft. A copy of that invoice is attached.

George A. Doole, Jr.

GAD:md

Enc. - a) Copy of MD-61-650, 4 April 1961  
b) Copy of Invoice 1777, 31 March 1961

cc: VPIS - TPE (Via Pres - TPE)

Memorandum dated 20 April 61, sent by George Doole to Amos Hiatt  
(in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4)

The existence of further C-46s within the *Fuerza Aérea de Liberación* becomes evident only from documents referring to transactions that occurred after the operation. These C-46s comprised serials no. 32992,<sup>23</sup> 33451,<sup>24</sup> 22343,<sup>25</sup> and probably also 33445.<sup>26</sup> Probably all of

<sup>19</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.77.

<sup>20</sup> Hagedorn, *Central American and Caribbean air forces*, p.148, where a photo can be found on p. 143. On 29 May 61, B-858 was operated out of Bangkok into Laos (Vientiane Daily Flight Operations Log of 29 May 61, in: UTD/Lewis/B2F6).

<sup>21</sup> Two letters dated 4 April 61, both sent by Air Asia's Amos Hiatt to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez (both in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4).

<sup>22</sup> Memorandum dated 20 April 61, sent by Managing Director George Doole to the Treasurer Amos Hiatt (in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4).

<sup>23</sup> N9935Z, ex 44-77596, said to have been exchanged with Southern Air Transport for serial no. 22451, that is former B-850 (Memorandum dated 20 October 61, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4).

<sup>24</sup> N9895Z ex 44-78055, which later became B-918. According to the letter dated 24 October 61, sent by the *Director General de Aeronáutica Civil* of Panamá to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez, C-46 44-78055 had

Los Hermanos' C-46s were officially registered in Panama, with known registrations being HP-314 (former B-866),<sup>27</sup> HP-314P (former N9895Z),<sup>28</sup> HP-316 (former B-850),<sup>29</sup> HP-322P (former N9459Z),<sup>30</sup> and probably also HP-315 (former N91293 and 44-78049).<sup>31</sup> No Panamanian registrations are known for C-46s B-864<sup>32</sup> and B-870.<sup>33</sup> These registrations were needed as cover for future re-registration of the aircraft on the civil aircraft market: Prior to the operation they were indicated to the Civil Aviation Administration of their country of origin, and after the operation they were needed for re-registration in that country.<sup>34</sup> They were probably not used for radio contact. Doug Price recalls: "Our flights down there were usually without contact to Air Traffic Control. At such time that we would go to Mexico City or Managua, we would contact local tower when we were in voice contact range with whatever aircraft ID we had at the time. I think that the one time I went to Mexico City, our flight had been pre-approved by the Mexican Government. Flights to Miami were pre-arranged."<sup>35</sup> During their operation out of Retalhuleu, the C-46s themselves received three-digit serials that were more or less arbitrary, but were to make them look like *Fuerza Aérea*

---

been regd. to Los Hermanos as HP-314P, but was deregistered on 24 October 61. For the sale to Air Asia see the letter dated 20 November 61 by Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez to Air Asia. Both documents can be found in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4.

<sup>25</sup> N9459Z ex 44-78520 of Aviation Sales Engineering Association (Davis, Martin, Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p. 110) had been registered to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez as HP-322P, but was deregistered on 24 October 61 (Letter dated 24 October 61, sent by the *Director General de Aeronáutica Civil* of Panamá to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4).

<sup>26</sup> C-46 ex 44-78049 was reported to have been registered to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez as HP-315 in 1962 (Davis, Martin, Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p. 100); as only a 1960 registration date would make sense for a *Bay of Pigs* player, either 1962 should read 1960, or this registration was used for another operation.

<sup>27</sup> C-46 B-866 (msn 22366) was sold by CATCL to Air Asia CoLtd on 24 October 60 (Letter by A. Hiatt dated 24 October 60, in: UTD/CIA/B9F1; Bill of sale dated 24 October 60, in: UTD/CIA/B9F1); already on 20 October 60, it had been sold to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez SA, Panama (Contract no. 60-074 of 20 October 60, mentioned in Air Asia's letter of 4 April 61 to Los Hermanos, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4) and regd. to them as HP-314 (Davis, Martin, Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p.111).

<sup>28</sup> Letter dated 24 October 61, sent by the *Director General de Aeronáutica Civil* of Panamá to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4.

<sup>29</sup> Between 20 October 60 and 9 March 61, Air America / Air Asia C-46 B-850 (msn 22451) was officially registered to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez as HP-316 (Davis, Martin, Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p.114).

<sup>30</sup> Letter dated 24 October 61, sent by the *Director General de Aeronáutica Civil* of Panamá to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4.

<sup>31</sup> C-46 44-78049 was reported to have been registered to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez as HP-315 in 1962 (Davis, Martin, Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p. 100); see the note above.

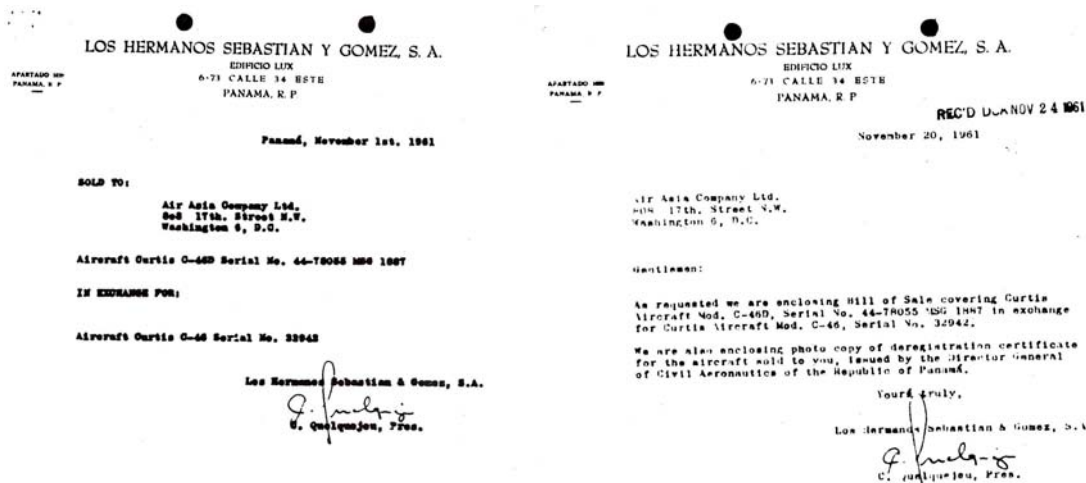
<sup>32</sup> C-46 B-864 (msn 22362) was sold by CATCL to Air Asia CoLtd on 7 September 60 (Bill of sale dated 7 September 60, in: UTD/CIA/B9F1; Letter by A. Hiatt dated 11 November 60, in: UTD/CIA/B9F1), for use against Cuba; on 20 October 60, it was sold to Los Hermanos (Contract no. 60-074 of 20 October 60, mentioned in Air Asia's letter of 4 April 61 to Los Hermanos, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4).

<sup>33</sup> C-46 B-870 (msn 22232) was sold by CATCL to Air Asia CoLtd on 24 October 60 (Letter by A. Hiatt dated 24 October 60, in: UTD/CIA/B9F1; Bill of sale dated 24 October 60, in: UTD/CIA/B9F1), and to Los Hermanos already on 20 October 60 (Contract no. 60-074 of 20 October 60, mentioned in Air Asia's letter of 4 April 61 to Los Hermanos, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4).

<sup>34</sup> This becomes evident by the fact that, in order to register former Los Hermanos C-46 HP-314P as B-918 with Air Asia, the certificate of deregistration in Panama was requested by the Civil Aeronautics Administration of Taiwan (Letter dated 9 October 61, by the CAA of Taiwan to Air Asia, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4).

<sup>35</sup> E-mail dated 23 July 2008, kindly sent to the author by Douglas Price.

*Guatemalteca* aircraft: B-850 is known to have become “857”,<sup>36</sup> and B-864 simply became “864”.<sup>37</sup> On 6 November 60, C-46 “292” was used for a flight to the Escambray Mountains.<sup>38</sup> Other C-46 serials known from the actual invasion are “877”, “875”, “788”, and “855”.<sup>39</sup> And it is believed that “1887”, or at least “887”, the serial that was traditionally said to be the manufacturer’s serial number (MSN) of former Los Hermanos C-46 B-918 (ex 44-78055) throughout the records of Air Asia and so on, was really a pseudo-Guatemalan Air Force serial used on this aircraft by the *Fuerza Aérea de Liberación* for operations out of Retalhuleu. The reason for this assumption is that the identity also given for C-46 “serial no. 44-78055” in two documents issued by Los Hermanos on 1 and on 20 November 1961 is “MSG 1887”,<sup>40</sup> not MSN 1887, but Air Asia and all the others who dealt with that aircraft took it as MSN 1887. The fact that “MSG 1887” was repeated in 2 documents excludes that it was simply a typing error for MSN 1887. The meaning of MSG is unknown, but maybe it stood for something like “Military serial Guatemala”, which would make sense in the case of a C-46 formerly operating in fake Guatemalan Air Force colors out of Retalhuleu, Guatemala.



The two Los Hermanos documents referring to C-46D “Serial No. 44-78055 MSG 1887”: Bill of Sale to Air Asia dated 1 November 1961 and Letter to Air Asia dated 20 November 61 (both documents preserved in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no. 4)

<sup>36</sup> A photo taken by Harold G. Martin was published in Hagedorn, *Central American and Caribbean air forces*, p.146, where the identity is given on p. 148.

<sup>37</sup> In the section about the *Bay of Pigs* of his autobiography preserved at UTD/Leary/ I B11F9, Connie Seigrist notes: “3 September 1960 – Capt. Beale and I departed Taipei for Oakland flying C-46 B-864. [...] 6 September – We landed in Oakland. [...] 7 September – we arrived in San Antonio. [...] 9 September – We received our dispatch release and departed San Antonio shortly after dark. We arrived over San Jose around two in the morning. [...] Starting from here onward in the operation I was not permitted to record a personal flight log. [...] about a week later. Beale and I flew 864 (the B- had been removed) to Retalhuleu” (pp.47/8).

<sup>38</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.76.

<sup>39</sup> “Listing of mission results with attached listings” of 1961, that is document 141186 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp).

<sup>40</sup> Bill of sale of C-46 “Serial no. 44-78055” dated 1 November 61, from Los Hermanos to Air Asia, and letter dated 20 November 61 sent by Los Hermanos to Air Asia, both in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4.



As to the flight training, Connie Seigrist recalls: “Shortly after we had moved from San Jose to Retalhuleu the Cubans started arriving. They had been living in a camp in the hills nearby in basic training waiting for the airfield to open to start their flying. We (Beale and I) started training the Cuban transport pilots as soon as they arrived. All but a couple had never flown C-46s before. An Agency sponsored Air Force unit arrived from Field Three of the Eglin Florida Air Force Complex. Their purpose [was] to administer the training syllabus, monitor aircraft maintenance procedures, dispatch covert night aerial delivery flights over Cuba when directed, and be in command of the Retalhuleu Base Flight Operations in coordination with the Cuban unit while acting under the direct control of the Agency. [...] The parking ramp was the last part of the airfield to be constructed. [...] We never had enough space on the new hard ramps, [so we] began parking the C-46s in the summer dry hard dirt downhill from the buildings. The seasonal rain forced us to move back later and squeeze in on the hard ramps around the other aircraft which caused lots of parking problems and unproductive man hours wasted while towing aircraft around. [...] As soon as we had the more experienced C-46 crews trained in a night delivery program we started them flying into Cuba at night parachuting supplies to the Cuban underground movement. Due to the limited fuel range of the C-46 we staged the departure from Puerto Barrios located on the Gulf of Mexico side of Guatemala 225 nm closer to Cuba. Usually they had enough fuel remaining after a delivery in Cuba to return directly to Retalhuleu.”<sup>41</sup> Former C-54 pilot Albert Persons describes Retalhuleu air base in a similar way: “The one runway ran northwest and southeast. Not only was it barely wide enough to accommodate a C-54, the runway had a slight crown in it to provide an additional challenge; and at 4,800 feet, with temperatures in the 90s, it would have been illegal back home for a C-54 at gross weight. There was no “go, no-go” decision to worry about. If an engine failed on takeoff, the runway was not long enough to continue on three engines, nor was it long enough to get the aircraft stopped before plunging through the fence and down the hill at the far end of the field. As we used to say, the “go, no-go” decision was made when we left the penthouse. The southeast end of the runway was 150 feet higher than the opposite end, enough of a grade to make it necessary to take off downhill and land uphill. Aircraft were parked on the taxi strip *cum* ramp. They were lined up nose to tail like elephants in a circus. Sometimes there were as many as six in the line. There was no way to turn an aircraft around or to move it in any direction except straight forward.”<sup>42</sup>

From the very beginning, the C-46 operation out of Retalhuleu suffered a number of accidents, but not all of them ended in the destruction of the aircraft. In his letter dated 4 January 1987, Connie Seigrist, former instructor pilot of the Cubans at Retalhuleu and then Director of Air Operations at Puerto Cabezas, wrote to Bill Leary: “We had one C-46 damaged on a training flight while landing at Retalhuleu. The second C-46 was shot up over Cuba, but made it home to Guatemala. The third C-46 was lost in Guatemala on a normal flight by Gen. Reid’s pilots that had remained in Retalhuleu for house keeping after we moved to Puerto Cabezas (Happy Valley), Nicaragua. I am not really sure, but maybe the Co-pilot was killed or badly hurt in the accident. The C-46 was destroyed. The surviving pilot (an administrative pilot for the AAG) later joined us in Happy Valley [...]. We needed an auxiliary field in preparation for the Invasion. [...] I searched out an area of fairly level open grass land nearby that appeared it could support the weight of C-46s and B-26s. I landed the

---

<sup>41</sup> Seigrist, *Memoirs*, pp.48/9, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9.

<sup>42</sup> Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, p.45.

forth C-46 there and immediately it sank down into the ground. That C-46 was rendered unavailable for the Invasion because of the time involved for digging it out. I flew it to Miami after the invasion. The fifth C-46 was lost in Nicaragua on another normal flight by Gen. Reid's pilots after Capt. Price and I left further house keeping to them in Happy Valley. No one was hurt. The C-46 was destroyed."<sup>43</sup> So 2 C-46s were destroyed, one in Guatemala in March 61, and the other one in Nicaragua in the summer of 1961.

The first C-46 accident occurred during training at Retalhuleu, probably in October 60.<sup>44</sup> In his memoirs, Connie Seigrist describes it as follows: "The east end of the runway had an abrupt dirt shoulder starting just before the hard top layer of the landing portion. One of the C-54 co-pilots in training decided he would like to upgrade to aircraft commander on the C-46 to be able to fly airdrop flights into Cuba. He was a nice gentleman, a former Cuban Airline co-pilot, and a fair pilot. Field Three Air Force Commander felt he should receive training for that opportunity. In his training he came in short and bent one of the landing gear on the shoulder. The landing was completed after a high sailing bounce off the shoulder. There were no injuries. The aircraft was given a wheels down repair and I flew it to San Jose for major repairs."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the equipment facilities at Retalhuleu only permitted to perform overnight service and ferry to overhaul. Connie Seigrist recalls: "San Jose, Costa Rica, had the nearest heavy maintenance hangar to Guatemala. We made a contractual arrangement with them for the C-46s and B-26s. In addition to training I also flew the C-46s and B-26s to San Jose for periodic maintenance inspections."<sup>46</sup> The second accident mentioned by Connie Seigrist seems to have involved C-46 "857", that is former B-850,<sup>47</sup> and may have occurred in November 60,<sup>48</sup> although the alias of this aircraft, HP-316, was cancelled only on 9 March 61.<sup>49</sup> Connie Seigrist describes the accident as follows: "The Cubans became aware of the night flights and laid in wait as best they could. One night they sprayed a C-46 fairly well by shooting out the landing gear on one side. No one was hit on board from the ground fire. The pilot was a good one. He flew the aircraft back to Retalhuleu and landed the aircraft without destroying it. The wing tip was replaced and a new landing gear installed."<sup>50</sup> The C-46 that was lost in Guatemala in March 61 in a crash with subsequent fire was former B-866 (constructor's serial number or msn 22366), for in their letter dated 4 April 61, Air Asia asks Los Hermanos to send them a check about \$ 51,000 for this aircraft.<sup>51</sup> The replacement, C-46

---

<sup>43</sup> Letter dated 4 January 1987, sent by Connie Seigrist to Bill Leary, p.2, preserved at: UTD/Leary/I B9F16.

