

Gettysburg College
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Guide to MS-202:
James W. Davis Letters



Gettysburg College, Musselman Library
Special Collections and College Archives

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MS-202: James W. Davis Letters

Processed by Karen D. Drickamer
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Size

1 box, .33 cubic feet

Location

Special Collections

Dates

Inclusive: 1951-1968
Bulk: 1966-1968

Provenance

Purchased from Michael Brown Rare Books.

Biographical Note

James Walter Davis was born in 1910, enlisted in the Army in 1930, completed his Basic training at Greenwood, Mississippi, and was assigned to Army Field Artillery. In order to be a member of the Air Corps, Davis attended night school. He was eventually received into Cadet Training for the Army Air Corps at Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York before graduating from Craig Field in Selma, Alabama. He became a flight instructor and instrument instructor piloting B24s and C-54s. By 1942, the Army created Air Transport Command (ATC), which was the first service able to deliver supplies and equipment to combat theaters around the world by air. At its height in August 1945, ATC operated more than 3200 transport aircraft and employed 209,000 personnel. James Davis flew for ATC in Europe, Egypt, India, China, and Brazil. He resigned as a major in 1946 to return home to help his ailing mother. Shortly after her death, James re-enlisted in the Army Air Force as a Sergeant Major. He married Janet Wilcox in 1947. By the time of the Berlin Air Lift (1948-49), James was once again a commissioned officer with the rank of major. He served in Germany for 3 years, stationed at Furstenfeldbruck AFB ("Fursty") near Munich.

Davis returned to the United States on detached service, flying for Capital Airways, a primary civilian carrier for the military's Logistic Air Support (LOGAIR) program, flying cargo for the CIA. Following after-hours instruction in helicopter piloting, Davis became a highly qualified helicopter pilot and a flight instructor for Southern Airways Flight School for Air Force cadres. Davis retired from the US Air Force as a Lt. Col. in 1958. He moved his family to Lakeland, Florida, and flew helicopters for Publix Markets. His ship crashed during a flight from Lakeland to Clearwater, and he suffered severe back injuries and a broken leg, injuries that continued to plague him for years. (*Naples Daily News*. Sunday, March 16, 1975. p. 58.)

In August of 1965, James joined Air America as a civilian pilot, stationed in Saigon, Vietnam, flying Bell UH-1 helicopters. He was First Officer until he resigned on 27 December, 1968, at age 58. (Private correspondence, **Patrizia Nava, Eugene McDermott Library, The University of Texas at Dallas, 18 Nov. 2016.**)

Historical Note

Within a year after the war against the Japanese ended, a Chinese/American company, Civil Air Transport, supported the Chinese National Government during their combat actions against the Communist Chinese by flying troops, supplies and munitions to Nationalist forces on mainland China. When the Nationalist China forces were defeated in 1949, the airline evacuated thousands of Chinese Nationals to the island of Taiwan. The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 spurred the CIA to acquire Civil Air Transport and the company was reorganized as CAT Incorporated, ostensibly a private enterprise, but actually CIA's new aviation arm. In 1958, CAT was reorganized as Air America and provided CIA with supply and covert mission support flights, as well as search and rescue capabilities, during the war in both Laos and South Vietnam. By 1962, the airline was moving and extracting troops and personnel from the war zone as well as providing support for several foreign governments involved in the war. It also transported refugees and took photos that would be used to further intelligence information.

The pilots and support personnel came from all aviation sources to include every branch of the US military. The airline flew the combination of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters because of the many varied, dangerous and unforgiving landing spots carved out of jungle and mountain sides. They flew cargo of food, mail, cement, roofing material, sedated animals, and gasoline.

They were a patriotic and professional group, and although civilians, they operated in combat areas and risk was all in a day's work. The crews displayed outstanding skill and boundless courage day and night, in monsoons, and in continuous dangerous all weather operations. The pilots were not required to fly to the rescue of military personnel in distress or place their lives in danger and received no compensation for their efforts and often lost wages because of their actions. Air America lost 240 pilots and crew to hostile fire.

