



**Group Application  
for  
Active Service Determination  
and  
Veteran Status Eligibility**

**CAT/AIR AMERICA  
VETERANS**

**September 1, 2004  
Volume 5**

Photocopy  
Information  
Removed

August 31, 2004

Mr. James D. Johnston  
Executive Secretary  
DoD Civilian /Military Service Review Board  
SAF Personnel Council  
1535 Command Dr., EE Wing, 3<sup>rd</sup> Fl.  
Andrews AFB, MD 20762-7002

Dear Mr. Johnston,

The letters from the Air Force Historical Research Agency and the Army's Center Of Military History (CMH) that you attached to your letter dated August 5, 2004, suggest that Air America employees did not support the U.S. Military in Southeast Asia. Those in the future who use these archives to conduct research on the subject might conclude that Air America never existed.

I understand your explanation concerning the reference to "CAT" in the response from the CMH. This comment, **"As a civilian airline CAT probably did ferry America personnel in South Vietnam and Laos, but our records do not contain details on this"** that appears at the end of their letter suggests they may not have read the material that you said in your letter was sent to them. This concerns me. The historical chronicle for the private Delaware Corporation that was originally named CAT, Inc., and later re-named Air America, Inc., was clearly described in the application. The name change occurred in 1959, and since the U.S. Army did not go into Laos until about that time it would be easy to understand why "CAT" would not show up in a search within their archive, since those particular records are not fully available in electronic format.

I visited the web site for CMH where a cursory search found neither CAT nor Air America. It is interesting to note that "White Star", which was the name of the U.S. Special Forces operation in Laos in the early 1960's, does come up, but not for that unit and there does not appear to be any mention of that Special Forces unit within their archives. One could conclude that operation White Star did not occur either, but we know that is not the case.

Given the lack of reliable electronic access to source data, it is illogical to assume that Air America did not exist based upon what may have been a simple keyword search for "Air America", and a search for the acronym "CAT" is not plausible. The most productive research of electronic resources would be one that incorporated several alternative key words.

In an email sent to the Air Force Historical Research Agency (afhso.research@pentagon.af.mil), I stated the following:

I have filed an application for group veteran status for Air America (AAM) employees. It has been placed on the **Federal Register** and accepted by the C/MSRB. AAM worked in Laos and Vietnam under a series of Air Force contracts. They operated military aircraft on loan from the U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Air Force. AAM supported the U.S. Air Force at Lima Site 85 and rescued many downed U.S. Military crewmembers. I am respectfully asking for any documentation in this regard that would help me with this issue.

They replied almost immediately, as follows:

Dear Mr. Cates,

We have no information on Air America involvement in the rescue of personnel assigned to Lima 85 that is releasable. There is however a study, done by the USAF which is available on line from the Virtual Vietnam Archive of Texas Tech University. For the series type in CHECO and the key word 85 at <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu> or type in virtual Vietnam archive in your search engine.

The word "releasable" is interesting. It suggests that information about Air America and/or the operation itself may still be classified. This was my first knowledge of the CHECO reports. Apparently they were classified initially and declassified later. I have included portions of them with this letter.

Initially I was disappointed in my search of the CHECO reports. I downloaded a PDF document and used the "Find" command for Air America and found nothing. Then, I tried the command on a word I knew was in the document to no avail. I was fairly certain at this point that the document was not keyword searchable, most likely due to the fact that the document was a scanned image.

CHECO is an acronym for Contemporary Historical Examination Current Operations. The first one I read was entitled "The Fall Of Site 85-9 August 1968." I have attached that report. The hand written notes in the margins, supposedly from one of the survivors, were present when I downloaded the document and I did nothing to alter the report. If you will read through to page 26, you will find information about Air America. There lies what I describe as the "smoking gun" for evidence that Air America was controlled by the United States Air Force and supported them in their operations. The report goes into detail about why the navigation aid was placed in Laos and that the requirement for secrecy was due to restraints placed on the United States by the Geneva Accords in 1962.