<sup>44</sup> This C-46 was piloted by Manuel González (Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.64/5).

<sup>45</sup> Seigrist, *Memoirs*, p.53, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9.

<sup>46</sup> Seigrist, *Memoirs*, pp.48/9, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9.

<sup>47</sup> Hagedorn, *Central American and Caribbean air forces*, p.148, describes the accident as follows: "B-850 is one of the aircraft that took heavy ground fire during the operation and was forced to make an emergency landing in Guatemala, where its left main gear collapsed and a wing was wrapped around utility pole. Miraculously, it survived and was repaired."

<sup>48</sup> This month is given by Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.94/5.

<sup>49</sup> On 9 March 61, registration HP-316, the alias of former Air Asia C-46 B-850 (msn 22451), was cancelled as "repossessed" (Davis, Martin, Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p.114).

<sup>50</sup> Seigrist, *Memoirs*, p.49, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9; the pilot of the C-46 was Mario Tellechea; a more detailed description of this accident as well as photos can be found in Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.94/5.

<sup>51</sup> Letter dated 4 April 61, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4. The subsequent history of this C-46 B-866 was kindly supplied by Steve Darke from the FAA file: The remains were sold to Aviation Sales & Engineering at an unknown date, and the aircraft was rebuilt. On 20 November 61, it passed to Tormac Associates, Fort Lauderdale, FL, as N8417C, then to Gulf Air Inc., Miami, FL, on 16 March 62, and finally to Intermountain Aviation, Phoenix, AZ, on 12 July 62.



msn 32942 (former 44-77546 and N9894Z), seems to have been registered as AN-AMG, at least officially.<sup>52</sup> It is unknown, when C-46s msn 32992,<sup>53</sup> 33451,<sup>54</sup> and 22343,<sup>55</sup> were acquired by the *Fuerza Aérea de Liberación*, but it was probably also in March 61. For msn 32992 was a replacement for msn 22451 “857”,<sup>56</sup> whose alias HP-316 was cancelled only on 9 March 61.<sup>57</sup> C-46 msn 33451 could receive its alias HP-314P only, when the alias HP-314 was no longer used on C-46 msn 22366 (former B-866), that is in March 61. And former Aviation Sales Engineering N9459Z (msn 22343 ex 44-78520) could receive its alias HP-322P only, after the first aircraft to use it, that is Helio Courier msn 525, had been sold as TG-DOF in March 61.<sup>58</sup> As for the initial training period, that is for September 1960, the number of C-46s to be used out of Retalhuleu was three,<sup>59</sup> it seems that these aircraft were the first 2 former Air America C-46s “857” (ex B-850) and “864” (ex B-864), which arrived in mid-September 1960, plus maybe C-46 N91293 (ex 44-78049, msn 33445), said to have been registered to Los Hermanos as HP-315<sup>60</sup> – maybe the aircraft that became “292” and flew the mission on 9 November 60.<sup>61</sup>

The C-54s did not come from Air America but from other sources, and the first two of them arrived from Florida in September 60, probably from Eglin AFB.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, “air facilities at Eglin Air Force Base” were used “for logistical flights to Guatemala and Nicaragua.”<sup>63</sup> As to the number of those C-54s, Connie Seigrist recalls: “During the Bay of Pigs [...], I can remember at least 5 or 6 different DC-4s just for the Invasion. But for training and base supplying there would only be one or two on base”.<sup>64</sup> In his letter dated 4 January 61 sent to the Chief of the CIA’s WH/4 of the Directorate of Plans,<sup>65</sup> the Chief of the CIA’s WH/4/PM, USMC Col. J. Hawkins, states that 7 C-54s were to be used for the strike

<sup>52</sup> Davis / Martin / Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p. 89, note for serial no. 32942: “N9894Z Jaime Camargo 1961. Sold Mar 61 to Central Intelligence Agency and used in attempted invasion of Cuba Apr 61. AN-AMG for a few weeks in Mar 61. Officially NTU”.

<sup>53</sup> N9935Z, ex 44-77596, said to have been exchanged with Southern Air Transport for serial no. 22451, that is former B-850 (Memorandum dated 20 October 61, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4).

<sup>54</sup> N9895Z ex 44-78055, which later became B-918. According to the letter dated 24 October 61, sent by the *Director General de Aeronáutica Civil* of Panamá to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez, C-46 44-78055 had been regd. to Los Hermanos as HP-314P, but was deregistered on 24 October 61. For the sale to Air Asia see the letter dated 20 November 61 by Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez to Air Asia. Both documents can be found in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4.

<sup>55</sup> N9459Z ex 44-78520 of Aviation Sales Engineering Association (Davis, Martin, Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p. 110) had been registered to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez as HP-322P, but was deregistered on 24 October 61 (Letter dated 24 October 61, sent by the *Director General de Aeronáutica Civil* of Panamá to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4).

<sup>56</sup> Memorandum no. SA/P –61-142 dated 20 October 61, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4.

<sup>57</sup> On 9 March 61, registration HP-316, the alias of former Air Asia C-46 B-850 (msn 22451), was cancelled as “repossessed” (Davis, Martin, Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p.114).

<sup>58</sup> Burnett / Slack / Davis / Hagedorn / Kuhn, *Central American and the Caribbean civil aircraft registers*, p.29.

<sup>59</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.50.

<sup>60</sup> C-46 ex 44-78049 was reported to have been registered to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez as HP-315 in 1962 (Davis, Martin, Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p. 100); as only a 1960 registration date would make sense for a *Bay of Pigs* player, either 1962 should read 1960, or this registration was used for another operation.

<sup>61</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.76.

<sup>62</sup> E-mail dated 8 December 2004, kindly sent to the author by Douglas Price.

<sup>63</sup> Col. J. Hawkins, *Record of paramilitary action against the Castro Government of Cuba* of 5 May 61, CIA doc. no. 0000132097, at <http://www.foia.ucia.gov/scripts/cgiserv...ber=0000132097>, p.2 (= p.9 on the web).

<sup>64</sup> E-mail dated 28 January 2005, kindly sent to the author by Connie Seigrist.

<sup>65</sup> Published at: [http://www.pacific-hs.net/apush/enrichment/unit\\_6/a\\_bay\\_of\\_pigs.htm](http://www.pacific-hs.net/apush/enrichment/unit_6/a_bay_of_pigs.htm).

and that the Florida base would be Opa Locka, open to CIA operations by that time. Indeed, Opa Locka airport, located in the north of the Miami area, was the airport from where those C-54s took off at night without either position or landing lights to haul supplies to Retalhuleu in Guatemala.<sup>66</sup> There was also a large Miami-based contractor called AACMF (believed to stand for “American Airmotive Corp., Miami, Florida”) that, according to the microfilms preserved at the USAF’s Historical Research Agency, did a lot of maintenance and other contract work on USAF C-54s in the late fifties and early sixties. So people living in the Miami area may have believed that the C-54s they heard at night taking off from Opa Locka<sup>67</sup> were the same they could see at Miami during daytime. But those nightly visitors did not come from Miami airport, they came from Eglin Air Force Base. And the C-54 pilots of those supply flights to Retalhuleu did not belong to the Miami contractor, but were American and non-American contract pilots, some of whom were from South East Asia and some were from Poland; they also transported the Cuban recruits to Retalhuleu.<sup>68</sup>

In the early sixties, Eglin was the home of two USAF C-54 operators: The USAF Air Proving Ground Center, which had been formed on 1 December 57,<sup>69</sup> had five C-54s<sup>70</sup> in the 1960/1 period, while the 48<sup>th</sup> Air Rescue Squadron (formed on 17 October 52 and operating C-54s between 1956 and 1965)<sup>71</sup> had six C-54s<sup>72</sup> in the 1960/1 period. The permanent presence of these 2 units at Eglin AFB probably served as a good cover for the secret presence of a third unit that was temporarily based at Eglin’s Auxiliary Field Three (Duke Field) from late 1960 to June/July 61: the 1045<sup>th</sup> Operational Evaluation & Training Group, Headquarters Command, Eglin, that is the very same unit whose Detachment 2 was responsible for the secret flights to Tibet.<sup>73</sup> So there is no doubt that the C-54s assigned to that unit in the 1960/1 period were the aircraft that were used against Cuba. Those C-54s came from a variety of units, all of them non-combat units like Air Base Wings or Training Centers. Four C-54Gs (45-565, 45-520, 45-631, and 45-636) were assigned to the 1045<sup>th</sup> Operational Evaluation & Training Group, Headquarters Command, Eglin, between 7 and 10 November 1960 and remained with them until June or July 61.<sup>74</sup> And four more C-54Gs (45-

---

<sup>66</sup> Prados, *President’s secret wars*, p.184; Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.37.

<sup>67</sup> Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, p.21.

<sup>68</sup> Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, p.40.

<sup>69</sup> See: Strategic Air Command, “Eglin Air Force Base”.

<sup>70</sup> C-54Gs 42-72740, 42-72528, 45-477, 45-495, and 45-629 according to microfilms nos. ACA-2, ACA-3, ACA-4, ACA-6, ACA-11, and AVH-1 preserved at the AFHRA, Maxwell AFB.

<sup>71</sup> “48<sup>th</sup> Rescue Squadron”, at: [http://www.afhra.af.mil/wwwroot/rso/squadrons\\_flights\\_pages/0048rqs.html](http://www.afhra.af.mil/wwwroot/rso/squadrons_flights_pages/0048rqs.html) .

<sup>72</sup> C-54Gs 42-72440, 42-72555, 42-72609, 42-72747, 44-9073, and 45-632 according to microfilms nos. ACA-2, ACA-3, ACA-4, ACA-6, ACA-11, and AVH-1 preserved at the AFHRA, Maxwell AFB.

<sup>73</sup> Trest, *Air Commando One*, p. 83.

<sup>74</sup> According to microfilms nos. ACA-2, ACA-3, ACA-4, ACA-6, ACA-11, and AVH-1 preserved at the AFHRA, Maxwell AFB the C-54Gs assigned to the 1045<sup>th</sup> Operational Evaluation & Training Group, Eglin, in November 1960 were: **45-565** of OKLAR (Oklahoma City Air Material Area), Tinker AFB, to 1045<sup>th</sup> OETGP, Eglin, on 7 November 60 (60312), back to OKLAR, Tinker AFB, on 1 June 61 (61152); **45-520** of SHTCE (Sheppard Technical Training Center), Sheppard AFB, to 1045<sup>th</sup> OETGP, Eglin, on 9 November 60 (60314); back to SHTCE, Sheppard AFB, on 28 June 61 (61179); **45-631** of AOT (Air Observers Training Center), Amarillo AFB, to 1045<sup>th</sup> OETGP, Eglin, on 10 November 60 (60315), back to AOT, Amarillo AFB, on 13 July 61 (61194); and **45-636** of AOT (Air Observers Training Center), Amarillo AFB, to 1045<sup>th</sup> OETGP, Eglin, on 10 November 60 (60315), back to AOT, Amarillo AFB, on 13 June 61 (61164).

550, 45-561, 45-579, and 45-611) were assigned to the 1045<sup>th</sup> OETGP, Eglin, on 20 and 22 February 1961; they also remained with them until June or July 1961.<sup>75</sup>

But as the first 2 C-54s had arrived at Retalhuleu already in September 1960, that is two months before the first C-54Gs were assigned to the 1045<sup>th</sup> OETGP, they had another origin. Both of them were lost in late September and in early October 1960: On the very first flight on 28 September 60 – the mission was to drop weapons and ammunition to the guerrillas operating in the Escambray Mountains<sup>76</sup> –, one of those C-54s suffered from engine trouble, after it had been hit by antiaircraft fire, tried to return to Retalhuleu, but made a forced landing somewhere in southern Mexico, where it was seized by the authorities.<sup>77</sup> The crew was allowed to return to Rayo Base four days later,<sup>78</sup> but the aircraft was still impounded in Mexico in October 61.<sup>79</sup> Only much later, when the *Fuerza Aérea Mexicana* had found that it had many irregularities, it was sent back to its operational base at Eglin in exchange for a more regular USAF C-54.<sup>80</sup> Those irregularities are described by Leroy Fletcher Prouty as follows: “In fact, the big transport was very special. Although it looked like any other C-54 or DC-4, a trained observer would have noted those things, and that it had unusual radios, no engine decals, and no manufacturer’s labels. It was ‘clean’, a non-attributable air plane. It had been ‘sanitized’ and was the pride of the clandestine operators’ art. It could have been flown anywhere in the world, and if it had been lost on some clandestine mission, the finder – whether he was Cuban, Congolese, or Russian – might have assumed that it had been operated by Americans, but he would not have been able to prove it. In other words, the U.S. Government, if required, could have plausibly disclaimed ownership of the plane and that it had had anything to do with the plane, its crew, and its cargo. This plane had been on many flights along the Iron Curtain borders, on leaflet drops and on electronic intelligence missions. It had been used for para-drop missions in Greece and in Jordan. It had been to the Congo and had delivered ‘black’ cargoes to the Katangese even while other U.S. Air Force C-130 aircraft were flying Congolese troops and supplies against the rebels. It had been to Clark Field near Manila, flying Tibetans to and from operational training sites. It had often been to the old World War II B-29 *Superfortress* bomber bases in Saipan where Southeast Asians were being trained in sabotage tactics and paramilitary civic action programs. But on

---

<sup>75</sup> According to microfilms nos. ACA-2, ACA-3, ACA-4, ACA-6, ACA-11, and AVH-1 preserved at the AFHRA, Maxwell AFB the C-54Gs assigned to the 1045<sup>th</sup> Operational Evaluation & Training Group, Eglin, in February 1961 were: **45-550** of 2848<sup>th</sup> Air Base Wing, Norton AFB, to 1045<sup>th</sup> OETGP, Eglin, on 20 February 61 (61051), back to 2848<sup>th</sup> Air Base Wing, Norton AFB, on 25 May 61 (61145); **45-561** of 1376<sup>th</sup> CLM (Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance) Squadron, Turner AFB, to 1045<sup>th</sup> OETGP, Eglin, on 20 February 61 (61051), back to 1376<sup>th</sup> CLM Squadron, Turner AFB, on 29 May 61 (61149); **45-579** of 2855<sup>th</sup> Air Base Wing, Olmsted AFB, to 1045<sup>th</sup> OETGP, Eglin, on 22 February 61 (61054), back to 2855<sup>th</sup> Air Base Wing, Olmsted AFB, on 29 May 61 (61149); and **45-611** of OKLAR (Oklahoma City Air Material Area), Tinker AFB, to 1045<sup>th</sup> OETGP, Eglin, on 22 February 61 (61054), back to OKLAR (Oklahoma City Air Material Area), Tinker AFB, on 29 June 61 (61180).

<sup>76</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.65.

<sup>77</sup> Leary / LeSchack, *Project Coldfeet*, pp.113/4; Hagedorn, *Central American and Caribbean Air Forces*, p.148; Prados, *President’s secret wars*, p.187.

<sup>78</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp. 65/6.

<sup>79</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no.1, p.98, that is p.106 on the website.

<sup>80</sup> Prouty, *The secret team*, chapter 2, at <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/JFK/ST/STchp2.html>, p.3; Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, p.71.

this flight its crew had been Cuban.”<sup>81</sup> Interestingly, besides Americans like Connie Seigrist,<sup>82</sup> the crews of those early C-54s sometimes seemed to be Czech or Polish,<sup>83</sup> and that indeed makes believe that those aircraft had often flown missions behind the Iron Curtain.