During the Fall of Saigon in April 1975, around 100 Marine, Air Force, and Air America choppers, took part in Operation Frequent Wind and evacuated an estimated 7,000 Americans and South Vietnamese out of Saigon in less than 24 hours. Air America was disbanded in 1976.

Scope and Content Note

The bulk of the collection consists of 23 letters by James W. Davis (1965 - 1968) from Vietnam, to his wife, Janet W. Davis, Miami, Florida. Letters from Janet W. Davis home from Europe in 1951 and Hong Kong and Bangkok in December of 1958, help to fill in biographical information. This collection contains four letters from various people to either James or both James and Janet. The collection also consists of news clippings and ephemera sent home by James in his letters. James did not place a date on his letters, only the day and time. Dates were determined by a few attached envelopes and/or events described when possible. Ephemera and news clippings had been removed from some envelopes prior to purchase.

Series Description

This collection is divided into four series. **Series I:** (Letters from James W. Davis to Janet W. Davis), **Series II:** (Janet W. Davis Letters), **Series III:** (Miscellaneous letters to James and/or Janet Davis), **Series IV:** (Ephemera, News clippings, Envelopes).

Box List

Box 1

Series 1: Letters from James W. Davis to Janet W. Davis

- 1-1 Finding Aid and Research Materials
- 1-2 1966 Feb 5 Saturday afternoon 2:00. Has 28:30 hours so far. Going to Pleiku tomorrow. Nha Trang [Air Base] is a resort; house ½ block from beach; has a crossbow from mountain tribe; handed out Christian tracts.
- 1-3 1966 Mar 11 Friday 11:15pm Just returned [to Saigon], flying to DaNang [Air Base] tomorrow; heard about the acquittal of Melvin L. Powers & Candace Mossler on the radio.
- 1-4 1966 Apr Sunday 8:30 Flying a Bell UH-1 Helicopter (Huey); making model for son Steve.
- 1-5 1966 Apr Tuesday 8:10 Birthday cards and gifts; some letters not getting home; not able to go home in June, will try for December; Pilot Peeves brought his family back with him; customer promised Chi-Com sub machine gun they captured.
- 1-6 1966 Apr Thursday 8:30 Flew 10 hours yesterday, six hours today; engine burning too much oil, bringing up another ship tomorrow; flew reconnaissance near Dalat Camly, looking for good helicopter pad sites in mountains w/3 majors and a captain; VC have held area for a long time; an operation has begun; flew down to Ban Me Thout [Airfield], saw water buffalo & elephants; nice and quiet here compared to traffic in Saigon; first 8 months is almost over.
- 1-7 1966 Apr 12 Tuesday afternoon 3:30 Mentions [Buddhist] demonstrations; not as bad as papers make out; Americans stay clear; getting a Browning 9mm automatic and a Swedish K sub-machine gun; has given away many guns to fellows who need them; including a carbine to a surgeon; ate at My Canh [floating restaurant on the river in Saigon rebuilt after 1965 bombing].
- 1-8 1966 Apr 15 Friday morning 10:00 [Roomate and Missionary] Lynn [Yokum] went to Cam Ranh [Air Base] to hold services; things have died down here as decision was made to hold general elections in 3-5 months for a civil

government; Vietnamese are a corrupt people; [12 Apr 1966] attack on Tan Son Nhut [main Air America station] didn't hit the Air America area.