There is a plethora of information about the concept and implementation of the Central Intelligence Agency, which was officially established in 1947. In a nutshell, the C.I.A. was an intelligence gathering organization. The methods used to accomplish that mission are to this day classified, and it was mandated that the Agency would refrain from commenting to the public concerning reports about them whether the information presented was true or false. (see <<http://www.fas.org/irp/cia/ciahist.htm>> where it states:

**"In 1949, the Central Intelligence Agency Act was passed supplementing the 1947 Act by permitting the Agency to use confidential fiscal and administrative procedures and exempting CIA from many of the usual limitations on the expenditure of federal funds. It provided that CIA funds could be included in the budgets of other departments and then transferred to the Agency without regard to the restrictions placed on the initial appropriation. This Act is the statutory authority for the secrecy of the Agency's budget. In order to protect intelligence sources and methods from disclosure, the 1949 Act further exempted the CIA from having to disclose its "organization, functions, names, officials, titles, salaries, or numbers of personnel employed."**

According to the cited reference, some changes to this policy were made in 1980 where the CIA now reports to certain congressional committees, but at the time, strict secrecy was enforced. Therefore, it may be understandable why the actual discussions in written form as to the reason for the purchase of Civil Air Transport are either not readily available or non-existent. Several historians, notably Dr. William Leary, have discussed the chronological history of the original company. However, none of them show who actually had operational control of the company, or who had the authority to make command decisions. Mr. Jim Glerum, retired C.I.A. employee, who was also imbedded within CAT, Inc. and Air America, Inc., provided me with a corporate chronology, which has been declassified, but perhaps not well known by the general public. Mr. Glerum assisted me with editing the original letter to the C.I.A. He has been a constant and stalwart supporter of CAT and Air America employees on this issue and his assistance is greatly appreciated.

### **Corporate Chronology**

**October 1946. General Claire Chennault and Whiting Willauer signed a contract with the China National Relief and Rehabilitation Agency creating CNRRA Air Transport (CAT). The first "official" flight was in January 1947.**

**January 1948. CNRRA went out of business and CAT officially became Civil Air Transport.**

**October 1949. The CAT head office moved to Hong Kong. First flights were conducted for CIA against an initial advance of \$200,000.**

**November 1949. Chennault and Willauer, plus other partners, separately incorporated Civil Air Transport South America (C.A.T.S.A.) in Panama and Civil Air Transport, Inc. (CATI) in Delaware. CATI, as an American company, acted as C.A.T.S.A.'s agent in an effort to secure impounded China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC) and China Air Transport Company (CATC) aircraft. Chennault and Willauer also had "purchased" CNAC and CATC from the Nationalist government with personal promissory notes (later made a corporate obligation). Some of the CNAC and CATC aircraft eventually were recovered, but the dispute dragged on for years. C.A.T.S.A. and CATI were not purchased by CIA (see below) and ultimately were dissolved.**

**January 1950. The first CIA subsidy payment was made to Chennault and Willauer.**

**August 1950. CAT was purchased by CIA from Chennault and Willauer. CIA created a Delaware holding corporation (Airedale Corporation) with an operating subsidiary, Cat Incorporated. Chennault and Willauer created the Willauer Trading Company to transfer CAT assets to Airedale, which then assigned them to CAT Incorporated in return for all operating company stock. Note: the company logos remained unchanged.**

**January 1955. The Pacific Corporation was created by CIA in Delaware to replace Airedale. The Pacific Corporation in turn created two Chinese companies. Civil Air Transport Company Limited (CATCL), with ostensible 60 percent Chinese ownership, was to serve as the designated flag carrier of the Republic of China. Asiatic Aeronautical Company Limited (AACL), a subsidiary of CAT Incorporated, held all corporate assets (except for two or three aircraft "sold" to CATCL). Both companies were appropriately licensed by the Chinese government. Under a "services contract" and a "charter agreement" respectively, AACL provided equipment and personnel for the flight operations of CATCL and CAT Incorporated.**

**March 1959. CAT Incorporated was renamed Air America, Inc. (AAM) and its Chinese subsidiary Asiatic Aeronautical Company Limited (AACL) became Air Asia Company Limited (AACL). The change to AAM was due in large part to continuing confusion between CAT incorporated and CATI - by the Chinese government.**

**May 1960. Southern Air Transport (SAT), of Miami, was purchased by the Pacific Corporation to meet USAF certificate requirements. A SAT Pacific Division was established in Tachikawa, Japan to replace Air America, Inc. on U.S military contracts that required a U.S. operating certificate allowing carriage of passengers.**

I seriously doubt if the people who initiated this effort were clairvoyant and none of them could possibly know what was to occur in Korea or Vietnam in later years. The issue of operational control of the company's assets is the lynch pin for my claim that flight crew and essential ground support personnel qualify for veteran status eligibility.

Information concerning operational control prior to 1960 is scant and to a certain extent circumstantial. CAT, Inc. did have USAF contracts during the Korean War. I described Operation Booklift and Operation Squaw in previous correspondence, where CAT, Inc. crews operated USAF aircraft. During these operations, which were paramilitary in nature, flight crews were shot at and some were killed in combat action. That kind of activity clearly goes well beyond the job description of employees in a private corporation who simply manufacture widgets under a USAF contract.