Indeed, what in USAF records is called the 1045<sup>th</sup> OETGP, was the DPD or *Development Projects Division* within the CIA hierarchy, that is the Agency’s air arm, whose independence from the CIA project is complained in the “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation” of October 1961: “Still another important factor in the diffusion of direction and control was the insistence of the Agency’s air arm, the Development Projects Division (DPD), on preserving its independence and remaining outside the organizational structure of the project, in which it had a vital, central role, including air drops to the underground, training Cuban pilots, operation of air bases, the immense logistical problems of transporting the Cuban volunteers from Florida to Guatemala, and **the procuring and servicing of the military planes**. The project chief had no command authority over air planning and air operations. The DPD unit established for this purpose was completely independent. [...] The chiefs of air operations in Guatemala and Nicaragua were DPD representatives, independent of the WH/4 chiefs of these bases.”<sup>84</sup> The man in charge of this unit was USAF Colonel Stanley W. Beerli, working for the CIA as head of the CIA’s Air Branch,<sup>85</sup> that is as chief, *Development Projects Division*: It was him who procured the B-26s and the C-54s for the project.<sup>86</sup>

Soon after the first C-54 had been lost,<sup>87</sup> that is probably in October 60, a Cuban student pilot made his C-54 touch a mountain, tearing off an engine, but the instructor, Ed Smith, one of Major Aderholt’s men from South East Asia, managed to return the aircraft near to Retalhuleu, where it crash-landed into the water.<sup>88</sup> Connie Seigrist recalls: “The C-54 was on a night drop training flight preparing a crew for a Cuban night flight. [...] Their particular training area was at the edge of the mountain range. The crew could not find the drop area and elected to fly around to search for it. In the process they flew into one of the large jungle trees with their left wing. Instead of crashing as might be expected they were able to nurse the aircraft downhill back to the ocean. I was able to talk them on the ground to air radio during their downhill flight back to the ocean immediately following their striking the tree. The American instructor informed me no 1 propeller could not be feathered and no 2 engine had stopped running. At the best it was a bad situation. There wasn’t any way the aircraft could stay aloft with two wind milling propellers, much less chance with both located on the left wing of the aircraft. [...] Suddenly their radio went quiet. It was obvious they were down. I

---

<sup>81</sup> Prouty, *The secret team*, chapter 2, at <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/JFK/ST/STchp2.html>, pp.1-3.

<sup>82</sup> In his letter dated 20 May 76 to CIA historian Dr. Jack Pfeiffer, Connie Seigrist says: “I flew many flights to Opa Locka, Florida and a few flights from Field 3 (Eglin) in western Florida, both as pilot and instructor” (in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9).

<sup>83</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.37; Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, p.40. “There was a total of about 20 Polish airmen at Eglin at the time, all of them ‘employed’ by Lockheed, so there should be enough of them to form at least two crews.” (E-mail dated 9 December 2009 kindly sent to the author by Franek Grabowski).

<sup>84</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no. 7, pp. 38/9, that is pp. 46/7 on the website; emphasis is mine.

<sup>85</sup> Trest, *Air Commando One*, p.83.

<sup>86</sup> Haas, *Apollo’s warriors*, p.150.

<sup>87</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.66.

<sup>88</sup> Trest, *Air Commando One*, p.114.

had started organizing a rescue party immediately after they first called in and also dispatched a C-46 to try locate the C-54. The C-46 called in shortly after take-off reporting they had located the C-54 still intact lying on the beach and observed some of the crew walking around. We departed instantly proceeding by road to the ocean. [...] Arriving at the downed aircraft we found everyone alive and well other than being shaken up except for two crew members. The co-pilot had a back injury and the flight engineer was bruised about the head but not seriously. While things were being organized to proceed back to the vehicles, I walked to the point where the C-54 had first touched the sand. The right wing had hit the sand and the left wing had hit the water. [...] The right wing had gradually dug itself about four feet deep into the sand bank where it was stopped. The wing digging in caused the aircraft to make a right pivot facing away from the water leaving the nose in the edge of the jungle and the tail toward the water. It was once in a million chances the aircraft and the crew had survived a total disaster probability. The emergency landing demonstrated superb airmanship by the American Commander.”<sup>89</sup> This was the instructor pilot, Captain Ed Smith, one of Major Aderholt’s men from South East Asia.<sup>90</sup> Other Americans on that C-54 were Air America kickers Miles L. Johnson and Richard A. (“Pete”) Peterson.<sup>91</sup> But the C-54 was to remain on the beach. Former *Bay of Pigs* pilot Edward B. Ferrer recalls: “Champerico is a beach on the Pacific coast of Guatemala near Rayo Base. Ten years later María and I were vacationing in Guatemala and while flying over the coast saw what remained of the C-54 fuselage. It was being used as a dwelling by an Indian family.”<sup>92</sup>

Probably both of these C-54s had the same origin: they were black mission aircraft. As the USAF’s Assignment Records only list “regular” USAF aircraft, it is difficult to identify the two C-54s. However, those records do note when an aircraft leaves regular USAF service, and indeed, C-54G 45-591 left the regular USAF at Tinker AFB on 12 October 1955, and C-54G 45-558 left the regular USAF at Clark AFB on 20 June 1957, both of them going to “top secret”.<sup>93</sup> This might suggest that they were the two C-54s involved in the two accidents mentioned above. In other cases, an aircraft that joins a secret program is referred to in a more cryptic way. This is, for example, the case with the C-54 that probably arrived at Rayo Base in October 60 as a replacement for the losses.<sup>94</sup> As all the other C-54s to be used from November 1960 onwards were G-models, the sole D-model in the fleet can easily be identified: For on 24 October 1961, the *Director General de Aeronáutica Civil* of Panama confirms to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez that upon their request dated 20 October 1961, the provisional registrations for three of Los Hermanos’ aircraft had been cancelled; and one of those registrations was HP-321P, formerly assigned to Los Hermanos’ C-54 42-72523.

---

<sup>89</sup> Seigrist, *Memoirs*, pp.53/4, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9.

<sup>90</sup> See Trest, *Air Commando One*, p.114, with a short description of this accident.

<sup>91</sup> Telephone interview with Miles L. Johnson conducted by Prof. William Leary on 6 July 1991, written resume, at: UTD/Leary/I B13F7.

<sup>92</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.66 note 2.

<sup>93</sup> Microfilm reel no. ACA-11, preserved at the AFHRA, Maxwell AFB.

<sup>94</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.68.



Letter dated 24 October 61, sent by the DGAC Panama to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez (UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4)

In the USAF's Assignment Records preserved at Maxwell AFB, C-54D 42-72523 is last mentioned when it left regular air force service at Kadena, Okinawa on 9 February 1956 and was transferred to an unknown outfit, coded "S ATEDEPTDAF".<sup>95</sup> The meaning of that code is unknown, but it probably stands for: "terminated" as to regular USAF service and transferred to a "special" unit reporting directly to the "Department of Defense / Air Force." Since that time, C-54D 42-72523 does no longer appear in the USAF Assignment Records. Before 1956, this C-54D had belonged to the 581<sup>st</sup> Air Resupply and Communications Wing at Kadena, Okinawa. When that unit was deactivated in 1956, most of their C-54s went to the 332<sup>nd</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron, Medium (Special), Kadena – reportedly including 2 special mission C-54s that the 581<sup>st</sup> Air Resupply and Communications Wing had had before, that had flown covert missions out of Taiwan during the fifties, often manned by CAT crews,<sup>96</sup> and that in 1959/60 passed to Detachment 2, 1045<sup>th</sup> OETGP at Kadena.<sup>97</sup> But while the later history of all the other 8 C-54s operated by the 332<sup>nd</sup> TCS in late 1956<sup>98</sup> can be traced from the USAF Assignment Records,<sup>99</sup> revealing that all but one<sup>100</sup> had left South East Asia before 1960, those 2 special mission C-54s do not appear in the USAF Assignment Records – like the 2 special mission C-118s of the same unit.<sup>101</sup> So, evidently C-54D 42-72523 was one of them, and the second one may have been C-54G 45-558, the one that left regular USAF

<sup>95</sup> Microfilm no. ACA-2 notes for 1956: 42-72523 C-54D of 581<sup>st</sup> ASL Group [that is the 581<sup>st</sup> ARCW], Kadena, leave to "S ATEDEPTDAF" on "CCL092122KADENA".

<sup>96</sup> Haas, *Apollo's warriors*, pp. 80/1, 92/3.

<sup>97</sup> Trest, *Air Commando One*, p.85; Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp. 44/5.

<sup>98</sup> That is C-54s 42-72505, 42-72510, 42-72520, 42-72610, 42-72652, 42-72675, 42-72694, and 42-72753.

<sup>99</sup> Microfilms nos. ACA-2, 3, 4, 6, and 11 preserved at the AFHRA.

<sup>100</sup> C-54D 42-72694 was assigned to the 6313<sup>th</sup> Air Base Wing, Kadena, on 2 September 60; while the card for 1961 is missing in the USAF Assignment Records, the cards for 1962-64 note: leave 18 FDM Sq, Kadena, on 62155; back to them on 62198; again to them back from maintenance at Hong Kong on 62212; to 18<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing, Kadena, on 62304; to 1<sup>st</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing, Kadena, on 64079, current on 64182.

<sup>101</sup> See the DC-6 file of this database.



service at Clark AFB and went to “top secret” on 20 June 1957 and whose previous history has been omitted in the microfilm. As one of Major Aderholt’s men was on the second ill-fated C-54, it was possibly already after the first C-54 had been impounded in Mexico that C-54D 42-72523 joined the fleet at Retalhuleu. As 2 C-54s were to be used for training at Rayo Base initially,<sup>102</sup> a second C-54 was needed for October 60. This seems to have been the mysterious C-54G HP-320 that was reportedly registered to Los Hermanos,<sup>103</sup> although this particular aircraft was also reported to have ditched in a small lake after take-off from NAS Jacksonville airport on 15 October 1959 due to incorrect fuel management.<sup>104</sup> Probably the aircraft was repaired and used by the *Fuerza Aérea de Liberación*, because at Puerto Cabezas, the actual fleet comprised “10 C-54 transports”.<sup>105</sup> These 10 C-54s are believed to have been the 2 C-54s that had received official HP- registrations – possibly to be used as call-signs for operations out of Retalhuleu – plus the 8 C-54Gs received from the USAF.

As to Eglin, it was probably there that all the other C-54s to be used in the operation were “sanitized”, that is USAF markings, other insignia, engine decals, and manufacturer’s labels were taken off to make them non-attributable;<sup>106</sup> and they were given fake serials. Indeed, the serials used by the C-54s of the *Fuerza Aérea de Liberación* against Cuba were completely arbitrary. What we do know about those serials mostly comes from the log book of one of the Cuban pilots, René García, who once gave it to Leif Hellström. Leif Hellström kindly sent to the author a copy of the pages where García noted his C-54 flights – with the exception of DC-4D “6600”, apparently the alias of C-54D 42-72523, they were all C-54Gs.<sup>107</sup> According to García’s log book, only C-54G “7701” was regularly at “Rayo Base” during the period between February and April 1961,<sup>108</sup> as it was used for all sorts of practices (including emergencies) out of Retalhuleu on 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 February 61, and then for night supply drops to Cuba on 11 February, 1 March, 4 March, 15 March, 20 March, as well as on 9 April and on 20 April 61. Four other C-54s were also used for training at Retalhuleu: C-54G “7003” on 8 February, C-54G “7001” on 9 February, C-54G “6606” on 6 April, and DC-4D “6600” on 7 April 61. Other night drops into Cuba were made by C-54Gs that apparently were used for one mission only during that period: “7702” on 13 February, “6604” on 7 March, and “6705” on 10 March; “6609” was flown back to Miami with passengers on 22 April 61. Other sources state that there was also a C-54 “6096”.<sup>109</sup> Apparently, the C-54s that appeared only once or twice at Retalhuleu were the aircraft that had come from Opa Locka with supplies or with new enlisted men: In October 60, they arrived irregularly about 3 times

<sup>102</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.50.

<sup>103</sup> According to Burnett/Davis/Hagedorn/Kuhn/Slack, *Central American and the Caribbean civil aircraft registers*, p. 29, C-54G HP-320 was registered to Los Hermanos in 1962; its identity is given as msn 36063, ex 45-610 and N4000A, and the authors add that it is believed to have been written off on 15 October 1959.

<sup>104</sup> According to Joseph Baugher’s USAF serials for 1945 (<http://home.att.net/~jbaugher/1945.html>), C-54G 45-610 (msn 36063) went to US Overseas Airlines on 16 Nov. 1955 and was registered as N4000A; it is said to have ditched in a small lake after take-off from NAS Jacksonville airport on 15 October 1959.

<sup>105</sup> Col. J. Hawkins, *Record of paramilitary action against the Castro Government of Cuba* of 5 May 61, CIA doc. no. 0000132097, at <http://www.foia.ucia.gov/scripts/cgiserv...ber=0000132097>, p.26 (= p.33 on the web).

<sup>106</sup> Prouty, *The secret team*, chap.2, internet version, p.1, <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/JFK/ST/STchp.2.html>.

<sup>107</sup> E-mail dated 24 June 2005, kindly sent to the author by Leif Hellström. In his log book, García adds the Guatemalan nationality prefix “TG-” to all C-54 serials, but this is believed to have been his own interpretation.

<sup>108</sup> Possibly C-54G 45-610, because in that way, it could have used HP-320 as a call-sign all the time.

<sup>109</sup> Hagedorn, *Central American and Caribbean Air Forces*, p.148.



a month,<sup>110</sup> but in January 1961, there were as many as 5 C-54 flights arriving each month with new troops for Trax Base.<sup>111</sup>



A rare photo of one of the C-54s of the *Fuerza Aérea de Liberación* at Retalhuleu in 1960/1  
(with kind permission from Janet Ray Weininger)

The drops were not very successful: The first airdrop mission of arms and ammunition to guerrillas in the Escambray Mountains near Trinidad in central Cuba took place on 28 September 60; the operation was not a success, as the supplies landed seven miles from the reception area, falling into the hands of Castro's militia instead of the those of the rebels,<sup>112</sup> and on the return flight, the C-54 involved made an emergency landing in Mexico, where it was seized by the Mexican authorities. The paramilitary agent, on whom the project had set great store, was captured and executed.<sup>113</sup> In October 60, a student pilot made a forced landing at Retalhuleu, considerably damaging his C-46. Then, the second C-54 was lost crash-landing in the ocean in that training accident of October 1960. And there were also other problems: Many times, pilots were forced to make landings in Jamaica or Grand Cayman Island, or at Puerto Barrios, Guatemala.<sup>114</sup> On 18 October 60, a member of the Honduran assembly stated that thirty US transport planes with supplies and former soldiers of the Batista *regime* had flown to the Guatemalan bases of Puerto Barrios and Retalhuleu.<sup>115</sup> Supply drops to guerrillas in the Escambray Mountains were resumed on 6 November 60 using C-46 "292",<sup>116</sup> and between November 60 and March 61, sixty-six additional drops were flown from Retalhuleu.<sup>117</sup> These flights took from 11 to 14 hours from departure to

---

<sup>110</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.69.

<sup>111</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.105.

<sup>112</sup> Fursenko / Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, p.64; "Inspector General's Survey of the Cuban Operation", dated October 1961, that is doc. no. 129914 of the CIA, readable at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no.1, p.98, that is p.106 on the website.

<sup>113</sup> "Inspector General's Survey of the Cuban Operation", dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published on the CIA's website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no.41, p.16, that is p.24 on the website.

<sup>114</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.93.

<sup>115</sup> Fursenko / Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, pp.65/6.

<sup>116</sup> For that particular mission of 6 November 60 see Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.75-84.

