

26 JAN 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Support

SUBJECT: Arming of Air America flight  
Crews in South Vietnam.

1. The crash of an Air America C-47, B929, on 14 January 1966 in the Mekong Delta and subsequent treatment of the crew by the Viet Cong raised the issue of establishing a policy arming Air America flight crews in South Vietnam. Arguments for and against arming the crews were requested from interested components at Headquarters, FE, [ ] and from Saigon Station in collaboration with Air America. There is unanimous agreement that the crews operating in South Vietnam should be allowed to carry arms, and the Chief of Station, Saigon has today requested "approval soonest" to implement a policy to that effect.

2. The COS, Saigon states that "the normal arguments for and against arming Air America aircrews prevail now as in the past." Those "normal" arguments, i.e., better chance of survival if unarmed when captured, difficulty in controlling use and possession of weapons, are the basis for the prohibition against carrying arms in Laos. But the COS affirms that the normal arguments have been overridden by the status quo in South Vietnam where the anti-aircraft threat has increased and the Viet Cong no longer treat crews as civilians or even as Prisoners of War. Noting that the usual time factor between forced landing and rescue is about fifteen to thirty minutes, he concludes: "if we can give a downed crew the chance of survival by holding the Viet Cong out of grenade range for such a period by allowing them to carry arms we must do so."

3. Ambassador PORTER at Saigon wholeheartedly concurs in the arming of the crews and told the COS to "quote me if useful." The full concurrence of Ambassador Lodge is anticipated.

APPROVED FOR  
RELEASE DATE:  
14-Sep-2009

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4. Saigon Station in collaboration with Air America, Saigon, has selected an appropriate weapon, arranged for weapons storage, control and maintenance and plans to commence aircrew training in use of weapons on 30 January

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5. The COS concludes by stating the "Air America crews are very jittery and need assurance some action being taken."

6. Approval to arm Air America crews operating in South Vietnam with controls proposed by the COS, Saigon is recommended.

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Alan M. Warfield  
Assistant Deputy Director  
for Support

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