The United States Government determined that communism was a threat to world peace. Covert and overt activity was deemed necessary to thwart this threat. Intelligence gathering in China, Korea, Tibet and South East Asia was stymied by treaty restraints and political difficulties. Many official documents clearly support this concern and its significance for the United States Government, which needed an air force that could perform in areas and conditions that a uniformed crew could not. That air force had to be controlled by the United States Military and its role included paramilitary duties along with support of U.S. Military personnel. But, it was clandestine in nature and its identity was not readily apparent.

Some insight to this claim can be found in the attached "Operations Plans for Laos" dated 1958, where USOM is mentioned and explained, and the attached contract between the United States Operation Mission (USOM) in Laos and Air America dated 14<sup>th</sup> January 1960. Also, on page 17 of the attached "Staff Report Prepared For The Use Of The Subcommittee On U.S. Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad of the Committee On Foreign Relations United States Senate" there is a discussion about the cease-fire in Laos that reads:

**...Termination of the Air America Contract, which has for years provided air support services for the entire range of U.S. Military, intelligence and civilian activities.**

A few years ago the United States Department of State released several reports as part of the **Foreign Relations Series**. The following material is excerpted from **Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXVIII: LAOS** (Department of State, 1998). It provides authoritative documentation for the reasoning and implementation of the war in Laos.

**The United States increasingly became involved in fighting a war against Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese forces in Laos during the Johnson administration. Laos, a small, poor, sparsely populated kingdom, became entangled in the Vietnam War because of its geographic position. The Kennedy administration had hoped to neutralize Laos and insulate it from the conflict, but failed because of North Vietnam's insistence on controlling the infiltration routes into South Vietnam. During 1964-1968, Laos became part of the main conflict in Southeast Asia as both the United States and North Vietnam struggled for control of the Ho Chi Minh trail and the northern highlands. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXVIII, Laos, released today by the Department of State, presents a detailed documentary account of U.S. high-level diplomatic, strategic, and military decisions that resulted in expanded involvement and commitments in Laos.**

**This volume, complementing the Department of State's expanded coverage of the documentary history of the Vietnam war, is based on extensive access to the records of the Executive branch, including the files of the White House and National Security Council, Departments of State and Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Central Intelligence Agency. In addition, this volume makes considerable use of personal papers of several key policymakers, including Averell Harriman and Generals Maxwell Taylor, William Westmoreland, and Creighton Abrams. It was completed before the Office of the Historian had access to Johnson's taped telephone conversations, but there are only a few tapes of conversations exclusively on Laos. Johnson usually discussed Laos in conjunction with Vietnam. Important tapes on the Vietnam war are included in Foreign Relations, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966 (released in 1998) and the President's taped conversations on the war including Laos are scheduled for publication in subsequent volumes on Vietnam and in volume XXVII, Mainland Southeast Asia: Regional Affairs.**

**During the first few months of 1964, the Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese forces again threatened the Plain of Jars, the strategic gateway to the Mekong valley, where most of the Lao population lived. Johnson and his advisers considered sending U.S. troops to Thailand as had been done in 1962, but settled instead on a series of incremental steps that included sending Air America pilots and propeller driven T-28 planes to reinforce the fledgling Lao Air Force and upgrading the Lao Air Force's bombing capabilities. Differences of opinion in the administration arose over Laos policy. The Department of Defense and General Westmoreland wanted to carry the secret war across the border against the Ho Chi Minh trail.**

**The Department of State and Ambassador Leonard Unger feared such a plan would shred what remained of the 1962 Geneva Accords and topple neutralist Prime**

**Minister Souvanna Phouma. The Central Intelligence Agency concentrated on its "quiet war," supporting, supplying, and directing Hmong guerrillas to harass the North Vietnamese in Laos.**

**In June 1964, two decisions propelled the United States into a more active role in Laos. The first was a retaliatory, armed reconnaissance mission against Pathet Lao anti-aircraft batteries that had downed a U.S. reconnaissance jet. As the President himself feared, this inaugurated an air war in northern Laos. Secondly, the United States supported a Royal Lao Armed Forces' military plan, Operation Triangle, to retake a key crossroad on the Plain of Jars. Air America's transport and fighter propeller planes joined the campaign. In retrospect, these two decisions marked the beginning of a new level of conflict between the United States and North Vietnam.**

**Despite continued differences of opinion among U.S. policy makers, after 1965 the trend was one of steady escalation of the war in Laos. In the face of Ambassador William Sullivan's opposition, Vietnam Commander William Westmoreland expanded covert cross border operations into Laos by South Vietnamese troops led by U.S. Green Berets. The secret air war against the Ho Chi Minh trail and in the north of Laos expanded exponentially. Other themes covered in the volume include U.S. political support of the Souvanna government against right-wing coups, the expansion of the covert Hmong guerrilla program, Secretary of Defense McNamara's interest in using technology to improve U.S. military capabilities in Laos, and the loss of the secret navigation site at Phou Pha Thi to six battalions of North Vietnamese regulars, resulting in the deaths of eleven Americans.**