<sup>117</sup> The "Inspector General's Survey of the Cuban Operation", dated October 1961, gives different numbers: "There were four such successes in all, out of 30 missions flown up to 21 April 61. [...] The first of these took

return, depending on the type of aircraft used and the actual destination, making a flying distance of 1,600 to 1,800 nautical miles, return trip.<sup>118</sup> On 31 December 60 a drop made to a Cuban agent was so different from what he had requested and had endangered his men by circling around in numerous U-turns that the agent complained to the Agency for lack of professional competence.<sup>119</sup> “In all, about 151,000 pounds of arms, ammunition and equipment were transported by air. Not more than 69,000 pounds of this was actually dropped; the rest was returned to base. Of this 69,000 pounds, at least 46,000 pounds were captured by Castro forces, who recovered all or a large part of ten drops, compared with our agents, who recovered three.”<sup>120</sup> The main problem seems to have been a lack of coordination. Former pilot Edward B. Ferrer recalls: “Most times, when the planes reached the prearranged DZ, there were no ground signals. Perhaps this was due to lack of coordination. It may seem slightly ridiculous, but *there was absolutely no direct communication between the guerrillas and the Air Force at Rayo Base*. When the guerrillas requested an air drop, they used an intelligence network operating between Cuba and the United States. The agents in the U.S. would then inform the advisors at Rayo of the date, time, and place of the scheduled drop. If, for any reason, the guerrillas had to move, there was no way for us to know.”<sup>121</sup> But there was not only the lack of a standard procedure for air reception, but sometimes also a lack of discipline: “Policy did not allow American observers to go along on the missions to correct the errors. Pilot discipline was lacking and instructions were not followed in numerous instances.”<sup>122</sup> Discipline among the soldiers was another problem. Former instructor pilot Connie Seigrist recalls: “Some of the Cubans from the camp in the hills in the past had managed to go AWOL [absent without leave] and get to Mexico City before apprehension. There were also a few troublesome types that required detention in Guatemala. Those requiring detention were untrustworthy security wise and for that reason couldn’t be returned to Florida where they were recruited from. A detention camp was built on the Gulf side of Guatemala in an inaccessible part of the jungle swamp for the purpose of holding the undesirables until the invasion of Cuba. There were no roads to the jungle prison. The prison was located on a high piece of uninhabited ground out in the middle of the swamp

---

place on 30 December after numerous attempts beginning in mid-October. There were 13 unsuccessful attempts during January and February. The third success took place on 3 March, when three agents were dropped (previous attempts to drop them had been made on 7 February and 27 February). The forth successful drop was on 29 March. [...] The three cargo drops known to be successful were all made in the Pinar del Rio Province. In other words, practically all the supplies went to one small area of western Cuba. Small amounts are thought to have been received in Camaguay and Oriente, but none in Matanzas or Havana” (document no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), nos.6-8, p.100, that is p.108 on the website).

<sup>118</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.71.

<sup>119</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), nos.3-5, pp.98-100, that is pp.106-8 on the website.

<sup>120</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no.9, p.101, that is p.109 on the website.

<sup>121</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.82.

<sup>122</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), nos.11-13, pp.101/2, that is pp.109-10 on the website. Ferrer (*Operation Puma*, pp.116-20) reports a special lack of discipline for February 61, when the C-54 and B-26 squadrons had little to do.

area. The only way to the prison was by boat or sea plane. I flew the PBY there twice landing on a river to take prisoners in or out. Those I flew out had taken a dim view of their situation after a short incarceration period and would repent enough to be allowed to return to the Retalhuleu area for training again. The Cubans that had maneuvered their way into Mexico City proposed another problem in which I became directly involved on one memorable occasion. Capt. Price and I were scheduled by the Agency to fly a C-46 to Mexico City to pick up the Cuban awols and bring them back to Retalhuleu. [...] Evidently none of the Cubans trusted what the Commander might do with them on their return regardless of my promise. We returned to Retalhuleu without a single Cuban.”<sup>123</sup> But the Headquarters directions of these airdrops also left much to be desired.<sup>124</sup> In early 1961, the Agency made a study and concluded that the Cuban crews did not have sufficient experience or supervised training in clandestine paramilitary air operations to meet the project objectives and that they were too undisciplined to obey instructions or to make correct reports. This study recommended that contract American aircraft commanders be used, but it did not receive the approval and went no further.<sup>125</sup> But there was still another type of missions assigned to the C-46s of the fleet: paratroop training; in February 61, the C-46s made 2 flights each day for such a training. The paratroop battalion was based at “Switzerland”, a farm located above “Helvetia” and was also owned by Roberto Alejos; and there was a second paratroop outpost near the city of Mazatenango. These paratroopers were to fight in the mountains of Cuba.<sup>126</sup>

In addition to this big transport fleet and a small number of liaison aircraft,<sup>127</sup> the most important factor of the *Fuerza Aérea de Liberación* were the B-26s. It is known that, when the Cuban exile pilots were trained for the *Bay of Pigs* operation at Retalhuleu, Guatemala (“Rayo Base”) between July 60 and April 61, these Cubans flew at least 6 of the 8 B-26s delivered to the *Fuerza Aérea Guatemalteca* in the summer of 1960.<sup>128</sup> One of them, FAG 420, made a belly landing at Retalhuleu at an unknown date.<sup>129</sup> “By the end of December

<sup>123</sup> Seigrist, *Memoirs*, pp.51/2, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9.

<sup>124</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no.16, p.103, that is p.111 on the website. “The requests for air drops came from Cuba by radio, secret writing or telephone to Miami and then were forwarded to WH/4 headquarters, which then put in an operational request to DPD, which in turn directed the Guatemala air base to mount the flight after approval had been given by DDCI. DPD could and did release its own cables, without coordination. This cumbersome system was complicated even more by the scarcity of agent radio operators inside Cuba” (ib., nos.19-20, p. 104 = p.112 on the website).

<sup>125</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is doc. no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no.31, p.107, that is p.115 on the website.

<sup>126</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.120.

<sup>127</sup> There was also at least one AT-11 (Hagedorn, *Central American and Caribbean Air Forces*, p.148), and probably also Helio Courier HP-322P (msn 525), believed to have also become part of the fleet of Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez, Panama, in 1960. It became TG-DOF around March 61 (Burnett, *et. al.*, *Central America and the Caribbean Civil Aircraft Registers*, p.29) and turned up as B-861 with Air America in August 62 (see the Helio file of this database).

<sup>128</sup> Hagedorn / Hellström, *Foreign Invaders*, pp.89-91, for details and for the identities of those B-26s; a Cuban pilot, whose log book is in the possession of Leif Hellström, notes FAG 400, 404, 408, 412, 420, and 424 as training aircraft (e-mail dated 22 February 2004, kindly sent to the author by Leif Hellström).

<sup>129</sup> See the photo of FAG “420” (after belly landing at Retalhuleu) in the article of Mario E. Overall, “Bay of Pigs: The Guatemalan connection” (10 May 2003), at: [http://www.laahs.com/artman/publish/article\\_50.shtml](http://www.laahs.com/artman/publish/article_50.shtml) . Connie Seigrist recalls this accident as follows: “Retalhuleu became crowded during periods of flight training and B-26s would then be scheduled to fly to San Jose airfield for take-off and landing transition. One training

1960, ten B-26 aircraft were available to the project.”<sup>130</sup> While Air America pilots Connie M. Seigrist (“Seig Simpson”) and William H. Beale Jr. (“Billy Bell”) – later assisted at Retalhuleu by former Air America pilot Douglas R. Price<sup>131</sup> – took charge of instructing the Cuban air crews on the transport aircraft, Maj. Gen. George R. (“Reid”) Doster, commander of the Alabama Air National Guard, worked with the B-26 pilots.<sup>132</sup> Documents published by the CIA, however, reveal that Air America pilots Connie Seigrist, William Beale, and Douglas Price also flew B-26 missions. Two of them occurred on 14 and 15 November 1960, when William Beale and Connie Seigrist flew B-26s out of Retalhuleu, Guatemala (“Rayo Base”).<sup>133</sup> These were no training flights, however, but strafing missions flown against an insurrection of the Guatemalan Armed Forces. Connie Seigrist recalls: “In late November or early December there was an insurrection in the Guatemalan Armed Forces aligned with the support of their eastern coast politicians in a take-over attempt of the country. Col. Batres flew down from Guatemala City on this particular afternoon to Retalhuleu for our air and ground assistance to help quell the insurrection. It came to light in his request for our assistance the Guatemala Air Force pilots under his command refused to take military action against their own countrymen and we were his last resort to help in saving the Ydigoras Government. Late at night we received permission from our Field Three Commander to assist Col. Batres. We immediately prepared three C-46s and Cuban ground troops to be flown to Puerto Barrios escorted by 2 B-26s in the early morning to arrive at daybreak. I flew one of the B-26s. Col. Batres’ instructions were for our B-26s to soften the airfield with our fire power to enable the C-46s to land with the Cuban ground troops without danger from retaliatory ground fire. The Cuban ground troops were then to take over and secure the airfield. Also in our instructions we were not to shoot into any operations or residential buildings on the airfield because Col. Batres’ intelligence source reported the local politicians unsympathetic to the revolt were being held hostage in the airport buildings and we should take all precaution not to harm them. We arrived in our B-26s as planned and proceeded to strafe and rocket gun emplacements, open sheds, revetments, thick bushes, or anyplace that could camouflage ground firing troops. By the time the C-46s arrived I was well convinced we had nullified any possible return action from the ground. Neither of our B-26s was hit by ground fire. [...] The three C-46s returned to Retalhuleu and we in our B-26s landed at Guatemala City per Col. Batres’ previous instructions. We remained for the day on the City airfield to fly cover for some Guatemala Air Force C-47s landing troops on a mountain airfield located halfway to Puerto Barrios. [...] I flew alone. The C-47s made their landing just before dark. They met no resistance and I returned to Retalhuleu as instructed by Col. Batres. Col. Batres instructed me the next morning to patrol the entire south coastal area from the mountains to the ocean and from the Mexico border to the El Salvador border. My instructions were to strafe anything moving on the highway or into any grouping of people. I patrolled the entire day and sighted nothing. After landing back in Retalhuleu I learned Col.

---

flight the pilot neglected to lower his landing gear and landed belly-up without injuries. Again temporary repairs were made and I delivered it to San Jose for major repairs” (Seigrist, *Memoirs*, p.53, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9).

<sup>130</sup> Col. J. Hawkins, *Record of paramilitary action against the Castro Government of Cuba* of 5 May 61, CIA doc. no. 0000132097, at <http://www.foia.ucia.gov/scripts/cgiserv...ber=0000132097>, p.13 (= p.20 on the web).

<sup>131</sup> Leary / LeSchack, *Project Coldfeet*, pp.113-16.

<sup>132</sup> Leary / LeSchack, *Project Coldfeet*, p.113.

<sup>133</sup> Memorandum “JMGLow Bonuses” of 7 September 61, that is document no. 141130 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp).

Batres had flown to Puerto Barrios to negotiate with the leaders of the revolt and the revolt was over.”<sup>134</sup>

At Retalhuleu, the Cuban students did not only have the *Fuerza Aérea Guatemalteca* B-26s for training, but probably also some of the 12 B-26s that had been taken from open storage at Tucson and Davis-Monthan AFB. They had been “purchased” as surplus from storage by Intermountain Aviation on behalf of the recorded end-user, CARAMAR (Caribbean Marine Aero Corp.).<sup>135</sup> It is not known how the B-26s were painted when they were used out of Retalhuleu, except that some of them had private “nose art”. At least two of them were badly damaged during training at “Rayo Base”.<sup>136</sup> The commander of the B-26 squadron was Joaquín “Pupy” Varela, and many of the daily training flights were proficiency flights: The transport aircraft would drop a number of rafts made of empty sealed 50-gallon drums lashed together into a lake about 25 miles northwest of “Rayo Base”, and the B-26s would use the rafts as targets conducting a series of machine gun and rocket drills.<sup>137</sup> Apart from being used for training, the B-26s also flew some pre-invasion overflights of Cuba out of Retalhuleu, flights that lasted up to 8 ½ hours and were undertaken in order to drop leaflets and to test the Cuban defenses, while US listening stations in Florida and elsewhere would note all Cuban reactions.<sup>138</sup> All of these activities did not remain unnoticed by the outside world: Already in late 1960, a number of reports about Trax and Rayo Base had appeared in several U.S. and Guatemalan newspapers, and so one day in early January 61, a Lockheed Constellation landed at Retalhuleu with 50 reporters from all over the Americas and Europe on board: Their purpose was to report the truth about the base. The newsmen were to arrive at 11:00 A.M., but by 9:00 A.M., the whole personnel of “Rayo Bases” had left the base and was hiding in the jungle. “To justify the existence of the base, a detachment of Guatemalan soldiers was brought in. Four hours later, a scout found us and reported that the Constellation, with all newsmen aboard, had departed on its return trip with a ‘no-news cargo’. We stumbled back to Rayo, having covered six kilometers of steaming Central American jungle.”<sup>139</sup> Apart from that, new American B-26 advisors arrived at Retalhuleu in January 61, that is “Billy”, “Joe”, “Pete”, “Riley”, “Wade”, and “Reid”, that is people from the Alabama Air National Guard, and “Billy Carpenter”, the American commander of the base, was replaced by “Lou Rotham”.<sup>140</sup> In February 61, there was little to do, only the C-46s practiced paratroop drops.<sup>141</sup> In March 61, Castro organized an attack force of 50,000 soldiers and managed to conquer most of the territory formerly held by guerrillas. This meant that the C-54s and C-46s that still flew drops to the remaining guerrillas often took heavy ground fire. A particularly heavy accident occurred on 5 March 61, when a C-54 was forced to land at

---

<sup>134</sup> Seigrist, *Memoirs*, pp.50/1, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9.

<sup>135</sup> Hagedorn / Hellström, *Foreign Invaders*, p.131, note 12 B-26s that left the USAF during the second half of 1960: 44-35830 and 44-35574 on 30 and 31 August; 44-35821, 44-35698, 44-35839, and 44-35845 on 2, 3, and 9 September; 44-35420, 44-35789, and 44-35896 on 6 October; and 44-35782, 44-34315, and 44-34590 on 12 and 13 October 1960.

<sup>136</sup> Hagedorn / Hellström, *Foreign Invaders*, p.127.

<sup>137</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.109/10.

<sup>138</sup> Hagedorn / Hellström, *Foreign Invaders*, pp.126-31.

<sup>139</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.111/2.

<sup>140</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.105/6. “Billy”, “Joe”, “Pete”, “Riley”, “Wade”, and “Reid” are believed to stand for Bill Peterson, Joe Hinkle, Pete Ray, Major Riley Shamburger, Wade Gray, and Major General Reid Doster (Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, p.53).

<sup>141</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.120.

Kingston, Jamaica: It had returned from a mission over Cuba, where one of its engines had been destroyed by heavy ground fire, and there were leaks in several of the fuel tanks. Four days later, the crew was picked up at Kingston airport by another C-54 arriving in the dark.<sup>142</sup> What happened to the damaged C-54 is unknown, but it was probably repaired and returned.

There was still another important change that happened in March 61: The initial plan had been to stage the invasion in the vicinity of Trinidad. “Plan for Landing. The landing plan provided for simultaneous landing at first light on D-Day of two reinforced rifle companies of approximately 200 men each over two beaches southwest of Trinidad and the parachute landing of a company of equal strength immediately north of Trinidad. The remainder of the force was to land over one of the two beaches in successive trips of landing craft. Naval Gunfire. Two LCI each morning mounting eleven 50 caliber machine guns and two 75mm recoilless rifles were to provide naval gunfire support at the beaches. Tactical Air Operations. The plan provided for a maximum effort surprise strike (15 B-26) at dawn of D-1 on all Cuban military airfields followed by repeated strikes at dusk of the same day and at first light of D-Day against any airfields where offensive aircraft were yet operational.”<sup>143</sup> However, this “Trinidad Plan” was rejected by the Department of State, because to them, it looked like a World War II invasion and would be too obviously attributable to the United States. So on or about 11 March 61, President Kennedy decided that it should not be executed and that possible alternatives should be studied. As according to the new plan any tactical air operations were to be conducted out of an airfield on Cuba, to whom those operations could then be attributed, the Zapata Peninsula of Central Cuba with the new airfield at Playa Girón was chosen, that is the actual Bay of Pigs.<sup>144</sup>

## **B) Moving to Nicaragua**

In October 1960,<sup>145</sup> a CIA delegation including Major Aderholt flew to Nicaragua’s president Luis Somoza-Debayle to negotiate, together with other CIA officials, to get Somoza’s permission to use Puerto Cabezas as a departure base for the strike force, representing themselves as businessmen from a front organization, United Fruit Company in New Orleans. Somoza said that he knew who they were and that he supported them, and so Aderholt flew with a son of Somoza to inspect Puerto Cabezas.<sup>146</sup> In early 1961, three American contract pilots with long Agency experiences were made available from another project, while William Beale returned to Air America in late 1960.<sup>147</sup> A number of other pilots and air-crew technicians, members or ex-members of several Air National Guards,

---

<sup>142</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no.58, p.20, that is p.28 on the website. The mission is described in detail in Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.123-5.

