

# CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

## Laos

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► Leary, William M. "CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955-1974." *Studies in Intelligence* (Winter 1999-2000): 71-86. Excerpted and abridged in *CIRA Newsletter*, 25, no. 3 (Fall 2000), 39-46.

**Clark comment:** Although the emphasis is on air operations, from Civil Air Transport (CAT) to Air America, this is an excellent overview of CIA operations in Laos generally. Leary concludes that "[t]he exploits of CAT/Air America form a unique chapter in the history of air transport, one that deserves better than a misleading, mediocre movie" (the reference is to 1990's *Air America*).

► Leary, William M. *Perilous Missions: Civil Air Transport and CIA Covert Operations in Asia*. Birmingham, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1984. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 2003.

According to **Motley**, *IJI&C* 1.1, *Perilous Missions* is an "important and penetrating account that unites CAT's airline history, intelligence activities, and the Cold War." CAT operated 1946-1959 when it became Air America.

**Tovar**, *IJI&C* 8.3, says this is "a serious study of the operations of CIA proprietary airlines" (fn. 5).

For **Goulden**, *Washington Times*, 8 Jun. 2003, Leary's is a "sound work, based on CAT's corporate archives." It serves as "a palliative for the wild yarns circulated about CAT and its successor organization, Air America, over the years."

**Bath**, *NIPQ* 20.2, gives this work a "highly recommended" rating. The new edition has "a helpful new preface that summarizes CIA's proprietary air operations subsequent to the transformation of CAT into Air America.... *Perilous Missions* remains the best study of CAT and CIA's early involvement in the air over Asia."

► Linder, James C. "The War in Laos: The Fall of Lima Site 85." *Studies in Intelligence* 38, no. 5 (1995): 79-88.

Lima Site (Landing Site) 85 was built on Phou Phathi, a mountain sacred to the Hmong and Yao tribes, about 25 miles from the Pathet Lao capital of Samneua. A Tactical Air Navigation (TACAN) station was built there by the U.S. Air Force in August 1966. The station was staffed by Air Force personnel in civilian clothing, and was guarded by 300 Thai mercenaries reinforced by 1,000 Hmong troops led by two CIA paramilitary officers.

The North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao began an offensive against the mountain in December 1967. The plan was to keep the Air Force technicians at the site until just prior to its fall; Ambassador Sullivan had sole authority for ordering the evacuation. The final push

against the site began on March 10; evacuation was ordered the next morning. Seven Americans were evacuated alive; eleven died. The failure is at least partially attributable to lack of command and control on the ground and the decision not to arm and train the Air Force personnel in defense and evacuation under fire.

See Timothy N. **Castle**, *One Day Too Long: Top Secret Site 85 and the Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

▶ Magagnini, Stephen. "An Inside Look at a CIA Secret War." *Capitol Hill Blue*, 31 Aug. 2000. [<http://capitolhillblue.com>]

Tony Poe talks (minimally) about the war in Laos.

See Dick Gay, "Tony This and Tony That," *CIRA Newsletter* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 30-35.

▶ McCann, Frederic. "Learning Quickly on the Job: Gathering Intelligence in Laos in 1968." *Studies in Intelligence* 49, no. 1 (2005). [[http://www.odci.gov/csi/studies/vol49no1/html\\_files/index.html](http://www.odci.gov/csi/studies/vol49no1/html_files/index.html)]

Personal memories: "In 1968, I was sent from Tokyo to Laos to interview refugees and ralliers from the communist Pathet Lao guerrillas who had fled to the protection of royalist Gen. Vang Pao's army of Meo hill tribe 'irregulars.'"

▶ Morello, Carol. "Undercover Warrior Finally Honored." *Washington Post*, 26 Jun. 2003, B1. [<http://www.washingtonpost.com>]

The remains of Charles G. Herrick were buried at Arlington National Cemetery on 25 June 2003. Herrick was shot down over Laos in 1963, while flying for Air America. "The return of the remains of Herrick and [Joseph] Cheney [pilot of the Air America plane on which Herrick was co-pilot] is the latest success story in a U.S. government effort to locate the remains of 1,874 Americans missing and unaccounted for from the Vietnam War era.