**The Office of the Historian has prepared a summary of the volume. For further information, contact David S. Patterson, General Editor of the Foreign Relations series, at (202) 663-1127 (fax: (202) 663-1289, e-mail: [pahistoff@panet.us-state.gov](mailto:pahistoff@panet.us-state.gov)). The texts of the volume, the summary, and this press release are available on the Department's Web site: [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/ibndex.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/ibndex.html). Copies of volume XXVIII can be purchased from the Government Printing Office.**

It is obvious that Air America was considered to be a tool of the United States Government to be utilized by the Department of Defense, the Department of State and specifically sanctioned by the Executive Branch, and not just for gathering information by the C.I.A. Operational and command authority can be further determined by these extracts from the State department documents in the form of telegrams, which explain U.S. Foreign policy in this area.

**2. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency to the Station in Saigon/1/**

**Washington, February 12, 1964, 2:29 p.m.**

**/1/Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Special Category Messages, Vol. I, 11/63-1/65. Secret; Exclusive; No Night Action. Sent to Saigon exclusive for Lodge, Harkins, and the Station Chief; repeated exclusive to Honolulu for Felt, Department of State for Hilsman, OSD for McNamara, JCS for Taylor and Anthis, and the White House for McGeorge Bundy.**

**00931. Joint State/DOD/CAS message. Ref: CAS Saigon 4293./2/ National Security Action Memorandum No 273 dated 26 November 63/3/ contains a paragraph, no 8,**

which addresses itself to operations into Laos from South Vietnam. This paragraph makes it clear that operational responsibility for "such undertakings" should pass from CAS to MACV. This was a clear directive concerning the transfer of responsibility for cross border operations. Subsequently, CINCPAC message exclusive for Gen Harkins, DTG 302350Z, containing CINCPAC's comments on Oplan 34B-64,4/ stated that Oplan 34B-64 had been well received and that there was a need for CAS Vientiane and MACV/CAS Saigon to work together to develop a combined plan for actions in Laos. CINCPAC concluded with the request that MACV initiate discussions of these operations with CAS Saigon and advise results. On 21 December, the decision was made at the Secretary of Defense level that DOD would not recommend operations across the Laos border pursuant to MACV Oplan 34B-64 because the political risks would exceed the probable results. However, the Secretary of Defense noted that highly effective CAS operations from within Laos along the Lao frontier should be expanded and the Kha operation developed, at least to cover this area, for intelligence purposes as the first stage. This decision was transmitted to Vientiane and Saigon by CAS Washington on the same date. This was amplified in a subsequent CAS message from Washington on 17 January to Saigon/5/ which made two principal points: (1) that Vientiane had authority to expand its own operations in areas adjacent to South Vietnam, and (2) that CAS Saigon would limit its role in the cross border field to that of advisor to MACV in any future MACV planning for cross border operations into Laos from South Vietnam.

59. Telegram From the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State/1/

Vientiane, May 24, 1964, 5 p.m.

/1/Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 LAOS. Secret; Immediate. Repeated to Bangkok, CINCPAC, London, and Paris. Received at the Department of State at 8:17 a.m., May 24 and passed to the White House, JCS, OSD, CIA, and USUN at 4:30 p.m.

1411. Want Dept be fully aware of degree to which we now becoming involved in measures in violation Geneva Accords but which are absolutely necessary if we are to meet urgent requirements in this ugly situation.

Souvanna called me on telephone this morning regarding threatening situation around Muong Kheung-Ban An-Muong Soui and asked for T-28 strikes in area. I told him [1 line of source text not declassified] to do anything quickly we would have to turn to U.S. pilots for combat missions. Souvanna hesitated at first but finally gave me green light proceed with U.S. pilots. Accordingly I am authorizing U.S. pilots (Air America civilians) to undertake T-28 flights tomorrow for two purposes: 1) help to hold PL advance on Ban An-Muong Soui area (Muong Kheung has reportedly now been evacuated); 2) cratering Rte 7 east of Ban Ban. Pilots will be briefed very carefully on known enemy dispositions and AA batteries. On a selective basis I am relaxing certain long-standing prohibitions: 1) Air America, particularly choppers, being permitted carry military personnel in hill areas and also war material; 2) Dept already aware presence here U.S. T-28 technicians; 3) closer ARMA and AIRA participation with FAR and RLAf in targeting for T-28 strikes and more direct USAID/RO participation in supply arrangements.