<sup>143</sup> Col. J. Hawkins, *Record of paramilitary action against the Castro Government of Cuba* of 5 May 61, CIA doc. no. 0000132097, at <http://www.foia.ucia.gov/scripts/cgiserv...ber=0000132097>, p.18 (= p.25 on the web).

<sup>144</sup> Col. J. Hawkins, *Record of paramilitary action against the Castro Government of Cuba* of 5 May 61, CIA doc. no. 0000132097, at <http://www.foia.ucia.gov/scripts/cgiserv...ber=0000132097>, pp.18-21 (= pp.25-28 on the web).

<sup>145</sup> Col. J. Hawkins, *Record of paramilitary action against the Castro Government of Cuba* of 5 May 61, CIA doc. no. 0000132097, at <http://www.foia.ucia.gov/scripts/cgiserv...ber=0000132097>, p.12 (= p.19 on the web).

<sup>146</sup> Trest, *Air Commando One*, pp.8 + 113-15.

<sup>147</sup> Seigrist, *Memoirs*, p.47, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9.



were recruited especially for the project under cover of a commercial company.<sup>148</sup> Also in December 1960, Captain Ferrer, who had taken command of the C-46 squadron, asked that in addition to the 5 C-46 captains up to then based at Retalhuleu, 2 more Cubans should be checked out as C-46 captains. This explains why, probably around March 61, some changes took place in the C-46 fleet: Former B-850 was replaced by former N9935Z, and 2 more C-46s appeared on the scene: former N9895Z and former N9459Z. On 28 March 61, all Cuban overflights were suspended, because the aircraft were needed to move the strike force from Guatemala to Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua,<sup>149</sup> and in March 61, the invasion force indeed moved from Retalhuleu, Guatemala, to Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua (“Happy Valley”). It was after that move to Nicaragua that C-46 serial no. 22366, that is former B-866, was lost in Guatemala on a normal flight by pilots that had remained in Retalhuleu for house keeping.<sup>150</sup> The circumstances are described by Albert Persons: “Joe Hinkle and Al Waters were assigned a mission one day to fly a C-46 to a small, private grass airfield in the interior of Guatemala. They had to slow the aircraft down and drag it in over the tops of some palm trees growing at the approach end of the field. A wing tip clipped the top of one of the trees, and the C-46 wound up in a ball half in and half out of the woods at the far end of the field. The aircraft was totaled. Miraculously, Joe and Al got out without a scratch. Sadly, a Guatemalan native who was picking coconuts in the top of the tree they hit was killed.”<sup>151</sup> The new base at Puerto Cabezas was commanded by Garfield M. Thorsrud, who had already worked for CAT and for the CIA in Indonesia, with Connie Seigrist as head of the transport operations, who was assisted by former Air America pilot Doug Price, and General Doster as head of the B-26 operations.<sup>152</sup> But the airstrip of Puerto Cabezas was not sufficient, because in case of a landing accident, the whole operation would be endangered. So Connie Seigrist argued: “We needed an auxiliary field in preparation for the Invasion. [...] I searched out an area of fairly level open grass land nearby that appeared it could support the weight of C-46s and B-26s. I landed the forth C-46 there and immediately it sank down into the ground. That C-46 was rendered unavailable for the Invasion because of the time involved for digging it out. I flew it to Miami after the invasion.”<sup>153</sup> Both of these accidents evidently happened before squadron commander Edward B. Ferrer moved his five C-46s from Rayo Base to Puerto Cabezas on 2 April 61.<sup>154</sup>

Apart from training at Retalhuleu and supply drops to Cuba, C-54Gs were also used to fly supply missions between Retalhuleu (“JMMadd”) and Puerto Cabezas (“JMTide”), but these missions were flown by North American pilots like, for example, Albert C. Persons, author of the book *Bay of Pigs*. But the number of Americans at the camp was held to a bare minimum for security reasons; and the Americans who were there, were represented to be either tourists

<sup>148</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no.3, p.140, that is p.148 on the website; Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.101.

<sup>149</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no.77, p.26, that is p.38 on the website.

<sup>150</sup> Letter dated 4 January 1987, sent by Connie Seigrist to Bill Leary, p.2, preserved at: UTD/Leary/I B9F16. See also Letter dated 4 April 61, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4.

<sup>151</sup> Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, p.54.

<sup>152</sup> Leary / LeSchack, *Project Coldfeet*, pp.115/6.

<sup>153</sup> Letter dated 4 January 1987, sent by Connie Seigrist to Bill Leary, p.2, preserved at: UTD/Leary/I B9F16.

<sup>154</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.127.



or adventurers.<sup>155</sup> So, training for those US pilots was arranged at Fort Lauderdale where they practiced emergency procedures, blacked-out approaches and landings, and low-level night flights.<sup>156</sup> When the day of the invasion approached, those C-54s also airlifted equipment, supplies, and personnel from Retalhuleu to Puerto Cabezas; these flights stepped up considerably during the first week of April 61. At about the same time, a C-54 arrived at Puerto Cabezas loaded with a dozen metal boats that were to be used later to off-load the invasion troops.<sup>157</sup> On 8 and 9 April, C-54s flown by contract crews arrived at Retalhuleu, and by mid-afternoon of 9 April 61, no less than 6 C-54s and 3 C-46s were lined up at Retalhuleu air base, ready to fly the Cuban troops to Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua on 10 and 11 April 61.<sup>158</sup> On 12 April 61, there were 3 C-54s at Puerto Cabezas.<sup>159</sup>

But the main air element in the *Bay of Pigs* operation were of course the Douglas B-26s. Eight more B-26s had left the USAF between 15 and 23 February 1961.<sup>160</sup> When the C-46 squadron moved from Retalhuleu to Puerto Cabezas on 2 April 61, a total of 17 B-26s were based at Puerto Cabezas.<sup>161</sup> Four more B-26s that had probably been stored at Tainan on Taiwan since the days of Operation *Haik* in 1958, were also registered to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez, Panama, in late 1960 or early 1961.<sup>162</sup> It is unknown if these aircraft used their HP-registrations for being ferried to Central America and if they really arrived there, or if they just were to join the *Fuerza Aérea de Liberación*, or if their registration to a Panama-based company was just to serve as cover for the B-26s really operating out of Retalhuleu, but it is likely that they remained at Tainan. Anyway, Air Asia had a contract with Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez SA, whose date of termination was indefinite.<sup>163</sup> It was probably at Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua that those B-26s were painted in the colors of the Cuban *Fuerza Aérea Revolucionaria*, and according to Col. Hawkins, the “air force” based at Puerto Cabezas “included fifteen B-26 light bombers.”<sup>164</sup> On 9 April 61, a barely disguised USAF L-1049 Super Constellation arrived at Puerto Cabezas bringing in a dozen members of a top-level strategy conference, apparently discussing the invasion plan with some of the US advisors – but none of the Cubans had been admitted.<sup>165</sup> In his “Narrative of air activity”, that is in memorandum no. TS-155685, Attachment A, dated 26 April 1961, Colonel Stanley W. Beerli, head of the CIA’s *Development Projects Division* (DPD) and commander of the Invasion’s air operations, gives the following details: “On 8 April 1961 a briefing was

<sup>155</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no.7, p.126, that is p.134 on the website.

<sup>156</sup> Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, pp.32-35.

<sup>157</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.133.

<sup>158</sup> Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, pp.59-69.

<sup>159</sup> Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, p.75.

<sup>160</sup> Hagedorn / Hellström, *Foreign Invaders*, p.131, note B-26s 44-34637, 44-34730, and 44-35411 that left on 15 February, and 44-34338, 44-35554, 44-35641, 44-35714, and 44-35732, that left on 22/23 February 61.

<sup>161</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.132.

<sup>162</sup> B-26s 44-35242 (msn 28521) was registered as HP-318 and later as HP-322; 44-34620 (msn 27899), was registered as HP-318P; 44-34682 (msn 27961) was registered as HP-319; and 44-34376 (msn 27655) was registered as HP-323 (see Burnett / Davis / Hagedorn / Kuhn / Slack, *Central America and the Caribbean Civil Aircraft Registers*, pp.28/9). For more details see the B-26 file of this database.

<sup>163</sup> See “Aircraft status” as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1.

<sup>164</sup> Col. J. Hawkins, *Record of paramilitary action against the Castro Government of Cuba* of 5 May 61, CIA doc. no. 0000132097, at <http://www.foia.ucia.gov/scripts/cgiserv...ber=0000132097>, p.26 (= p.33 on the web).

<sup>165</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.137/8.

conducted for the Deputy Director (Plans), Acting Chief, WH-4, and Acting Chief, DPD, which outlined the proposed plan of air operations for project JMATE and Sub-Project JMFURY. Targets were as cited in DPD Air Operations Plan 200-1 with the exception that Targets 1, 2, and 3 were to be struck on D-3 as a portion of Project JMFURY. Project JMFURY involved target 1, San Antonio de Los Baños, two aircraft; target 2, Campo Libertad, two aircraft; target 3, Santiago de Cuba, two aircraft. On 9 April the briefing team departed Washington for JMTIDE. The purpose of this trip was to brief the combat elements of the proposed plan of activities. After two days target study at JMTIDE, a recommendation was submitted to Headquarters which recommended assignment of three aircraft each to Targets 1 and 2. This change was affected.”<sup>166</sup> On 13 April 61, the crews for the first strike were selected, and air base commander “Gar” (Garfield Thorsrud) informed the pilots that this first strike would not be flown by 16 B-26s, as it had been planned all the time, but – upon President Kennedy’s special request – by only 8 B-26s.<sup>167</sup> On 14 April 61, the ships carrying the infantry of Brigade 2506 to Cuba left Puerto Cabezas, and General Somoza, the President of Nicaragua, saluted the troops sailing to Cuba.<sup>168</sup> As it seems, he also spoke to the pilots: “At a meeting before the Bay of Pigs, President (General) Somoza addressed the plan. His exact words were. ‘Don’t fuck it up.’”<sup>169</sup>

### **C) Operation *Pluto*, the attempted invasion at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961:**

From their base at “Happy Valley”, i.e. Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua, some B-26s of this *Fuerza Aérea de Liberación* first made some overflights of Cuba, to drop leaflets and to test Cuban reactions. On Saturday morning, 15 April 61, a strike force of 8 B-26s, piloted by exile-Cuban aircrews, took off from Puerto Cabezas to start Operation *Pluto*, i.e. to bomb Castro’s air force at “Campo Libertad” west of Havana, at San Antonio de los Baños Airbase located south of Havana, and at Antonio Maceo Airport at Santiago de Cuba. A 9th CIA-owned B-26 from “Happy Valley”, painted as “FAR 933” in the colors of Castro’s air force, landed at Miami the same day, posing as a defective Cuban pilot who said to have bombed some Cuban airfields before fleeing to the United States, to give a cover story to the real air strikes flown in Operation *Pluto*.<sup>170</sup> But immediately after the attacks, Raúl Roa, the Cuban

<sup>166</sup> Stanley W. Beerli, “Narrative of air activity”, Memorandum no. TS-155685, Attachment A, dated 26 April 1961, that is doc. no. 141165 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp).

<sup>167</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.138-40.

<sup>168</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.143-45.

<sup>169</sup> E-mail dated 12 October 2006, kindly sent to the author by Doug Price.

<sup>170</sup> On 15 April 61, at 7.20Z hours GMT (that is at 1.20 hours local time), B-26s “923” (“Gorilla One”, flown by Captain Gustavo Ponzosa and Navigator Rafael García Pujol) and “929” (“Gorilla Two”, flown by Gonzalo Herrera and Navigator Angel López) took off for Santiago de Cuba and inflicted heavy damage to the airfield facilities. At 7.30 hours GMT the same day, B-26s “931” (“Puma Two”, flown by Captain Daniel Fernández-Mon and Navigator Gastón Pérez), “933” (“Puma One”, flown by Captain José Crespo and Navigator Lorenzo Pérez-Lorenzo), and “935” (“Puma Three”, flown by Captain Osvaldo Piedra and Navigator José Fernández) took off for “Campo Libertad” near Havana, but “931” was hit and exploded, killing Daniel Fernández-Mon and Gastón Pérez, while “933” was damaged by ground fire, but could escape to Boca Chica Naval Air Station, Key West, where the aircraft was repaired and flown back. At 7.40 hours GMT, 3 more B-26s with exactly the same fake tail numbers – “931” (“Linda Two”, flown by Captain René García and Navigator Luis Ardois), “933” (“Linda One”, flown by Captain Luis Cosme and Navigator Nildo Batista), and “935” (“Linda Three”, flown by Captain Alfredo Caballero and Navigator Alfredo Maza) – took off from Puerto Cabezas for a bombing mission to San Antonio de los Baños, inflicting a lot of damage to the airfield; later, B-26 “935” had to land at Grand Cayman, as he was low on fuel. But the crew was flown back to Puerto Cabezas by the CIA’s PBY. While a

Foreign Minister denounced the US involvement before the UN General Assembly, and when the US Ambassador denied Roa's charges showing a photo of "FAR 933", Roa pointed out that, while all real Cuban B-26s had plexiglass noses, "FAR 933" had a solid nose, so wasn't a Cuban aircraft. This failure to make the world believe in the cover story of a rebellion inside the Cuban Air Force caused President Kennedy to immediately call off all air strikes for the next 48 hours.<sup>171</sup>

On the other hand, this first air attack had been quite successful, as most of Castro's airplanes had been destroyed, but leaving – first of all – 3 T-33s, which had been located by a U-2 as being parked side by side on a small airbase near Santiago. So, on 16 April 61, at about 1.45 p.m., President Kennedy approved that four Cuban exile-piloted B-26s from Puerto Cabezas should bomb and destroy these three T-33s at dawn on 17 April, while they were still on the ground. But at about 9.30 p.m. on 16 April, Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to the President, telephoned General C.P. Cabell of the CIA to inform him that the dawn air strikes the following morning should not be launched until they could be conducted from a strip on the Cuban beach.<sup>172</sup> Col. Beerli, head of the CIA's *Development Projects Division* (DPD) and commander of the Invasion's air operations, describes this dramatic decision, which probably caused the failure of the whole operation, in a very undramatic way: "On D-1 eleven targets were assigned the B-26 strike force designed to destroy the remainder of GOC operational air capability. Between the hours of 2100 local and 0100 local during the night 16-17 April the target assignment was changed prohibiting air strike of any airfields the morning of D day. All aircraft were committed to sustain air support over the beachhead area."<sup>173</sup> In spite of this change, the invasion itself was to begin as planned: In a meeting held at Puerto Cabezas at about 16.00 hours on 16 April 61, "Frank", that is US Army Lt.Col. Frank Egan, the on-site paramilitary operations chief who reported to Col. Hawkins,<sup>174</sup> had explained the plan: The landing zone was to be the Bay of Pigs close to the town of Girón. The area along the road that ran west, parallel to the eastern coast, toward the Australia sugar mill, that is Playa Larga (Long Beach), was code-named "Red Beach". The area nearest to the road that ran east of Girón along the southern coast to the city of Cienfuegos was code-named "Green Beach". The actual landing would take place at Girón, which had been code-named "Blue Beach".<sup>175</sup> The mission of the transport aircraft was to support the ground troops: "Of our six transport aircraft – five C-46s and one C-54 – two were dispatched to Red Beach, about ten miles from Girón. Each would drop thirty paratroopers together with weapons and equipment. The remaining four transports would make their drops at San Blas junction [north of Girón]. Once on the ground, the paratroopers would cover the entire intersection, facing the expected vanguard of forces sent by Castro to attack the beachhead established by the

---

mission to be flown in a third "935" was aborted on 15 April, a third B-26 "933", flown by Captain Mario Zúñiga, took off at about 9.00 hours GMT (3.00 hours local time) for a special mission to Miami ("Listing of mission results with attached listings", that is document no. 141186 published on the CIA's website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), and "Log of tactical strikes", Attachment 1, that is document no. 141185 published on the same website) – evidently to provide for the cover story.