- 1-9 1966 Apr 24 Sunday 7:15 Awaiting repair to helicopter at DaNang and will return to Saigon for its 100 hour inspection; flying in area of Quan Ngai Province big Marine operation; ringside seat for air strikes; received a new Colt 45; Buddhists still trying to stir things up; infiltrated with communist agitators; US fed up; let the Catholics and Buddhists argue it out; \$17M a day in aid; money all goes to wealthy; the city is off limits to military but Air America pilots are civilians and live in town.
- 1-10 1966 May Thursday 10:00 [Church of Christ Missionary [and housemate] Phil Carpenter is marrying a Vietnamese girl in 60 days; looking for Baptist missionaries.
- 1-11 1966 May 13 Friday 8:50 Bought a Lambretta scooter; going to Nha Trang next week for a few days.
- 1-12 1966 May Sunday 8:30 Charlie Davis from Manila there to preach for the revival; switching to Baptist Church now that not living with Church of Christ people; bruised "new" bone in leg; expecting new ships June 1st.
- 1-13 1966 Jun 23 Thursday 10:30 8 straight days and still 10 hours ahead of everyone else; AA's helicopters arrived today (Bell 205 Hueys) but can't be unloaded until \$300,000 is paid to Vietnamese government for import tax; these are the helicopters used to deliver \$17M a day in aid; explains Buddhist-Catholic problem, discrimination and suspicions; Diem government corruption, Gen. Ky; and the Vien Hoa Dao pagoda [Buddhist headquarters].
- 1-14 1966 Jul 11 Monday afternoon 2:30 Disgusted with the Vietnamese people and their corruption; Madam Ngu stole, transferred, confiscated money earmarked for schools and built Catholic churches; present government no better; aid never gets to the people who need it; promised a 38 caliber revolver, Cobra model, Hammerstein automatic, a Browning 25 automatic and given 2 different models of the Chi Com Model K-50 sub machine guns and a Mauser rifle (believed to be furnished to the VS by the Russians); wants to be a blood brother to the Montagnard tribe and have a bracelet to wear on his right arm as it is the best insurance to have in case he goes down in the mountains; 2000 ARVN including six generals deserted (with guns) and joined the Buddhist struggle group and took the city of DaNang; the war against the VC is going more our way; planning on going home January 15.
- 1-15 1966 Sep 28 Monday 7:30 Flying Donald McDonald, new USAID director,

tomorrow over flooded area. Air America is firm on 1000 hours per year limit; has only 240 more to get in three months; tower for TV station almost finished.

- 1-16 1966 Oct 8 Thursday 3:30 Helicopter in for maintenance; hauling PAT teams and supplies [Political Action Teams]; Americans part of the teams; rescued a Special Forces badly wounded soldier and came under VC fire; got a new folding stock carbine which hangs on side of seat; wear a 38 when flying and a 25 when going out at night; wants a Browning 9 mm automatic w/13 round clip; trying to get a shotgun; have given away 7 guns to military & civilian who can't get them any other way.
- 1-17 1966 Nov Tuesday 6:45 VIP flight to Tay Ninh [combat base] – Archbishop Iakovas, head of the Green Orthodox Church of North and South America; ceremonies, teas, lunch, visits to temple and village with 8000 refugees from North Vietnam.
- 1-18 1967 Feb 9 Thursday afternoon 4:00 Today is Tet and I am on standby; never seen such firecrackers as late night; Buddhists set up altars outside houses with food & drinks for ancestors; they burn bright colored papers and a paper demon head on a wooden frame; firecrackers are to scare away evil spirits: sending few clippings to explain Tet.
- 1-19 1967 Apr 9 Sunday 7:00 Returned from DaNang; spent yesterday on the DMZ around Quang Tri where VC attacked 6 Apr; USAID & embassy houses blown up; flew Ambassador up to take a look; flew supplies & ammo to several outposts; flying under 1000 ft, solid overcast and snipers; depressed. Next 16 months will be hard.
- 1-20 1968 Sep 22 Saturday 8:00 Flew 34 hours in 4 days; new pilot Bob Mehaffey; new guns, Italian Beretta 25; got up to Tug Hoa, flew for Ray Hanchalela and got a Smith & Wesson 38 Police special; flew out of Nha Trang then Ban Me Thuot in Montagnard country; 2 Chinese captured at Special Forces Camp northwest of Kontum on Cambodian border; flew to Dak70 then to the camp; dark with 5000 ft. ceiling & 7500 ft. mountains, “blacker than the inside of your hat.”
- 1-21 n.d. Saturday 8:00 Came up with 29 hours, leaving with 82, want 20 more this month; flew badly wounded troops out of Duc Pho yesterday, VC tried to overrun the outpost; evacuated the worst; deposit of pay in error; 4 Americans captured at Special Forces Camp at Tralong during battle; graves of 3 found, captain led away; rescue patrol ambushed; captain found edge of stream – head 20 yards away; “If I go down I won't be taken alive.”