Unger

At same time Department appears nervous about any acknowledgment that Air America involved in maintenance T-28's in Udorn even though we have had to use Air America planes liberally in moving troops and munitions to and from areas such as Ban Na and Muong Soui where there are no aircraft which Lao can fly which can do the job.

- a. The additional airlift aircraft (three C-123 and three Caribou), estimated by the Ambassador to be required (Vientiane to State 1694, 25 June 1964),<sup>/3/</sup> can be made available from PACOM resources with no appreciable effect on the air effort in South Vietnam. When the requirement has been firmly established, the Joint Chiefs of Staff will direct CINCPAC to lend these aircraft to Air America at Udorn and to support them as required.

4. We are prepared to furnish additional T-28's promptly [1-1/2 lines of source text not declassified] we do not believe US civilian pilots required for T-28's in support of operation. However, US is prepared to use existing Air America aircraft, provide additional three C-123's and three Caribou, and permit use of US civilian pilots to bring GM-16 up to Muong Soui and to provide continuing resupply of operation as required. (Our public and third-country position would be that the operation is mercenary Air America and not US Government and that, in any event, the operation relates directly to defense of Neutralist forces along lines para 3 above.) FYI: We also considering authorizing use of napalm if Souvanna requests and you approve, in support of this or any other operation and not merely in case major Communist attack as you have previously requested and we have authorized. End FYI.

125. Telegram From the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State/1/

Vientiane, August 20, 1964, 7 p.m.

/1/Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 LAOS. Top Secret; Limdis. Repeated to CINCPAC to pass to Defense.

338. Joint Embassy/AIRA/ARMA message. Deptel 174./2/ I do not see much prospect of reducing calls on US planes and personnel for SAR operations if we hope to exploit the advantages of our T-28 strike force in present military situation. SAR is a crucial factor in maintaining morale of pilots and there is no prospect at this juncture of establishing effective SAR procedures without use of both civilian (Air America) and US military personnel. See Embtel 337./3/ But we might be able to justify before US and international public use of military aircraft in attempt rescue downed American military fliers (e.g. Yankee team) while withholding use jet fliers for rescue RLAF or Thai pilots. I am convinced, however, that such distinction would seriously cripple morale of Thais, who have borne far greatest brunt of air operations in PDJ area, and of AA pilots, who regularly expose themselves to great risks.

/3/McGeorge Bundy sent a copy of this telegram to President Johnson with the following observations in a covering note dated May 14, 12:50 p.m.: "Very few people in the Foreign Service write as well as the average journalist. Bill Sullivan in Laos is an exception. Quite aside from the merits of his argument, I think you will be interested in his reply to an effort by my brother Bill to open another diplomatic track toward Vietnam negotiations by way of a conference on Laos." (Johnson Library, National Security File, Memos to the President, Vol. X, 4/15-5/31/65)

We have come a long way from the day when our only transgression of the 1962 Geneva Accords was the covert direction of Air America operations. We now conduct an average of fifty combat air sorties daily by U.S. aircraft against targets on Laos territory; we maintain, encadre, and direct a clandestine guerrilla force of 20,000 men which inflicts daily casualties on the enemy; we have installed, we supply, and we advise a Thai artillery battalion at a critical point on Laos soil; we operate a fleet of about fifty aircraft primarily engaged in paramilitary activity; and we conduct a clandestine military aid program here on a fifty million dollar a year scale.

242. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Laos/1/

Washington, July 16, 1966, 2:27 p.m.

/1/Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 LAOS. Secret; Immediate; Limdis. Drafted by Slutz, cleared by Hamilton of DOD/ISA, and Ewing, and approved by Bundy. Repeated to Bangkok, CINCPAC, COMUSMAGTHAI, COMUSMACV, DEPCHJUSMAG/THAI. As of July 1, 1966, Department of State telegrams to all posts were numbered consecutively according to the time they were sent. Telegrams repeated to posts for information used the same number.

9249. Ref: A. Vientiane's 249. B. ARMA 0471, DTG 140545Z July./2/

/2/In these telegrams, both July 14, the Embassy and the ARMA set forth the concept of Operation Prasane, a plan to take the strategic town of Nam Bac in Luang Prabang province and thus improve security of the royal capital and lessen pressure on RLG positions in Nam Bac in Phong Saly province. (Both *ibid.*)

#### Operation Prasane

1. Based on your estimate of prospects for success of Operation Prasane, we inclined go along with your recommendation that we assist FAR in planned assault on Nam Bac.

