

AIR AMERICA: BOEING-VERTOL CH-47C CHINOOK
by Dr. Joe F. Leeker



Air America Chinook “016” airlifts a C-46 fuselage at Udorn in 1973
(*Air America Log*, vol. VII, no. 8, 1973, p. 3)

The types of missions flown by Air America’s CH-47C Chinooks:

All Air America Chinooks had armor plates and IFR capability. Essentially, there were four types of missions flown by the Chinooks: First, they were used as troop carriers within Laos, and in this configuration, they could carry 32 passengers (Aircraft and avionics information as of 1 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14); to quote one example: On 20 January 73, two Air America Chinooks were used to transport troops to re-open the Vientiane-Luang Prabang highway (Bowers, *The USAF in South-East Asia. Tactical Airlift*, p. 462). In another configuration, they could carry wounded out of a battle area, then they could be equipped with 24 litters, while 2 attendants could take care of the wounded. In still another configuration, they could carry cargo and even small vehicles, and so they had roller conveyer tracks and inertia reels. They could also rescue besieged people and lift heavy equipment with its hoist winch, and they could transport large outside cargo in a sling (Aircraft and avionics information as of 1 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14), including downed aircraft like a Twin Otter or even a C-46 fuselage estimated to weigh about 13,000 pounds. But the primary mission of the Chinook was probably transporting large external sling loads from Udorn, Thailand to isolated exact positions in Laos. An Air America Chinook could move a 155MM gun with ammunition and crew from one position to another in one trip; the crew and ammunition were loaded inside and the gun outside to a cargo hook. Sometimes, even four cargo hooks were used in order to transport four different loads to four different places (Hutchison, *Chinooks*, p. 4).

Statistics according to official Air America documents:

- 8 Boeing-Vertol CH-47C Chinooks were acquired from the US Army in late 72 (Bowers, *The USAF in South-East Asia. Tactical Airlift*, p. 454)
- The first three CH-47s arrived at Udorn on 2 October 72 (Minutes ExCom-AAACL/AAM of 10 October 72, in: UTD/CIA/B9F7)
- Inventories of 31 March 72 > 30 November 72 (in: UTD/CIA/B1F10): 0 > 6L

The individual aircraft histories:

Type	registration / serial	c/n (msn)	date acquired	origin
Boeing CH-47C	"992"	B-584	Oct./Nov. 72	ex US Army 68-15992

Service history: used for local training at Udorn on 7 January 73, involving the Air America crew of Messrs. Kanach, Hutchison, Wade, and Yamskulna (Udorn daily flight schedule of 7 Jan. 73, in: UTD/Severson/B1F7); on 26 January 73, "992" was flown by the Air America crew of Messrs. Reid, Bengtson, Davis, and Sangduen on a AID-439-713/*Peppergrinder* mission out of Udorn (Udorn daily flight schedule of 26 Jan. 73, in: UTD/Severson/B1F7); on 29 January 73, the rotors of Air America CH-47s "992" and "857" touched each other, while taxiing at the refueling area of Vang Vieng (L-16), Laos (XOXO of 29 Jan. 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B25F12); repaired; also flown by Preston S. Myers on several occasions (Interview with P.S. Myers in March 96); assigned to contract F04606-71-C-0002 for use out of Udorn 16-30 April 73 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14); still so 1-30 November 73; in flyable storage at Udorn 1-31 December 73 and 1 April-31 May 74 (Flight Operations Circulars of 1 November 73, 1 December 73, 1 April 74, and 1 May 74, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

Fate: returned to the US Army in June 74 (?); converted to CH-47D in 1990 and reserialled as 90-0214.

Boeing CH-47C	"998"	B-590	Oct./Nov. 72	ex US Army 68-15998
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Service history: used for local training at Udorn on 7 January 73, involving the Air America crew of Messrs. Spearman, Collard, Higgings, Sickler, and J. Myers (Udorn daily flight schedule of 7 Jan. 73, in: UTD/Severson/B1F7); on 26 January 73, "998" was flown by the Air America crew of Messrs. R. Davis, Collard, Dodds, and Disonrutana on a Requirements Office/*Peppergrinder* mission out of Udorn (Udorn daily flight schedule of 26 Jan. 73, in: UTD/Severson/B1F7); flown by the Air America crew of Messrs. Collard, Bengtson, Crowell, and Disonrutana from Udorn (T-08) to Vang Vieng (L-16) under contract AID-439-713 on 2 March 73 (Udorn daily flight schedule of 2 March 73, in: UTD/Bonansinga); photos can be found in: UTD/Abadie/B1; UTD/Landry/B1F2; the A. Cates collection preserved at TTU (no. VA024826); Love, *Wings of Air America*, p. 69; and Conboy, *War in Laos*, p. 60; assigned to contract F04606-71-C-0002 for use out of Udorn 16-30 April 73 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14); still so 1 November-31 December 73 and 1 April-31 May 74 (Flight Operations Circulars of 1 November 73, 1 December 73, 1 April 74, and 1 May 74, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

