



Secret soldier

Search Co-ordinates: 13-348930°N, 100-969771°E

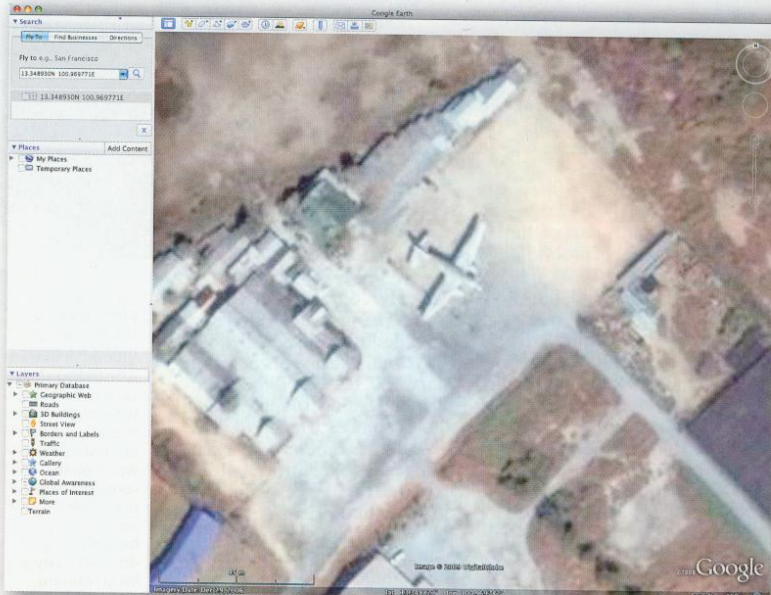
THIS MONTH'S virtual excursion takes us south of Bangkok, Thailand, a nation well-covered by global mapping software. Among the local shapely temptations are various airframes

discarded after the Vietnam War. The Curtiss C-46 Commando, however, has a much longer association with the region.

As the CW-20, the Commando evolved from the fabric-covered Condor in 1936; it first flew in March 1940 in competition with the DC-3. Its metal fuselage, larger than the DC-3's, was ideal for sleeper accommodation and it was the first airliner to offer significant underfloor storage. Many served in 1942 flying over the "Hump" (Himalayas) from India to the Chinese Nationalists under Chiang Kai-Shek.

This example, a C-46F built at Buffalo in 1945, first served with Seaboard & Western before running into a ditch in Rome in July 1951. Repaired, it hauled cargo round the Caribbean from Miami until it became one of eight issued to Continental Air Services of Vientiane, Laos, as part of the USA's "Agency for International Development". These low-visibility operations saw it posted missing in March 1975 en route from Hong Kong, although in May it reportedly "escaped" to Bangkok.

This may explain its presence



ABOVE Given its location, which is on the coast but remote from convenient airfields, it is highly likely that the Commando at Chonburi, south of Bangkok, arrived by sea.

BELOW It took more than global mapping to flush out this Commando in "fatigues" in 2007. Note the hot dogs in the shadow of its former self.

outside this restaurant in Chonburi, bearing both Thai and Cambodian identities (XW-PMF and HS-SKD).

Although a few C-46s survive in Alaska, Canada and Latin America, they may also be found in many Asian countries. The Tokorozawa Museum in Tokyo has one of many Japanese

examples (35-798498°N, 139-472219°E) and the Korean War Memorial in Seoul has one next to a B-52 (37-535601°N, 126-978845°E). The only flyable Commando is with the Commemorative Air Force in Riverside, California, USA (33-967993°N, 117-409418°W).