2. We somewhat disturbed at magnitude of planned operation in area only 60 miles from Dien Bien Phu at time when both King and PriMin out of country and FinMin Sisouk urgently seeking more foreign economic assistance. Not sure how these plans square with implications Souvanna's recent admonition to General Staff not to provoke sharp enemy reactions (JANAF 0454)./3/

/3/Not further identified.

3. Nevertheless, we prepared at this time to approve use of your in-country assets, e.g., Air America H-34 helicopters, to provide needed airlift assistance to FAR for this operation.

4. We have serious reservations, however, over introduction of USAF aircraft and pilots into Laos for airlift operations./4/ We would consider this step as major departure from present policy of tactical air support to but not participation in Lao ground operations.

/4/The Embassy estimated that to airlift 1,400 FAR troops by helicopter to positions north of Nam Bac would require 10 helicopters with Air America pilots. The

**Embassy suggested that, instead of tying up so many helicopters, 4 USAF 3-C aircraft with USAF crews should be employed. The risks were considered minimal for the 2-day operation. (Telegram 249 from Vientiane, July 16; Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 LAOS)**

**5. Believe political implications this proposal such as to require, as minimum, request from Souvanna for US intervention in this form./5/**

**/5/In telegram 335 from Vientiane, July 19, the Embassy reported that as the operation was already underway and delay would adversely affect morale, it was prepared to use in-country assets, Air America helicopters and pilots. (Ibid.) Printed from an unsigned copy.**

**Source: FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES 1964-1968, Volume XXVIII. Laos. Released by U. S. Department of State, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1998. DEPARTMENT OF STATE PUBLICATION 10523, OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN, BUREAU OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

Further information can be obtained from the attached CHECO report entitled "Command And Control 1966-1968". There, you can readily see the chain in command that included 7/13 Air Force based in Udorn, Thailand, which had operational authority over all air sorties into Laos. This report also shows the close cooperation between AIRA, CAS (a code name for the CIA described in the CHECO reports) and Air America.

I have included other CHECO reports and specifically included "Air Operations In Northern Laos 1 APR 1970 to 15 Jan 1971" because Air America is mentioned as part of the Air Force under 7/13 Air Force. The report barely mentions Air America. I attribute that primarily to bias to present the USAF in the forefront, and also because our mission was classified even to many members of the USAF. However, there cannot be any doubt that Air America was involved in the defense of LS20A and Sam Thong during this period and those listed on the Memorial Plaque as KIA during this period is valid proof of that claim.

The main point that I am presenting is that the CHECO reports and Foreign Relation reports clearly establish that Air America was included in the military chain of command and served at the direction of U.S. Military commanders in direct support for the U.S. Military. This claim is reinforced in the attached CHECO report, "The Bolovens Campaign," which states on page 4:

**Airlift of supplies and troops would be conducted jointly by the RLAF, civilian contractor (Air America), and USAF CH-3 and CH-53 helicopters controlled by 7/13 Air Force.**

Activity of that type could not logically be construed as typical contract work. Several Air America flight crews lost their lives during this campaign and I was personally involved in it. It was during this period that I rescued a Navy pilot, who had been shot down during a

bombing run. That rescue was chronicled in an article that I supplied to you earlier entitled "Night Train To Bangkok."

This rescue was a joint effort between Air America and USAF A1 aircraft and was conducted because the USAF rescue aircraft had to fly from Vietnam to the crash site and the timing would have caused the capture and perhaps death of the pilot. The ground fire in the rescue zone was extremely active, and had it not been for the USAF A1 aircraft, which bombed and strafed continuously during the rescue, it would have ended in failure. However, it is not specifically to the mission itself that I am referring, but rather to the coordination between the three services that included the U.S. Navy pilot and his presence of mind to remain calm during the preparation, the United States Air Force and Air America. It is not my intention to single myself out personally here, because my effort in this regard was no different than that experienced by several Air America helicopter flight crews. Rather, it is the cooperation aspect that I am referring to and the fact that I was personally involved and reporting a first hand experience adds credence to my claim.

On page 26 of the Site 85 CHECO report it says:

**Five helicopters, three USAF and two Air America, were designated as the force required to accommodate the evacuation. To provide an immediate capability, the two Air America helicopters were to remain overnight (RON) each night at nearby Lima Site 98; USAF helicopters were to come from Thailand-based resources. Subsequently, some USAF messages expressed the desire for Air America helicopters to RON at Site 85, not 98. Following a decision to evacuate, the Ambassador was to notify 7AF at 7/13 AF TACC at Udorn AB, Thailand who could in turn notify 7AF at Tan Son Nhut AB, Vietnam. Weather permitting, 7AF was to scramble or divert four A-1 aircraft to provide cover for the evacuation, suppress enemy fire, and FAC for subsequent jet strikes.**

On the next page a message from CINCPACAF approved the plan. This plan was not a quick contract to the highest civilian airline bidder and it certainly does not qualify as a "ferry" for U.S. Military personnel as stated by Mr. Dale Andrade with CMH. In fact, Air America's presence in Laos and Vietnam was established as early as 1960 when aircraft and crews were placed in that area as direct support for U.S. Army Special Forces as described in my previous letter to you. Yet, some documents have described the operations in both countries and omitted Air America completely.