<sup>171</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.139-62.

<sup>172</sup> Prouty, *JFK. The CIA, Vietnam, and the plot to assassinate John F. Kennedy*, pp.121-34.

<sup>173</sup> Stanley W. Beerli, "Narrative of air activity", Memorandum no. TS-155685, Attachment A, dated 26 April 1961, that is doc. no. 141165 published on the CIA's website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp).

<sup>174</sup> Bohning, *The Castro obsession*, pp.41-44; Col. Hawkins himself was at Washington at that time, discussing the invasion with General Charles Cabell and Richard Bissell of the CIA (ib., pp.48/9).

<sup>175</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.167.

Liberation Army at Girón. There was no drop scheduled at Green Beach, since it was anticipated that the area would be under the control of the landing forces of Brigade 2506. [...] our departure was scheduled for 0200 Nicaraguan time [...] so the drops could take place at 0620.”<sup>176</sup> Only late in the evening, Col. Hawkins was informed about the President’s decision: “At about 2215 on the night of 16 April, I was informed at the Command Post by Mr. Esterline, the Project Chief, that these attacks had been cancelled by order of the President on recommendation of the Department of State. Upon hearing this, I immediately telephoned Mr. Bissell, the Deputy Director (Plans), who was at the Department of State, and urged in the strongest terms that the President be immediately requested to reconsider this decision and that the possible disastrous consequences of cancelling these attacks be explained to him.”<sup>177</sup> But the decision was not changed and all that could be done was to expedite certain measures.

Not long after daylight on 17 April 61, the airborne infantry company was successfully parachuted from C-46 aircraft to four of the five scheduled drop zones where its elements were given the mission of sealing off approach roads.<sup>178</sup> A much more detailed picture is given by CIA document no. 141186, that is the “Listing of mission results with attached listings” of 1961: On 17 April 61, C-46 “855”, piloted by Captain Ferrer, flew to DZ-3 and DZ-4 and encountered light ground fire, but the drops were ok and on target. Captain Ferrer and his co-pilot Raúl Solís dropped commander Alejandro del Valle and his paratroopers close to the San Blas junction north of Girón (DZ-3), together with their equipment. Then they returned to Girón to inspect the small local airport (DZ-4) and its runway condition, when they were attacked by a B-26 of Castro’s air force. But Captain Ferrer and his C-46 escaped and returned to Puerto Cabezas.<sup>179</sup> The same day, C-46 “877”, piloted by Captain Navarro, flew to DZ-3 and DZ-5 and also encountered light ground fire, but again, the drops were ok and on target. C-46 “788”, piloted by Captain Luaices, flew to DZ-3, and again the drops were ok and on target. Still the same day, C-46 “875”, piloted by Captain Mario Tellechea, flew to DZ-1, DZ-2, and DZ-3; while there was no drop at DZ-1 due to enemy fighters, the drops at DZ-2 and DZ-3 were ok; at DZ-1, C-46 “875” had been attacked by a Cuban Sea Fury, but escaped to witness the Sea Fury crash at sea.<sup>180</sup> Still on 17 April C-46 “864”, piloted by Captain Gómez, flew to DZ-1, where the drops were ok. Then on 18 April 61, C-46 “864”, piloted by Captain Edward Ferrer and coded “Elephant One”, left “Happy Valley” at 14.00 hours and flew to “Playa Girón airfield” with a full load of ammunition, but the landing was aborted due to enemy fighters.<sup>181</sup> On 19 April 61 an unknown C-46, piloted by Captain Gómez, flew to “Playa Girón airfield”, but was recalled due to enemy fighters; the same day, C-46 “864”, piloted by Captain Luaices, also flew to “Playa Giron airfield”, but

---

<sup>176</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.167/8.

<sup>177</sup> Col. J. Hawkins, *Record of paramilitary action against the Castro Government of Cuba* of 5 May 61, CIA doc. no. 0000132097, at <http://www.foia.ucia.gov/scripts/cgiserv...ber=0000132097> , pp.33/4 (= p.40/1 on the web).

<sup>178</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no.91, p.30, that is p.38 on the website.

<sup>179</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.173-77.

<sup>180</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.201.

<sup>181</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.190-200.

the landing was aborted.<sup>182</sup> In the evening, another C-46 piloted by Captain Manuel Navarro, landed at Girón airfield with a load of medical supplies, communications equipment, and ammunition, picked up the injured crewmember of a downed B-26 (Matías Farías) and brought him back to Puerto Cabezas.<sup>183</sup> Also on 19 April, 3 C-46s and a C-54 tried to find and rescue the downed B-26 crews – in vain.<sup>184</sup> That evening, 5 C-46s were parked the flight line of “Happy Valley”.<sup>185</sup> To sum up, no Air America crews flew the C-46s during the operation,<sup>186</sup> but Air America furnished several of the C-46s used in the *Bay of Pigs* operation: As B-850 and B-866 had probably been replaced by N9894Z and N9935Z in March 61, and as N9895Z and N9459Z arrived at the same time, the 5 C-46s flown during the *Bay of Pigs* operation itself (“864”, “877”, “875”, “788”, and “855”) are believed to be have been B-864, B-870, N9459Z, N9894Z, and N9935Z: 2 C-46s of the fleet did not participate in the invasion: One (believed to be “292”) still stuck in the sand in Nicaragua, and one (believed to be N9895Z) stayed in Florida. For throughout the invasion, Joe Hinkle and Ron Smith had been at Opa Locka with their C-46; only after the invasion, they learned that they had been there in order to fly 2 “T-birds” if needed, but that that plan had been cancelled so that they returned to Puerto Cabezas shortly after the operation.<sup>187</sup> On 14 May 61, the last C-46 was flown from Puerto Cabezas to Miami.<sup>188</sup>

There were also four C-54s that were used during the *Bay of Pigs* operation: On the night of 17-18 April 61, one C-54 drop of ammunition was made at “Red Beach” and three at “Blue Beach”, and on the following night, “Blue Beach” received two drops.<sup>189</sup> A much more detailed picture is given by CIA document no. 141186, that is the “Listing of mission results with attached listings” of 1961: On 17 April 61, C-54 “7711”, piloted by Captain Cereceda, flew to Drop Zone 3. On 18 April 61, C-54 “7711”, flew to “Blue Beach” twice, piloted by Captain Valdes on the first flight and by Captain Mario Tellechea (“Falcon Two”) on the second flight. The same day, C-54 “7107”, piloted by Captain Menendes, also flew to “Blue Beach”, while C-54 “7710”, piloted by Captain Castor Cereceda (“Falcon Three”), flew to “Red Beach”. These 3 C-54s made up Operation Falcon.<sup>190</sup> On 19 April 61, C-54 “7711” flew to “Blue Beach”.<sup>191</sup> That evening, 4 C-54s were parked the flight line of “Happy

<sup>182</sup> “Listing of mission results with attached listings” of 1961, that is document 141186 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp).

<sup>183</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.214; Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, pp.1+85; and Seigrist, *Memoirs*, p.57, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9.

<sup>184</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.217.

<sup>185</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.218.

<sup>186</sup> Memorandum “JMGLow Bonuses” of 7 September 61, that is document no. 141130 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp).

<sup>187</sup> Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, pp.101/2. Connie Seigrist notes: “I heard we had 2 T-33s at Eglin and 2 of our Louisiana Air Guard pilots that were with us in TIDE at that time would go fly them as cover for the B-26s. But we had lost by then. [...] To have flown the T-33s at this time would have been futile” (Letter of 20 May 76 to CIA historian Dr. Jack Pfeiffer, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9).

<sup>188</sup> Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, p.111.

<sup>189</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), no.96, p.31, that is p.39 on the website.

<sup>190</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.209, says that he (and not Captain Menendes) flew the lead C-54 “Falcon One”: “Navigator Reinaldo Lazo, flight mechanic Héctor Hernández, and PDO’s Alberto Pérez, Luis Regalado and Chiqui Ginebra made up the rest of my crew. Jaime Bourne was to fly as co-pilot. [...] We took off at 1530.”

<sup>191</sup> “Listing of mission results with attached listings” of 1961, that is document 141186 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp).



Valley”.<sup>192</sup> One last C-54 mission was flown on 20 April 61: Captain Edward Ferrer and his crew flew 10,000 pounds of supplies and weapons to guerrillas in the Minas del Frío area, but when the C-54 arrived over the drop zone at about 22.00 hours, it was greeted by anti-aircraft fire, so that the C-54 returned to base with its full load.<sup>193</sup> To sum up: No Air America crews or Air America C-54s were involved in this operation.<sup>194</sup>

As to the bombers, on D-Day, 17 April 61, several B-26s took off from Puerto Cabezas to support the invasion forces landing on Cuba, but there, they met heavy defense by anti-aircraft fire and the three *Fuerza Aérea Revolucionaria* T-33s and 5 Hawker Sea Furies. Especially due to the fast T-33s, 5 rebel B-26s were lost that day.<sup>195</sup> Four additional B-26s arrived at Puerto Cabezas from the United States in the night of 17 to 18 April.<sup>196</sup> Aerial support of the invasion lasted only to 20 April 61: On 18 April 61, B-26 “923” took off for José Martí airport at 6.30 hours GMT, that is 0.30 local time, but the darkness and heavy haze precluded the success of the mission. When reports reached Puerto Cabezas on 18 April that the troops on the beach were coming upon intense pressure, Air America pilot Connie Seigrist asked permission to lead a flight of 6 B-26s to “Blue Beach”, that is to Playa Girón.

---

<sup>192</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.218.

<sup>193</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.219-21.

<sup>194</sup> Memorandum “JMGLOW Bonuses” of 7 September 61, that is document no. 141130 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp).

<sup>195</sup> On 17 April 61, at 8.30 hours GMT (that is 2.30 local time), B-26s “929” (“Lobo Two”, flown by Captain Gonzalo Herrera and navigator Angel López) and “945” (“Lobo One”, flown by Captain Pupy Varela and navigator Tomás Afont) took off for a bombing mission to “Blue Beach” (Playa Girón) and eventually also bombed the northern edge of “Red Beach” (Playa Larga). At 8.45 hours GMT, that is 2.45 local time, B-26s “930” (“Linda Two”, flown by Captain Mario Cortina and navigator Salvador Miralles) and “985” (“Linda One”, flown by Captain René García and navigator Luis Ardois) took off for interdiction missions to the Isle of Pines, sinking 2 ships and then destroying 6 trucks on “Red Beach”. At about 12.00 hours GMT, B-26s “915”, “928” (“Gorilla Two”, flown by Captain Ignacio Rojas and navigator Esteban Bovo-Carás) plus two more took off from Puerto Cabezas for “Blue Beach” to support the troops; they shot down one of Castro’s B-26s and destroyed one truck, but while the 3 others escaped by dropping the ordnance into the sea, “915” (“Chico Two”) was shot down near “Blue Beach”, killing the co-pilot (Eddie González), while the pilot (Captain Matías Farías) survived and joined the Brigade on the beach. At 15.45 hours, B-26s “935” and “917” took off from Puerto Cabezas for “Blue Beach”, but “935” (“Paloma One”) was shot down killing Captain Raúl Vianello (navigator Demetrio Pérez bailed out), while “917” (“Paloma Two”, flown by Captain Antonio Soto and navigator Benito González) landed at Grand Cayman. At 16.30 hours GMT, 2 more B-26s took off from Puerto Cabezas for “Blue Beach”. One of them (“Lion Two”, flown by Captain Crispín García and navigator Juan M. González) landed at Boca Chica, Key West, to refuel, left the Florida at 17.40, and crashed in the coastal jungle of Nicaragua, killing both men; the other B-26, “923” (“Lion 1”, flown by Captain Miguel Carro and navigator Eduardo Barea, who was to accompany C-46 “864” to Girón airfield), had to return to base for mechanical problems. At 19.30 hours GMT (13.30 local time), 2 B-26s left “Happy Valley” for “Blue Beach”, but both of them were shot down, and there were no survivors (killing pilot José Crespo and navigator Lorenzo Pérez-Lorenzo of “Puma One” as well as pilot Osvaldo Piedra and navigator Joe Fernández of “Puma Two”). Several night missions were attempted: “985” left Puerto Cabezas at 22.07 hours GMT (16.07 local time) for San Antonio de los Baños, but the blackout and heavy haze precluded the success of the mission. At 22.30 hours GMT, “927” took off from Puerto Cabezas, but did not find its target and landed at Boca Chica. At 23.10 hours GMT, that is at 17.10 hours local time, a last B-26 took off from Puerto Cabezas and dropped bombs and rockets onto San Antonio (“Listing of mission results with attached listings”, that is document no. 141186 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), “Log of tactical strikes”, Attachment 1, that is document no. 141185 with slightly different times, and with additional information from Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.173-204, and Hagedorn / Hellström, *Foreign Invaders*, p.130).

<sup>196</sup> Col. J. Hawkins, *Record of paramilitary action against the Castro Government of Cuba* of 5 May 61, CIA doc. no. 0000132097, at <http://www.foia.ucia.gov/scripts/cgiserv...ber=0000132097>, p.39 (= p.46 on the web).

In the afternoon, Seigrist (code name “Simpson”), Air America pilot Doug Price (code name “Peters”) and four Cuban pilots took off from Puerto Cabezas and flew their B-26s to Playa Girón, where they arrived about an hour before sunset. During that attack, the 6 B-26s destroyed a long line of tanks and trucks, a total of 30 vehicles, and killed some 900 of Castro’s soldiers.<sup>197</sup> Connie Seigrist recalls this mission as follows: “I informed my Agency boss (Gar) that I would like to take a flight to give aerial support for our now stranded ground troops. He granted permission provided there be at least one Cuban flown B-26 with each American flown B-26. Capt. Price decided to fly. We accounted for the first two American flown B-26s in the Invasion. Four Cuban B-26 crews immediately volunteered to go with us as they also felt the ground troops should not be left to forage for themselves. [...] A blue stripe on ground equipment, aircraft, or laid on the ground during the Invasion was our identification. Anything in Cuba not showing a blue stripe or panel was fair game. We six aircraft departed Puerto Cabezas and arrived over Bay of Pigs about an hour before dark. We spread, armed our switches, and test fired our guns when the coast was coming in sight. My aircraft carried eight 225 lb frag bombs, eight frag rockets, and fully armed fourteen forward firing 50 cal guns. Some others carried napalm. As we were coming over the coast I could see a convoy of vehicles coming from inland down the only road toward the beach. I knew our invading troops did not have enough ground equipment to form a convoy plus no blue stripes were visible. I decided to go straight in opening my bomb-bay doors while lining up for my dive. I set the intervalometer to release all bombs equally spaced within four seconds. When lined up on the lead tank I started my dive. When in range I released the bombs and simultaneously held down on my firing trigger while flying down the entire convoy. I turned out immediately making a 270 degree turn to come back in crosswise of the convoy to fire my rockets. I released two rockets at the tanks and watched as they ricochet of the tanks exploding into the air. I then joined pattern behind my flight. I then came around again in turn this time to fire my remaining rockets into the last three trucks in line that were towing field artillery pieces. My stores were now expended except for a few rounds of 50s for emergency and I pulled out to fly watch while the other B-26s completed their runs. We left the area as the last aircraft pulled up. The convoy looked awfully messed up as we departed, but I had my doubts that we caused much damage to the tanks. Doug’s trim system had been shot and he was having some control difficulties. I encouraged him to drop his tanks. He tried but they kept hanging on. He finally managed to get his aircraft under control. All of us took a few rounds, but no real damage and no one was injured. Later we were informed two Castro T-33s arrived over the area in less than a minute after we departed from our strike. We arrived back over Puerto Cabezas after dark. A couple of Cube B-26s were very low on fuel. A flight of replacement B-26s from Field Three had arrived shortly before us. While landing they had run into some grazing ponies that had gotten on to the runway and the runway was closed