▶ Parker, James E., Jr. *Codename Mule: Fighting the Secret War in Laos for the CIA*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995.

**Chambers** calls this a "very straight and narrowly focused telling of Parker's role in the later stages of the Laotian campaign."

**Bates**, *NIPQ* 12.2, finds that the "Foreword" by William A. Leary, a history professor at the University of Georgia, is "an excellent history of Laos from the mid 1950s to the date Parker arrived.... Parker's story is written in an entertaining first person format and reads like a novel."

On the other hand, **Reske**, *NIPQ* 12.3, learned little from Parker's book: "It was mostly "a series of episodic 'I was there, I did that, I saw that' war stories that never quite connect."

**Bode**, *WIR* 15.5, says that Parker "tells his story simply, with minimal commentary, and allows the reader to reach his own conclusions." Although the author's experiences cover only a "relatively narrow period" (from late 1971 to early 1975), he is "a keen observer" and "a fine story-teller."

For **Warren**, *Surveillant* 4.4/5, Parker "provides insights into the Agency's extensive covert operations in Laos and the men who conducted them."

See also the review by Col. Donald F. **Lunday** at <http://www.thehistorynet.com/reviews>.

► Petchell, Robert A. [pseud.] "Cash on Delivery: How to Obtain North Vietnamese Soldiers for Intelligence in Laos." *Studies in Intelligence*, Fall 1973.

The author discusses the "Cash on Delivery" program in Laos from November 1970 through January 1972. The program used irregular guerrilla intelligence collection teams, called Paramilitary Team Operations, a program similar to the Hmong irregular battalions of Vang Pao. Selected guerrilla teams were told that for each North Vietnamese defector or abductee they would share \$1,000 for an NVA officer, \$400 for an NCO, and \$200 for a private.

► Prados, John. *The Presidents' Secret Wars: CIA and Pentagon Covert Operations Since World War II*. New York: Morrow, 1986.

**Valcourt**, *IJI&C* 1.3, says Prados has produced an "extremely well researched volume," but he "tarnishes his objectivity with the bias of some distorted criticism... which ... reduce[s] his work to a political tract under the guise of scholarship." Nevertheless, there is a "considerable amount of worthwhile information.... As a guide to the literature of the field, it is a gold mine." However, in his criticisms, he "fails to put the situation in perspective."

Although he finds the work somewhat numbing, **Smith**, *I&NS* 2.4, also believes *The Presidents' Secret Wars* "will be highly useful because Dr Prados has done serious archival work.... In one stroke this volume moves the study of covert operations to a higher and more sophisticated plane."

► Robbins, Christopher.

1. *Air America: The Story of the CIA's Secret Airlines*. New York: Putnam's, 1979. *The Invisible Air Force: The Story of the CIA's Secret Airline*. London: Macmillan, 1979. [pb] New York: Corgi, 1979. [pb] New York: Avon Books, 1985.

**NameBase** pontificates that "Air America ... is known for ferrying opium to market in exchange for Meo support of the CIA's military strategy in Laos. Robbins has one chapter on the opium question, but concentrates more on material he collected from 'personal interviews with pilots, copilots, kickers, ground personnel, administrative workers, CIA men, journalists, and people on the fringe of the strange world of the Agency's air proprietaries.'"

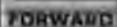
For **Constantinides**, the book contains "errors, both large and small," including the author's insistence that CIA operations in Laos were hidden from Congress. In addition, the writing style is more appropriate "for a series in an adventure magazine."

2. *The Ravens. The Men Who Flew in America's Secret War in Laos*. New York: Crown, 1987.

**Tovar**, *IJI&C* 8.3, calls the book "an interesting anecdotal account of the operations of the Ravens."

**Kross**, *IJI&C* 3.2, says that Robbins "weaves an intricate and detailed picture of the main players in America's covert Laotian operation [and] of the political struggle in both Washington and Vientiane."

Richard **Helms**, *IJI&C* 3.4, challenges Kross' review: "There are some points in the Kross review ... which seem at odds with the book itself and with history as I knew it.... In the field the ambassador was the boss.... The CIA Station[s] ... latitude was exercised within established policy at the ambassador's daily discretion.... [T]he Ravens ... were administered by the Air Attaché.... CIA did not fight in Laos. The Lao did the fighting."



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