It seemed reasonable that military personnel who had assigned duties in the region during this period could best define Air America's connection with United States Military Operations in Laos and Vietnam. I wrote to Retired Major General Richard Secord, who was a Major in the USAF at the time, and directly involved with Site 85 operations, and asked him for his opinion. His letter is attached and included in that letter is the following statement.

**...AAM supported the Joint project 404 (US Army and USAF personnel deployed at the 6 main operating sites in Laos) which entailed continuing combat. AAM also directly supported the USAF RAVEN FAC program in Laos with both fixed and rotary wing aircraft. Additionally, AAM support of the US manned "Site 85" radar**

**bombing facility in far Northern Laos during 1967 and 1968 is well documented. I was the Agency officer in charge of the defense of this site.**

Air America was not originally designated to be a primary search and rescue arm of the U.S. Military. Air America's mission was to provide supply support to U.S. Military advisors and their trainees in Laos. However, this mission was not on a level equal to that of a truck or taxi driver because Air America was also overtly and covertly involved with clandestine missions for intelligence gathering teams controlled by U.S. Military advisors and C.I.A. personnel, who had been drafted directly from the U.S. Military for their expertise in military operations. Many of these civilians were not direct hires, but were on contract and rendered civilians due to the political situation. Still, many U.S. Military personnel remained in Laos after the 1962 accords were established, and while that was classified at the time, declassified records now show that statement to be true and correct.

Air America aircraft were not normally equipped to suppress enemy fire and that is acknowledged in the CHECO report entitled "USAF Search And Rescue In South East Asia 24 October 1966" that is attached. Air America crews were allowed to have weapons on board in later years, and Air America employees were already there in the country and immediately available. Starting on page 18, the report says:

**Marine helicopters from Danang and Air America aircraft provided coverage until USAF capabilities could be upgraded.**

On page 30 it says:

**Air America, a private airline, which supports covert activities in Laos.... could be pressed into service in the event a YANKEE TEAM plane went down.**

On page 34 it reads:

**Air America was to provide coverage in the PDJ area during all YANKEE TEAM missions. The newly established Deputy Commander, 2AD, Thailand was made responsible for all USAF operations in Laos, including search and rescue. ...In addition to the coverage that Air America provided from its bases in the northern part of Laos, the USAF moved the two HH-43B's into Nakhon Phanom to give coverage within a 100-mile radius.**

The report goes on to say that even Air America had an image to present to the outside world as non-combatants. Therefore, when two vintage North Vietnam Colts bombed Site 85 and one was shot down by the flight mechanic in an Air America aircraft (documented in the CHECO reports and in the History Channel video that is part of this letter) the U.S. Ambassador to Laos was understandably and visibly upset. According to Ted Moore, the AAM pilot in the History Channel video, he was told in no uncertain terms to remain quiet about his involvement. The United States Government had a political problem and Air America was really the only avenue available. This statement is not an opinion made by me, because on page 35 of this, at the time, highly secret report it says:

**Although, the USAF rescue capability increased in 1964 and throughout 1965, Air America was the backbone of the humanitarian operation during the first year.**

**Between June 1964 and June 1965, Air America made 21 successful recoveries of American pilots. .... Although Air America made most of the recoveries, (The USAF made five according to this report) they worked in close conjunction with U.S. RESCAP and control elements.**

On page 37 it reads:

**With the USAF buildup, direct SAR support from Air America in Laos was needed less. Air America continued to provide SAR for the RLAF, their own operations, and on an on-call basis for U.S. aircraft. At present Air America continues to furnish the USAF SART forces with staging sites, weather information, and intelligence, all of which are indispensable to successful operations.**

However, the last statement would prove to be not entirely correct. That report was written in 1966 and the fall of Site 85 did not occur until 1968 and Air America was most certainly involved in direct support at that time. I did not arrive in Laos until mid 1969. I was directly involved in at least five different rescues, and I have heard and read about many more rescues by Air America during the same period.