---

<sup>197</sup> Leary / LeSchack, *Project Coldfeet*, pp.118/9. Captain Connie Seigrist and his observer Gustavo Villoldo flew B-26 “945” (“Lobo One”), Captain Doug Price and his observer Alberto Pérez-Sordo flew B-26 “927” (“Lobo Two”), while the other 4 B-26s were “960” (“Tiger Two”, flown by Captain Gustavo Ponzoa and navigator Rafael García-Pujol), “965” (“Chico One”, flown by Captain René García and navigator Luis Ardois), “950” (“Chico Two”, flown by Captain Mario Zúñiga and navigator Manuel Villafañá), and “955” (“Tiger One”, flown by Captain Antonio Soto and navigator Benito González). The fleet took off at 19.07Z, that is 13.07 hours local time (“Listing of mission results with attached listings” of 1961, that is document no. 141186 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp), plus “Log of tactical strikes”, Attachment 1, that is document no. 141185 at the same website, with additional information from Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.206-09).



until the ground crews could remove the bodies. It was a touch and go situation. Luckily the ponies were removed in a short time and the aircraft without much fuel remaining made it for landing just as the crew were positioning to bail out.”<sup>198</sup>

Encouraged by this success, several B-26s were sent out to support the troops at “Blue Beach” on 19 April 61: One B-26 took off from Puerto Cabezas at 0700Z (1.00 hours local time), followed by two other B-26s at 0845Z (2.45 hours local time); they successfully attacked a Cuban column after dawn. Shortly afterwards, 2 more B-26s, that had taken off at about 0900Z, appeared over the beach, flown by Alabama Air National Guard crew members Thomas “Pete” W. Ray, Riley Shamburger, Leo F. Baker, and Wade C. Gray, four B-26 instructors from Puerto Cabezas who had volunteered to fly that mission.<sup>199</sup> Although they were supposed to receive air cover from a nearby US Navy carrier, the cover did not arrive, and the 2 B-26s were shot down, killing the four Americans. Another B-26 took off at 0900Z, this one flown by Lt. Col. Joseph L. Shannon, but returned to base. At 1030Z, that is 4.30 hours local time, 2 more B-26s, whose serials are unknown,<sup>200</sup> took off from Puerto Cabezas, flown by Seigrist and Price. As they had been told before, they tried to contact the US Navy carrier, but did not receive any answer. Just before they reached the beach, they were told to leave the area immediately. President Kennedy had decided against additional US involvement. At 5.00 p.m., the Castro forces overran the rebel troops on the ground.<sup>201</sup> That evening, 7 B-26s were parked the flight line of “Happy Valley”.<sup>202</sup> To sum up, Air America’s contribution to the actual *Bay of Pigs* operation was that Air America pilots Connie Seigrist and Doug Price volunteered for several B-26 missions at the end: Connie Seigrist, whose alias in the *Bay of Pigs* operation was “Simpson”,<sup>203</sup> flew B-26 “945” on mission NT-26-37 on 18 April 61, interdicting a convoy of tanks and trucks west of the beachhead of “Blue Beach” and inflicting heavy damage to the convoy; on 19 April 61, Seigrist flew again to the “Blue Beach” and encountered considerable opposition from anti-aircraft artillery and from Cuban aircraft, but the serial of his B-26 is not indicated. Doug Price, whose alias during the *Bay of Pigs* operation was “Peters”, flew B-26 “927” to “Blue Beach” on 18 April 61, and an unidentified B-26 on 19 April 61.

In addition to the combat and air drop missions of the operation, an American-manned PBY patrolled the waters south of Cuba for a total of 57 hours during five days on air-sea rescue and communications relay duty.<sup>204</sup> This aircraft was PBY-5A HP-289 (msn 22022), officially owned by Turismo Aéreo SA, and flown out of “Happy Valley” as “289”.<sup>205</sup> It had

---

<sup>198</sup> Seigrist, *Memoirs*, p.56, in: UTD/Leary/IB11F9.

<sup>199</sup> Haas, *Apollo’s warriors*, p. 159; Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.214-16; “Log of tactical strikes”, Attachment 1, that is document no. 141185 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp).

<sup>200</sup> “Log of tactical strikes”, Attachment 1, that is document no. 141185 published on the CIA’s website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp); a Cuban pilot, whose log book is in the possession of Leif Hellström, notes four additional B-26s: “900”, “911”, “920”, and “924” (e-mail dated 22 February 2004, kindly sent to the author by Leif Hellström).

<sup>201</sup> Leary / LeSchack, *Project Coldfeet*, p.119. “Listing of mission results with attached listings”, document no. 141186 published at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/search\\_options.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp); Trest, *Air Commando One*, p.115.

<sup>202</sup> Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, p.218.

<sup>203</sup> E-mail dated 15 February 2004, kindly sent by Leif Hellström to the author.

<sup>204</sup> “Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, that is document no. 129914 at: <http://www.foia.cia.gov/search.asp>, Chapter N: Americans in combat, § 6, p.141 of the manuscript, p.149 on the website.

<sup>205</sup> See the photos contained in the file “83 photographs identified as JMTIDE” of 1961, that is document no. 133203 at the CIA’s website at <http://www.foia.cia.gov/search.asp>.

been fitted with electronic equipment at Miami in early 1961 and was named “Swan Island”. Its intention was to fly at altitude around the invasion area of Cuba and to transmit radio broadcasts back to the CIA HQ at Langley, Virginia.<sup>206</sup> The American crew of this PBY consisted of Air America pilot Don Teeters, as well as of Philip Gibbony, Philip Ingoglia, John S. Lewis, Joel F. Kilgore, Harry P. Rahm, and Joe M. Skipper. This crew flew missions in the PBY on 15, 17, 18, and 19 April 1961.<sup>207</sup> But before that date, Connie Seigrist had sometimes flown the aircraft to deliver prisoners to the prison built in the swamps of Guatemala, or to pick them up and bring them back to the base camp.<sup>208</sup>

#### **D) The aftermath**

After the failure of the invasion, Connie Seigrist, Doug Price, “Leo Turk (an Agency maintenance employee), some Air Guard personnel, and a few Agency para-loft employees were assigned to stay on in Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua as housekeepers for the Agency’s property left behind. Among our housekeeping duties we flew two C-46 flights loaded with boxes of undistributed propaganda leaflets to a safe distance from the coast out in the gulf away from sea traffic and dumped them into the sea. We also flew a few flights using B-26s to drop all the unused tanks of napalm on some exposed rocks a few miles out in the gulf. We participated in Civic Action assistance flying the C-46. A few flights were made to Managua for medical requirements or political purposes. Some other flights were made transporting teams for sport competitions such as softball. We also delivered three B-26s to the Nicaraguan Air Force on the Managua airport. The end of July 1961 Capt. Price and I left Nicaragua ending our tour there.”<sup>209</sup> Other B-26s were returned to Davis-Monthan, while the former Operation *Haik* aircraft reappeared in South Vietnam in Project *Farm Gate* in July 63. While in June and July 61, the C-54Gs returned to the USAF units they had come from, and while HP-321P, the alias of Los Hermanos’ C-54D 42-72523, was cancelled from the civil aircraft register of Panama on 24 October 61,<sup>210</sup> making believe that it returned to Kadena, PBY-5A HP-289 was delivered to Miami, where it was sold to Atlantic General Enterprises as 5Y-KUD in August 63 and then to the Caribbean Seafood Production Corp. as HR-236 in December 65 without moving from Miami, and then became N6108, TG-BIV, N5404J and ZK-PBY (not taken up), until it was lost in the Pacific Ocean on 16 January 94.<sup>211</sup> The situation of the C-46s is more complex, although most of the survivors remained with the CIA: On 13 May 1961, Air Asia asked the Taiwan CAA to issue registrations for C-46s serial

---

<sup>206</sup> Legg, *Consolidated PBY Catalina*, p.101.

<sup>207</sup> Memorandum “JMGLOW Bonuses” dated 7 September 1961, that is document no. 141130 at the CIA’s website at <http://www.foia.cia.gov/search.asp>.

<sup>208</sup> Seigrist, *Memoirs*, pp.51/2, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9.

<sup>209</sup> Seigrist, *Memoirs*, p.57, in: UTD/Leary/I B11F9.

<sup>210</sup> See above.

<sup>211</sup> Robbins, *Air America*, p.65; Hagedorn/Hellström, *Foreign Invaders*, pp.126-31; Hagedorn, *Central American and Caribbean Air Forces*, p.148; Leary, *Project Coldfeet*, pp.113-19; Legg, *Consolidated PBY Catalina*, pp. 54 (with a photo of 5Y-KUD), 98 (including a photo of TG-BIV of Troya SA), 99 (with a photo of HR-236), and 101. The FAA’s US Civil Aircraft Register of 1 July 1969 gives N6108 (msn 22022) as owned by Steward Davis Inc., Long Beach, CA. It also flew as “24-P-4” in the movie *Tora! Tora! Tora!*, a photo is in Legg, *Consolidated PBY Catalina*, p.41; in June 1988, it was sold as N5404J, before the New Zealand Catalina Group acquired it in 1993 allocating the registration ZK-PBY. However, it ditched into the Pacific Ocean near the Christmas Islands between Hawaii and Tahiti on 16 January 94 during delivery to New Zealand as N5404J; a picture of the sinking N5404J is in Legg, *Consolidated PBY Catalina*, p.270.

nos. 22362 (former B-864, reregistered on paper only<sup>212</sup> as B-874) and 22232 (former B-870), “repossessed from Los Hermanos”, for ferrying them from the United States to Taiwan.<sup>213</sup> On 15 May 61, C-46 no. 22232 was registered as B-914, and no. 22362 as B-916.

中華民國交通部民用航空局  
民用航空器登記證

中華民國五十年五月十五日 局長 翁廷章

CIVIL AERONAUTICS ADMINISTRATION  
MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS  
REPUBLIC OF CHINA

CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION OF CIVIL AIRCRAFT

Nationality and Registration marks B-914  
Serial number 22232  
Type and make Curtiss-Wright Co. C-46B  
Name of owner AACL  
Address of owner 46 Chung Shan Road, North, 2nd Section, Tainan  
It is hereby certified that the above aircraft has been duly entered on the register of this administration in accordance with the Convention on International Civil Aviation dated December 7, 1944 and with the Civil Aeronautics Act of China and has been allocated the nationality and registration marks B-914 and is of Chinese nationality.

Date of issue 15th day of May 19 61 Director R. T. Lee

中華民國交通部民用航空局  
民用航空器登記證

中華民國五十年五月十五日 局長 翁廷章

CIVIL AERONAUTICS ADMINISTRATION  
MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS  
REPUBLIC OF CHINA

CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION OF CIVIL AIRCRAFT

Nationality and Registration marks B-916  
Serial number 22362  
Type and make Curtiss-Wright Co. C-46B  
Name of owner AACL  
Address of owner 46 Chung Shan Road, North, 2nd Section, Tainan  
It is hereby certified that the above aircraft has been duly entered on the register of this administration in accordance with the Convention on International Civil Aviation dated December 7, 1944 and with the Civil Aeronautics Act of China and has been allocated the nationality and registration marks B-916 and is of Chinese nationality.

Date of issue 15th day of May 19 61 Director R. T. Lee

Certificates of registration of Air Asia C-46s B-914 and B-916, both dated 15 May 1961 (UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4)

So Captain Ralph Adam and First Officer C. M. Pinkava were sent to Miami as ferry crew in June 61, but when B-914 arrived at Tainan on 22 July 1961 from Hawaii via Iwo Jima, the Tainan Port Inspection office found a box with fifty tommy-gun bullets on the radio bench in the cockpit – of course, Air Asia explained that they did not know anything about those bullets.<sup>214</sup> Both aircraft returned to service with Air America, soon afterwards flying out of Bangkok.<sup>215</sup> C-46 “857” (former B-850, serial no. 22451), the aircraft that had crash-landed probably in November 60,<sup>216</sup> but was repaired, and whose official alias HP-316 was cancelled only on 9 March 61,<sup>217</sup> was sold to Southern Air Transport, Miami, as N74811, reportedly on

<sup>212</sup> As this paper work was done, when former B-864 was already flying in Guatemala as “864”, it is given here just for the record: “B-864 – Deregistration from CATCL approved 21 September 1960 on which date the aircraft was registered in the name of AACL as B-874. Sale of B-864 [to Los Hermanos] was also approved on 26 September 1960, although approval of deregistration from AACL was 19 October 1960” (Letter no. SLC-60-681 of 15 November 1960, sent by Secretary-Legal Counsel to VPO, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.4).

<sup>213</sup> Petition no. A-50-8306 of 13 May 1961, by Air Asia to the Taiwan CAA, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 reel no.4.

<sup>214</sup> Letter dated 8 August 61, sent by the Tainan Port Inspection Office to Air Asia, and Air Asia’s reply dated 15 August 61, both in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4.

<sup>215</sup> On 14 August 61, Air America pilot Ed Eckholdt flew B-914 out of Bangkok, and on 30 October 61, he flew B-916 out of Bangkok (both entries in: Log book of Ed Eckholdt, in: UTD/Leary/I B6F12).

<sup>216</sup> Hagedorn, *Central American and Caribbean air forces*, p.148, describes the accident as follows: “B-850 is one of the aircraft that took heavy ground fire during the operation and was forced to make an emergency landing in Guatemala, where its left main gear collapsed and a wing was wrapped around utility pole. Miraculously, it survived and was repaired.” November 1960 is given by Ferrer, *Operation Puma*, pp.94/5.

<sup>217</sup> On 9 March 61, registration HP-316, the alias of former Air Asia C-46 B-850 (msn 22451), was cancelled as “repossessed” (Davis, Martin, Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p.114).

14 September 61<sup>218</sup> – however, Air America’s Memorandum no. SA/P-61-142 of 20 October 1961 says that “S/N 22451 was exchanged with SAT for S/N 32992”,<sup>219</sup> that is N9935Z, and such an exchange would make more sense in March 61, when alias HP-316 was cancelled, because in that way the fleet received a “fresh” aircraft prior to the actual invasion. C-46 serial no. 22366 (former B-866) was destroyed in March 61, and on 31 March 61, Air America’s CEO George Doole himself bought the replacement aircraft (N9894Z, serial no. 32942) from Southern Air Transport, so that this aircraft could be offered to Los Hermanos on 4 April 61<sup>220</sup> – another fresh aircraft for the invasion. The ill-fated serial no. 22366, however, was later repaired and became N8417C with Intermountain Aviation on 12 July 62.<sup>221</sup> Because of the two losses, Air Asia / Air America now seemed to be the owners of C-46s msn 32942 and 32992, and indeed, Air Asia’s Memorandum no. SA/P-61-142 dated 20 October 61 states that “Documents involved in the transactions whereby the two remaining aircraft, S/N 32942 and 32992, were acquired are available,”<sup>222</sup> although other voices were more cautious.<sup>223</sup> As early as 3 October 61, however, Air Asia asked the CAA of Taiwan to issue a B-registration for a third C-46D to be ferried from Miami to Taiwan on or about 9 October 1961, adding that this was a replacement aircraft for the remaining two once sold to Los Hermanos: “we have agreed with the conditional sales vendee to accept a C-46D type aircraft, Serial No. 1887, in lieu of one of the aircraft delivered to that vendee by this Company by virtue of irreparable damage sustained by one of the aircraft sold by this Company to said vendee during the course of its possession of that aircraft.”<sup>224</sup> On 9 October 1961, that aircraft was registered as B-918, just for the ferry flight from Miami to Taiwan.<sup>225</sup> Its origin has been discussed above: Acquired probably in March 61 and given the alias HP-314P,<sup>226</sup> C-46D 44-78055 msn 33451 was identified in two Los Hermanos documents as “MSG 1887”, and this identity was interpreted by Air Asia and by all subsequent institutions as being the Manufacturer’s Serial Number, although it probably was the military serial used in Guatemala. As no C-46 with such a serial was used during the actual invasion, this may have been the C-46 that was sent to Florida, as it also had a US registration (N9895Z). The subsequent history of this aircraft has also been already discussed above: After it had been

---

<sup>218</sup> Eastwood / Roach, *Piston engine airliner production list*, p.149.

