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The CIA Makes the Going Grate

SUNDAY STAR
12 April 1970

Here's a surprise: Newsweek reports that Air America, which serves the CIA in Southeast Asia, is now one of the biggest U.S. airlines — ranking just behind National and just ahead of Northeast.

The surprise, of course, is that it isn't the biggest. I suppose it's the service. Who wants to fly on an airline run by the CIA?

Take the case of Marvin Munch, a de-frocked transvestite who was being shipped home to Peoria from Saigon in disgrace.

Wandering through the Ton Son Nhut Airport, Munch took a wrong turn, fell through a trapdoor, and landed in a heap in front of the Air America ticket counter.

"Heavens to Betsy!" Munch said.

"I'm glad you know the password," the ticket agent, a dashing type wearing a black eye patch over his left ear, said as he put away his \$8 Aston-Martin automatic.

Humming a few bars of "Fly the Friendly Spies of America," the agent wrote out a ticket for Munch in invisible ink, burned it in an ashtray and handed him a boarding pass. "After you memorize this," whispered the agent, "eat it."

Munch nervously did so. "This flight, should you decide to accept it," said the agent grimly, "is now boarding through the broom closet, tunnel D-12. You'll recognize it easily. The aircraft is disguised as a four-engine water buffalo."

Munch had no trouble finding the plane. It was the only four-engine water buffalo on the field. He was greeted at the top of the gangway by an attractive stewardess wearing dark glasses and a black moustache.

"Coffee, tea or, in case of capture by the enemy, hemlock, sir?" she inquired.

"What enemy?" asked Munch uneasily.

"Who knows?" said the stewardess mysteriously. "Please extinguish all fuses and fasten your parachutes for takeoff."

Once airborne, the pilot came back into the cabin. He was wearing puttees, a leather helmet and a white silk scarf. Bending over Munch, he whispered in his ear: "This is your captain, X-184-2(B), speaking. We have reached our cruising altitude of 15 feet. We estimate a flight time of two hours and 18 minutes to our top-secret destination. Do you happen to know, old chap, where we're going?"

"I'd like to go to Peoria," Munch said.

"Jolly good show that," said the pilot, nodding. "It's seventy kilometers through hell. But so's Decatur."

An hour later, the plane landed at Whar Dhat, capital of the neutralist Asian kingdom of Cao Dng.

"Good luck, men," said the pilot, shaking each passen-

ger's hand. "This plane will self-destruct in five seconds." And he led the hasty exit, waving a poison-tipped umbrella and shouting, "Peoria for the Peorians!"

The water buffalo blew up on schedule and the resultant blast toppled the neutralist government, a shaky coalition at best.

The pilot surveyed the wreckage with satisfaction. "Damn fine job," he said proudly. "It's heartwarming to know Peoria will now be on our side."

Munch said he didn't think this was Peoria.

"Never mind," said the pilot. "Wherever it is, it's on our side now. And we're keeping alive the finest traditions of the CIA. It's the third government we toppled this week."

"But why?" asked Munch.

"Because," said the pilot, tossing the end of his white silk scarf jauntily over one shoulder, "it was there."

APPROVED FOR
RELEASE DATE:
18-Dec-2009

APPROVED FOR
RELEASE DATE:
24-Sep-2009