One that I was personally involved with is chronicled in CHECO report "Search And Rescue Operations In SEA I Jan 1971-31 March 1972." Again, a cursory search reveals nothing about Air America. But, on page 68 of this 88-page report that is attached, it says under the subtitle Spectre 22: **"The two survivors that had bailed out first...in Steel Tiger...were picked up by Air America...."**

In an attached letter that was posted on the Internet by David J. Preston, the airborne mission commander for the 1972 rescue, it is interesting to note that Air America is included in the list of aircraft involved as a matter of course because we were on-call for such activity. It is also interesting to note that a re-print article from **Stars & Stripes** that is also attached says **"All 15 crew members of a downed Spectre gunship were rescued March 31 from Laos in one of the most successful recovery efforts in the Vietnam war."** Yet, not one mention is made of Air America.

Included in the CHECO reports are numerous descriptions of the medals and decorations awarded to USAF rescue members, and I am sure they were well deserved. I do not believe any of the Air America crew members wanted a medal. The work we did was part of our job and when the mission was over we went back to routine tasks. Most never even filed a report, but the question about whether Air America supported the military in accordance with stipulated job descriptions by appropriate United States Military authority is clearly answered in the CHECO reports.

Air America's support for the U.S. Military was not just in Laos. In General Secord's letter he says:

**In July and August 1966 I worked in the US Embassy Saigon in the Air Office which supervised Air America (AAM) operations in South Vietnam. AAM crews and aircraft closely supported COORDS missions, which were, combined CIA/US Armed Forces operations aimed at destroying enemy infrastructure. Thousands of AAM**

**fixed wing and rotary wing missions were flown in this short period of time to my knowledge.**

In a letter written to me by Mr. Ted Hellmers, who was an Air America helicopter pilot in Vietnam during the late 1960's and early 1970's, he says:

**It was very early in the morning when we were able to land in Khe Sanh to begin evacuating the badly wounded U.S. Special Forces personnel. We took them to the U.S.S. Hope hospital ship located 15 miles off the coast. We flew many round trips that day, until darkness. Neither the U.S. Army, Marines, or Air Force were able to accomplish this task, and so we all felt especially proud we were able to be of assistance when called upon.**

I know Ted Hellmers personally and I worked with him in Vietnam before I was transferred to Laos. According to Ted, as well as Ben Densely, whom I wrote about in a previous letter, Larry Stadulis, David Kendall and many others, it was clearly understood their mission was to support the U.S. Special Forces in Vietnam, and usually what they did there was unreported. But, occasionally, a kind military commander would respond to what they saw. In a letter of commendation, which did not include any decoration or financial reward, or even a posting in a conspicuous place, Col. H.S. Sachers, Senior Advisor, Headquarters, Advisory Team 2, MACV wrote:

**Captains Kendall and Hellmers calmly and quickly reacted to this critical situation without any assurance that the mortar attack was over. The selfless decision to assist the airfield personnel shows bravery and genuine concern for the welfare of others.**

The presence of Air America in Vietnam during this period was substantial and incontrovertible. Almost every documentary about Laos and Vietnam during this period contains recorded moving pictures of bright silver aircraft with "Air America" clearly painted on their hulls in a variety of paramilitary operations. U.S. Special Forces operations in Vietnam were highly classified and even the stories written by those who were there omit Air America, even though Air America flight crews conducted thousands of flights in their support. Operations in Korea, China, Tibet, Indonesia and French Indo China, before it became Vietnam, by CAT crews are even more shrouded in secrecy. But the pictures of CAT flight crews flying C-119's, an Air Force aircraft on loan in accordance with DOD directives, cannot be denied.

Continental Air Services is also mentioned several times in the CHECO reports. They may have an argument to present for veteran service. However, CASI was not owned by the federal government and never to my knowledge operated U.S. Military aircraft, which represents part of my claim for Air America. Nothing said here should reflect unfavorably on any future application on their part. I cannot champion their cause because I was not an employee of CASI, but some former Air America employees did transfer to CASI and their service in SEA was observed by me personally to be honorable and worthy of respect.

Based upon the foregoing summation and supporting documents as cited, I claim that CAT, Inc/Air America, Inc. was a private corporation, lawfully formed as a private corporation by the Department of Defense through the Central Intelligence Agency for the

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expressed and intended purpose of acting as a paramilitary air force in areas the U.S. Military was restrained from entering due to existing treaties and covenants. The United States Military supported this corporation and enveloped them as one of their own and in turn CAT/Air America supported them. For all intents and purposes, the employees of this corporation, from 1950 until 1975, were the U.S. Military in civilian clothes and they deserve to be eligible for veteran status as any other military person and in accordance with the spirit and intent of public law 95-202 established by the Congress of the United States of America.

Yours truly,

  
Allen Cates

Encls.