Fate: returned to the US Army in June 74 (?); converted to CH-47D in 1990 and reserialled as 90-0217. Used in Afghanistan in 2002, where it experienced an engine failure in the summer of 2003, loaded with troops, and crashed; no one was killed, but the aircraft was a total loss (e-mail dated 4 Nov. 2004, sent by Rob Devlin to Dr. Erik Carlson, who kindly forwarded it to the author).

Boeing CH-47C "016" B-608 Oct./Nov. 72 ex US Army 68-16016

Service history: photos were published in: *Air America Log*, vol. VII, no. 8, 1973, p.3; another photo can be found in the A. Cates collection preserved at TTU (no. VA024827); based at Udorn in 73; also flown by Preston S. Myers on several occasions (Interview with P. S. Myers in March 96); assigned to contract F04606-71-C-0002 for use out of Udorn 16-30 April 73 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14); still so 1 November-31 December 73; in 1973, "016", crewed by Captain W. R. Hutchison, First Officer T. H. Olson, and Flight Mechanics S. G. Sickler and D. R. Crowell, airlifted two C-46 fuselages from Air America's Udorn base to the Royal Thai Army compound and to the Royal Thai Border Police Camp, where they were to be used for training; Air America's Chief Flight Mechanic G. Eiler performed the rigging chores on the pick-up end and Assistant Chief Flight Mechanic C. Brigham was the rigging specialist at the delivery end (E. W. Knight, "Udorn-based CH-47 lifts stripped C-46s"); in flyable storage at Udorn 1 April-31 May 74 (Flight Operations Circulars of 1 November 73, 1 December 73, 1 April 74, and 1 May 74, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C); airlifted Air America DHC-6 N389EX, which had crashed at Sala Phou Koum (LS-260), Laos, on 28 April 74, back to Udorn in April 74 (a photo is preserved in: UTD/Maxwell/B1F5).

Fate: returned to the US Army in June 74 (?); converted to CH-47D in 1988 and reserialled as 88-0096.



Chinook 019 at Udorn in 1973
(*Air America Log*, vol. VII, no. 5, 1973, p. 8)



Chinook 019 at Udorn in 1973
(with kind permission from Judy Porter)

Boeing CH-47C "019" B-611 Oct./Nov. 72 ex US Army 68-16019

Service history: a photo can be found in: *Air America Log*, vol. VII, no. 5, 1973, p. 8, and in: UTD/Landry/B1F2; used for local training at Udorn on 7 January 73, involving the Air America crew of Messrs. Brand, Moher, Gehring, R. Stewart, and Sivasilchai (Udorn daily flight schedule of 7 Jan. 73, in: UTD/Severson/B1F7); on 26 April 73, Air America UH-34D H-45 suffered an engine failure and made a forced landing at coordinates TF 6799, about 6 nautical miles northeast of Ban Xon (LS-272); as an engine change was required, Air America Chinook "019" picked up H-45 and returned it to Udorn (XOXO of 26 April 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B25F12); assigned to contract F04606-71-C-0002 for use out of Udorn 16-30 April 73 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14); still so 1 November-31 December 73 and 1 April-31 May 74 (Flight Operations Circulars of 1 November 73, 1 December 73, 1 April 74, and 1 May 74, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

Fate: returned to the US Army in June 74 (?); converted to CH-47D in 1991 and reserialled as 91-0233.

Boeing CH-47C “828” B-540 Oct./Nov. 72 ex US Army 68-15828

Service history: flown by the Air America crew of Messrs. Hitchman, Gehring, Dodds, and Sivasilchai from Udorn (T-08) to Vang Vieng (L-16) under contract AID-439-713 on 2 March 73 (Udorn daily flight schedule of 2 March 73, in: UTD/Bonansinga); assigned to contract F04606-71-C-0002 for use out of Udorn 16-30 April 73 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14); still so 1 November-31 December 73 and 1 April-31 May 74 (Flight Operations Circulars of 1 November 73, 1 December 73, 1 April 74, and 1 May 74, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

Fate: returned to the US Army in June 74 (?); converted to CH-47D in 1990 and reserialled as 90-0184.