<sup>219</sup> Memorandum no. SA/P-61-142 of 20 October 1961, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 reel no.4.

<sup>220</sup> Memorandum dated 20 April 61, sent by Managing Director George Doole to the Treasurer Amos Hiatt; two letters dated 4 April 61, both sent by Air Asia’s Amos Hiatt to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez (all documents in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4).

<sup>221</sup> Davis/Martin/Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p.111.

<sup>222</sup> Memorandum no. SA/P-61-142 dated 20 October 61, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4.

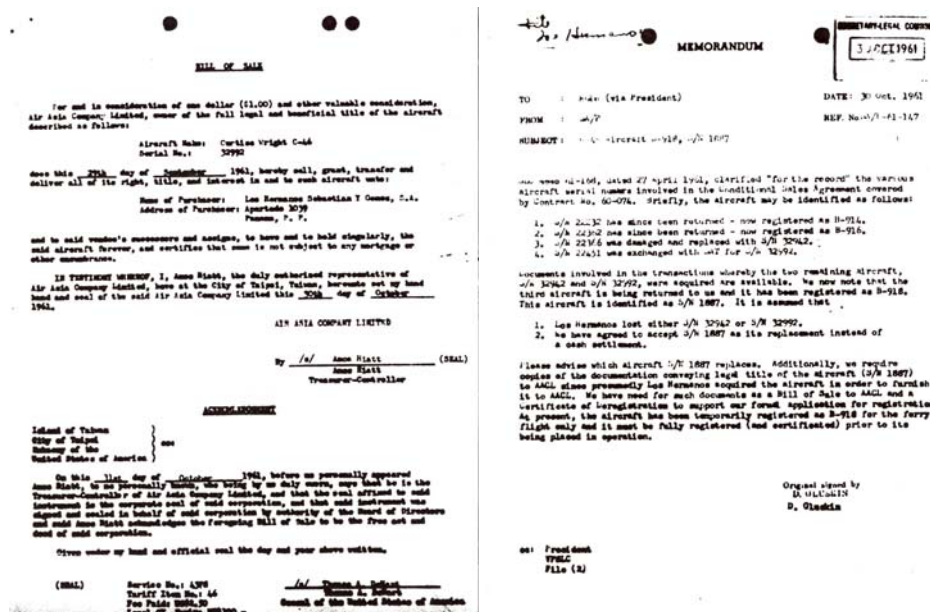
<sup>223</sup> In a Memorandum dated 11 October 61 (“Aircraft listing - Aircraft Liability Insurance”, in: UTD/Fink/B2F15), Air America’s Assistant Legal Counsel Jerry Fink commented the 2 “new” C-46s as follows: “Regarding C-46 aircraft with serial numbers 32992 and 32942” [which had apparently appeared on an Air America aircraft listing for insurances – no. IM-61-475 of 7 October 1961, unfortunately lost – , which is commented by this memorandum], “this office has no current information regarding our acquisition nor any record of B registration numbers having been assigned. It is believed that action may be pending on these aircraft...”

<sup>224</sup> Petition no. A-50-8867 dated 3 October 61, sent by Air Asia to the CAA of Taiwan, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4.

<sup>225</sup> Notification no. AN-2-50-1372 dated 9 October 61, sent by the CAA of Taiwan to Air Asia, adding that “the Chinese registry may be used for the ferry flight only after cancellation of Panamanian registry has been secured in writing” (in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4).

<sup>226</sup> Formerly, it was N9895Z of Jaime Camargo (Eastwood/Roach, *Piston engine airliner production list*, p.217).

provisionally registered as B-918 on 9 October 61 for the ferry flight only and left the United States about 12 October 61, its alias HP-314P was de-registered on 24 October 61, then it was officially sold by Los Hermanos to Air Asia "in exchange for aircraft Curtiss C-46 Serial no. 32942" on 1 November 61, and on 8 December 61, it was definitely registered to Air Asia as B-918.<sup>227</sup> So, C-46 serial no. 32942 ex 44-77546 and N9894Z that had been officially registered as AN-AMG for just a few weeks,<sup>228</sup> was lost – apparently the one mentioned by Connie Seigrist as "lost in Nicaragua on another normal flight by Gen. Reid's pilots after Capt. Price and I left further house keeping to them in Happy Valley. No one was hurt. The C-46 was destroyed."<sup>229</sup> C-46 msn 32992 (former N9935Z) ended up with LANICA as AN-AOD,<sup>230</sup> but the confusion about who really owned that aircraft produced a strange document: a Bill of Sale dated 29 September 61, to be signed and sealed on 30 October 61, and to be officially acknowledged on 31 October 61, by which Air Asia pretends to sell C-46 S/N 32992 to Los Hermanos for \$ 1,00.



Two documents that reflect the confusing property situation in October 1961: Bill of Sale for C-46 S/N 32992 about \$ 1,00 and a Memorandum that tries to sum up what had happened (both documents preserved in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no.4)

As to Los Hermanos' C-46 Serial no. 22343, whose alias HP-322P was also deregistered on 24 October 61, it survived with Nicaragua's airline LANICA as AN-AOC, until it was

<sup>227</sup> Notification no. AN-2-50-1372 dated 9 October 61 (in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4); Memorandum by Jerry Fink of 11 October 61 (in: UTD/Fink/B2F15); Letter dated 24 October 61, sent by the DGAC Panama to Los Hermanos; Los Hermanos' Bill of Sale to Air Asia dated 1 November 1961 referring to C-46D "Serial No. 44-78055 MSG 1887"; and CAA of Taiwan, Notification no. AN-2-50-1645, sent to Air Asia on 8 December 61 (all three documents in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4)

<sup>228</sup> Davis / Martin / Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p. 89.

<sup>229</sup> Letter dated 4 January 1987, sent by Connie Seigrist to Bill Leary, p.2, preserved at: UTD/Leary/I B9F16.

<sup>230</sup> Davis/Martin/Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46 Commando*, p.90.



damaged beyond repair at Managua on 25 February 1976.<sup>231</sup> Finally, the last C-46 for which a Panamanian registry (HP-315) with Los Hermanos is mentioned, former 44-78079 (msn 33445), believed to have been “292”, apparently returned to Davis-Monthan AFB. As C-46 “292” was not used during the actual invasion, this may have been the C-46 that had sunk into the sand in Nicaragua in April 61, when Connie Seigrist was looking for an auxiliary landing field: “We needed an auxiliary field in preparation for the Invasion. [...] I searched out an area of fairly level open grass land nearby that appeared it could support the weight of C-46s and B-26s. I landed the forth C-46 there and immediately it sank down into the ground. That C-46 was rendered unavailable for the Invasion because of the time involved for digging it out. I flew it to Miami after the invasion.”<sup>232</sup> Having stuck in the sand for quite a while, it may have received some damage, and that might explain why it was returned to Davis Monthan AFB for storage. A couple of years later, on 2 March 65, it was sold there minus engines, and it ended up as CC-CDI with ALFA in Chile, where it crashed on 18 July 68.<sup>233</sup> To sum up: Air America’s contribution to the *Bay of Pigs* operation consisted of sending some instructor pilots, who later even flew combat missions, of sending there 4 of their own C-46s, and of financing part of the losses of transport aircraft that occurred during the operation: For only 1 C-46 (B-918) was returned as a compensation for the 3 C-46s that had been destroyed (B-850, B-866, and N9894Z/AN-AMG).

#### **E) A new Cuban crisis in 1963:**

In early 1963, US President Kennedy was increasingly worried about Cuban subversion in Latin America, especially in Venezuela, and about the Soviet presence in the Caribbean. So on 15 March 63, the Special Group of the CIA authorized a small sabotage program. Through radio propaganda and fictitious letters sent to Cubans, the CIA hoped to encourage a swifter removal of the Soviet troops.<sup>234</sup> Already in February 63 Air America wanted to sell up to 6 C-46s to the customers.<sup>235</sup> On 8 March 1963, C-46s B-914 and B-918 were sold to USAID-Laos, and on 9 April 63, the Executive Committee of Air Asia Co Ltd agreed to sell C-46s B-846, B-854, B-858, and B-910 to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez SA, Panama, the same company which had been used as a CIA cover during the *Bay of Pigs* operation, and which had offered to purchase these aircraft.<sup>236</sup> The plan was to deliver B-854 on 15 April 63, B-846 on 1 May 63, B-910 on 15 May 63, and B-858 on 1 June 63.<sup>237</sup> But already on 1 April 63, Los Hermanos seemed to be interested only in 3 C-46s, because that day, Air Asia asked the CAA of Taiwan to approve the sale and deregistration only of C-46s B-846, B-854, and B-858.<sup>238</sup> By late April 63, it was clear that B-858 and B-910 would remain in use with Air America, and on 25 April 63, Air Asia’s Washington Office sent a two-page draft letter agreement to Los Hermanos, covering the sale of C-46s B-846 and B-854 to be taken over by

<sup>231</sup> Letter dated 24 October 61, sent by the DGAC Panama to Los Hermanos (UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4); Davis / Martin / Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p. 110.

<sup>232</sup> Letter dated 4 January 1987, sent by Connie Seigrist to Bill Leary, p.2, preserved at: UTD/Leary/I B9F16.

<sup>233</sup> Davis / Martin / Whittle, *The Curtiss C-46*, p. 100.

<sup>234</sup> Fursenko / Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, p.329.

<sup>235</sup> Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committee of Air Asia Co Ltd of 26 February 63, in: UTD/CIA/B7F2.

<sup>236</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of 9 April 63, in: UTD/CIA/B7F2. Negotiations to sell B-914 and B-918 to USAID had already begun by February 63 (Memorandum dated 15 February 63, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4).

<sup>237</sup> Memorandum no. CFO-63-127-A/6 dated 3 April 63, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 4.

<sup>238</sup> Petition no. A-52-11292 dated 1 April 63, sent by Air Asia to the CAA of Taiwan, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no. 4).

Los Hermanos at Tainan “on or before May 1, 1963”.<sup>239</sup> Indeed, both C-46s were sold to Los Hermanos on 1 May 63, and so it may be assumed that these aircraft were to be used to drop propaganda material over Cuba within the new CIA sabotage program. But, on 18 May 63, the interests that Los Hermanos had in both C-46s were transferred to TASA (Turismo Aéreo SA), Panama,<sup>240</sup> and Air Asia accepted “the latter company’s obligation in lieu of Los Hermanos”.<sup>241</sup> By mid-July 63, the USA started a harassment campaign against Cuba, which was supposed to include a major act of sabotage every month.<sup>242</sup> But the two C-46s remained at Tainan, probably because the *détente* reached by Kennedy and Khrushchev in the summer of 1963<sup>243</sup> made it no longer necessary to use them in the Caribbean theater. It was only on 23 August 63, that both C-46s were officially registered as HP-314P (msn 33372, ex B-854) and HP-315P (msn 22215, ex B-846)<sup>244</sup> to TASA (Turismo Aéreo SA).<sup>245</sup> But this was for

**LT DIRECTOR CIVIL AERONAUTICS ADMINISTRATION TAIPEI TAIWAN/REPUBLIC OF CHINA**

**THIS IS TO NOTIFY YOU THAT THE C-46 AIRCRAFT MSN33372 AND MSN22215 HAVE BEEN ISSUED WITH 23 AUGUST 1963 EFFECTIVENESS CERTIFICATES OF REGISTRATION NUMBERS HP-314P AND HP-315P AND AIRWORTHINESS CERTIFICATES THESE AIRCRAFTS MAY BE PERMITTED BY ANY QUALIFIED PILOT POSSESSING VALID AIRMAN LICENSES ISSUED BY AN ICAO MEMBER STATE IT IS REQUESTED THAT YOU CAUSE COPIES OF THIS CABLEGRAM TO BE ATTACHED TO THE RESPECTIVE AIRCRAFT BY THE AIR ASIA COMPANY LIMITED VENDOR OF SUCH AIRCRAFT TO THEIR PANAMANIAN OWNER AS EVIDENCE TO ANY PERSON WHO MAY BE CONCERNED OF SUCH REGISTRY CERTIFICATION AND LICENCE**

**NAS PANAMA CIVIL AERONAUTIC**

Cable of August 63 sent by the DGAC Panama to the CAA of Taiwan  
(UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4)

delivery only, because in their petition no. A-52-12001 sent to the CAA of Taiwan on 28 August 63, Air Asia requested “approval to fly, in ferry delivery, the said two C-46 type aircraft bearing the stated Panamanian registry [...] as follows: from Tainan to Taipei [...]; such flight would be conducted during the evening of 29 August 1963; the ferry departure of such aircraft [...] simultaneously from Taipei on the morning of 30 August 1963.”<sup>246</sup> Aboard both C-46s were 2 Helio Couriers<sup>247</sup> in the meantime owned by Marathon Aviation of Miami: former Air America Helio B-847 (msn 541, by then reregistered as N28927) and former VIAT XV-NAI (msn 568, officially N48702). While Air Asia also asked the CAA of Taiwan to approve the export of former B-847, the former VIAT Helio aboard the C-46s is described

<sup>239</sup> Draft Letter Agreement of 25 April 63, between Air Asia’s Washington office and Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez SA, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel 4.

<sup>240</sup> Status papers for these two C-46s as of 15 January 74 in: UTD/CIA/B56F4.

<sup>241</sup> Letter no. WC-63-2487, sent by Air Asia’s Washington Counsel James Bastian to VPSLC, Taipei on 17 July 63 (in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel 4).

<sup>242</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *Spies and commandos*, p.59.

<sup>243</sup> Fursenko / Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, p.338.

<sup>244</sup> Cable sent by the DGAC, Panama, to the CAA of Taiwan in August 63, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4.

<sup>245</sup> Burnett / Slack / Davis / Hagedorn / Kuhn, *Central American and the Caribbean civil aircraft registers*, p.29.

<sup>246</sup> Petition no. A-52-12001, sent by Air Asia to the CAA of Taiwan on 28 August 63, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4.

<sup>247</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA’s secret war in Tibet*, p.191.



only as “aircraft parts, engines”.<sup>248</sup> A hand-written note on the petition adds that, as far as Air Asia was concerned, the delivery flight would end at Bangkok – apparently the place where the aircraft were (or were to be) taken over by the purchaser. On 5 October 63, both C-46s and both Helios were registered to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs,<sup>249</sup> and since then, they were operated by the ARC or *Aviation Research Center*, Charbatia Air Base (“Oak Tree”), India, on clandestine supply missions.<sup>250</sup> The provisional Panamanian registrations of the two C-46s, however, were cancelled only on 10 August 1964,<sup>251</sup> that is about a month before their Indian registry marks were also cancelled,<sup>252</sup> because both C-46s returned to service with Air America.

© University of Texas at Dallas, 11 August 2008, last updated on 23 August 2010.

---

<sup>248</sup> Petition no. A-52-12001, sent by Air Asia to the CAA of Taiwan on 28 August 63, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel 4. For details about the Helios see the Helio file of this database.

<sup>249</sup> The C-46s became VT-DRH (former B-846) and VT-DRI (former B-854), while the Helios became VT-DRJ (former B-847) and VT-DRK (former XV-NAI). All of these aircraft were registered on 5 October 63 (Letter of 11 September 2000, sent by Charan Dass, Office of the Director General of Civil Aviation, India, to the author).

<sup>250</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp. 188-95.

<sup>251</sup> Burnett / Slack / Davis / Hagedorn / Kuhn, *Central American and the Caribbean civil aircraft registers*, p.29.

<sup>252</sup> Registrations VT-DRH and VT-DRI were cancelled on 23 September 64 (Letter dated 11 September 2000 sent by Charan Dass, Office of the Director General of Civil Aviation, India, to the author).