- 1-22 n.d. Tuesday 8:00 Back from DaNang; new pilots coming in faster than we can get rid of them; if we could get the other five ships; have 71.35 hours this month; helped young Vietnam girl get medical help; pilot injured on a motor scooter; costing him \$44/day in Army hospital; my retired ID is worth the effort and time put into earning it.
- 1-23 n.d. Friday 8:00 Only 30 hours this month, pay will be a little over \$1600; Vietnam captain went to Wing's office and Wing, his nephew, and interpreter left in nephew's car; no one has seen them since; kidnapped?; Leopard has been transferred to Ving Tau [Air Base]; he broke up a mountain smuggling ring and other crooked deals with narrows escapes from ambushes and snipers; transferred for his protection.
- 1-24 n.d. Friday Morn 10:30 Send penicillin stickers, sending papers for the car; 2 ships in for 2000 hour overhaul and 3 in for 1000 hour; still no word on Wing; mystery.

Series 2: Janet W. Davis Letters

- 1-25 15 Aug 1951 Janet W. Davis to Myrtice and Paul Harrison, Georgia
Janet, James, and daughter visiting Paris from "Fursty."
- 1-26 20 Oct 1951 Janet W. Davis to Myrtice and Paul Harrison, Georgia
Janet, James, and daughter visiting London from "Fursty."
- 1-27 1968 Dec 11 Janet W. Davis to Linda Davis Markley
Janet and sons, Steve and Michael, flew to Hong Kong to join James for Christmas, (Miami – Atlanta – Los Angeles – Hawaii – Tokyo – Hong Kong).
- 1-28 1968 Dec 15 Janet W. Davis to Linda Davis Markley
Touring the city and environs, then flying to Bangkok.
- 1-29 1968 Dec 18 Janet W. Davis to Linda Davis Markley
Staying in Bangkok; James leaving for Saigon and will return Saturday (21st); leaving on the 26th for Taipei.
- 1-30 1968 Dec 19 Janet W. Davis to Linda Davis Markley
Touring Bangkok; [Insert] 21st Sat., James returned from Saigon.
- 1-31 1968 Dec 22 Janet W. Davis to Linda Davis Markley
Touring and visiting in Bangkok.
- 1-32 1968 Dec 26 Janet W. Davis to Linda Davis Markley
In Taipei; James is clearing up with American Air; then on to Tokyo

and Hawaii; James is anxious to get back to the states.

Series 3: Miscellaneous Letters to James and/or Janet Davis.

- 1-33 1965 Mar 12 Myrtice Harrison, Cairo GA, to Janet and Family, Coral Gables FL
- 1-34 1967 Mar 7 Steve, Cora Gables FL, to Jim
- 1-35 1967 Mar 29 M. King, Hong Kong, to James W. Davis
- 1-36 1967 Mar 29 Lloyd G. Kelley, Miami FL, to James W. Davis

Series 4: Ephemera, News Clippings, and Envelopes

- 1-37 Ephemera
- Lynn Yokum's *News and Notes from Vietnam, March and July 1966*
 - Phillip H. Carpenter's Wedding Invitation, for 2 July 1966
 - Trinity Baptist Church Welcome, n.d.
 - The W. R. Hartman's Christmas Letter, 1964
- 1-38 News clippings
- 1-39 Press Release: Peking NCNA International Service, 13 July 1967
- 1-40 Envelopes

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