Chinook 857 in 1972/73
(UTD/LaShomb/B6F10)

Boeing CH-47C “857” B-569 Oct./Nov. 72 ex US Army 68-15857

Service history: flown by the Air America crew of Messrs. Weitz, Arnesen, Crowell, and Dodds from Udorn (T-08) to Vang Vieng (L-16) on 7 January 73 on a *Peppergrinder* mission (Udorn daily flight schedule of 7 Jan. 73, in: UTD/Severson/B1F7); on 26 January 73, “857” was flown by the Air America crew of Messrs. Kanach, Olson, Crowell, and Emarat on a AID-439-713 mission out of Udorn (Udorn daily flight schedule of 26 Jan. 73, in: UTD/Severson/B1F7); on 29 January 73, the rotors of Air America CH-47s “992” and “857” touched each other, while taxiing at the refueling area of Vang Vieng (L-16), Laos (XOXO of 29 Jan. 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B25F12); repaired; used for local training at Udorn (T-08) on 2 March 73, involving the Air America crew of Messrs. Spearman, Andrews, Bulkley, and J. Myers (Udorn daily flight schedule of 2 March 73, in: UTD/Bonansinga); a photo is preserved in: UTD/LaShomb/B6F10; assigned to contract F04606-71-C-0002 for use out of Udorn 16-30 April 73 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14).

Fate: returned to the US Army on 20 September 73 (Flight Operations Circular of 1 November 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C); converted to CH-47D in 1990 and reserialled as 90-0219.

Boeing CH-47C “864” B-576 Oct./Nov. 72 ex US Army 68-15864

Service history: a photo of “864” can be found in the A. Cates collection preserved at TTU (no. VA024831); on 2 December 72, the forward main rotor blade was struck by a wind shield brace, while “864” was at the Air America ramp at Vientiane, but as there was no damage, the aircraft resumed normal operation; flew Udorn (T-08) - Vientiane (L-08) on 14 December 72 (Crew member duty report of H .F. Miller, in:

UTD/ Miller/B4F6; type not given); used for local training at Udorn on 7 January 73, involving the Air America crew of Messrs. Kanach, Hutchison, Wade, and Yamskulna (Udorn daily flight schedule of 7 Jan. 73, in: UTD/Severson/B1F7); on 26 January 73, “864” was used for local training at Udorn involving the Air America crew of Messrs. Spearman, Egecrone, Stewart, and Yamskulna (Udorn daily flight schedule of 26 Jan. 73, in: UTD/Severson/B1F7); assigned to contract F04606-71-C-0002 for use out of Udorn 16-30 April 73 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14).

Fate: returned to the US Army on 20 September 73 (Flight Operations Circular of 1 November 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C); converted to CH-47D in 1990 and reserialled as 90-0195.

Boeing CH-47C “103” B-618 Oct./Nov. 72 ex US Army 69-17103

Service history: flew Udorn (T-08) - Long Tieng (LS-20A) on 2 February 74 (Crew member duty report of H .F. Miller, in: UTD/Miller/B4F6; type not given); assigned to contract F04606-71-C-0002 for use out of Udorn 16-30 April 73 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14); still so 1 November-31 December 73 and 1 April-31 May 74 (Flight Operations Circulars of 1 November 73, 1 December 73, 1 April 74, and 1 May 74, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

Fate: returned to the US Army in June 74 (?); converted to CH-47D in 1991 and reserialled as 91-0259.

Before Air America received their own Chinooks in 1972, heavy cargo like guns was transported by US Army Chinooks even within Laos. The photo below, which was taken by MacAlan Thompson at Nam Bac (LS-203) in the spring of 1967, shows US Army Chinook “179” hauling a 105 mm gun up to the top of a nearby hill.



US Army Chinook “179” at Nam Bac in 1967
(with kind permission from MacAlan Thompson)

Errors:

Some publications mention an Air America Chinook “999”, which was reported to have been written off in the Republic of Vietnam on 19 May 72. According to official Air America fleet lists, such an aircraft did never exist. The error seems to go back to a photo published in Conboy, *War in Laos*, p. 60, probably taken in late 72, where Chinook “998” looks a little bit like “999”.