

ALLEN CATES

Photocopy
Information
Removed

August 10, 2004

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

Dear Mr. Johnston,

In your letter to me dated July 27, 2004, you mentioned you had requested a search for records about Air America with the Army's Center for Military History. Perhaps I can assist you.

As I understand it, your question was whether or not Air America supported the United States Army in Laos and Vietnam during the conflict in Southeast Asia, and if it did so in a manner consistent with the intent of PL 95-202.

The answer is yes to both questions. Support for this is provided by reference to the attached texts by Paul C. Payne, Reuben Densley and Clarence Abadie.

Paul C. Payne:

A military historian would first want to know if the U.S. Army ever served in Laos. I have attached the text of a speech made by Mr. Paul Payne at the Lao Veterans of America Congressional Reception Awards, Longworth House Office Building, U.S. House of Representatives.

Although this text champions veteran status for the Hmong, portions clearly present a case to support that the U.S. Army did indeed serve in Laos. Here are excerpts from his speech.

"Those first teams of Special Forces soldiers in civilian clothes deployed to Laos in 1959 under the command of Col. Arthur "Bull" Simmons of Sontray Raider fame.

I was fortunate enough to be assigned to a second increment team and arrived in 1960 and assigned to RLA training center in Savannakhet. A little more than a year later after Captain Kong Le overthrew the Lao government, we opened up our footlockers and lo and behold became Special Forces White Star Mobile Training Teams. I then found

myself in NW Laos (50 miles west of Luang Prabang) recruiting, training and employing the 15th battalion of volunteer (15th BV) in combat operations against the North Vietnam Army (NVA) and Pathet Lao. This lasted until the 1962 Geneva Accords forced the US to withdraw its uniformed military.”

Reuben Densley:

Reuben Densley served with the Special Forces, and his letter shows that Air America supported the U. S. Army by supplying them with necessary and appropriate staples, along with evacuating them under enemy fire. I have known Mr. Densley since 1967. Ben left the Army and was employed with Air America, Inc. in 1966. We were both based in Saigon and both transferred to Udorn, Thailand, where we often flew together. Ben went back to the Army after the war ended and retired. He later went to work for NASA and now lives in Florida. I asked Ben if he would write a letter about his experiences in Laos with the United States Army Special Forces and it is attached. This is an excerpt from Mr. Densley’s letter.

“ June of 1960 my Special Forces team left Ft. Bragg, NC on an Air Force C-124 and arrived 14 days later in Bangkok. The mission at that time was classified "Secret Sensitive" and we were provided with ID cards that said we were Dept. of Army Civilians. We were given a clothing allowance and bought khaki shorts and short sleeve shirts for up country and a polyester suit, wash and wear, for travel. At Don Muang airport in Bangkok we got on an Air America C-46 and flew to the Plain Of Jars, Laos. “

“From then until we left in Dec 1960 we were re-supplied by Air America aircraft, which for the most part were the C-46’s. I found out later that the Bad Guys ran the team that replaced us off the PDJ three days later, and they were on an Air America aircraft shooting out the door on takeoff.”

Clarence Abadie:

I looked at the Army’s Center for Military History website and found nothing about “Hotfoot” or “White Star.” Mention of both names may be found in selected books, but no connection with Air America is made. Clarence Abadie was one of the original helicopter pilots in Laos with Air America. He later became the Base Manager. Mr. Abadie wrote an article about his experiences with the H-19 and I have included it with this letter. Abadie’s article provides some important points. It talks about Art Wilson and his propensity for wearing shower shoes when he flew; thus adding credence to Ben Densley’s letter.

Abadie’s article also shows why the H-19 needed to be replaced with a helicopter with better performance if a long-term relationship was anticipated, and apparently it was anticipated. It ties the relationship to the U.S. Army and its training program to the Hmong when combined with the Payne and Densley letters, and identifies Air America employees acting in direct support for this mission. The H-19 was replaced with the H-34, which was loaned to Air America from the United States Marine Corps through its subsidiary Air Asia Co. LTD. No other civilian aviation company used United States

Military aircraft that were not FAA certified and it further ties Air America to the United States Military since these aircraft were used to support United States military personnel.

Mr. Payne says the Special Forces left Laos in 1962, but please notice he says "uniformed military." The truth is that Special Forces personnel in civilian clothes remained in Laos right up to the end. Air America employees supported the United States Army directly in Laos for several years in the '60's and early 70's. Job descriptions and hazards were precisely the same as if they had been in the military. The time sheets generated by the pilots were referred to as "RO", which stood for Requirements Office. Air America also supported the United States Army directly in Vietnam. For the most part this was direct support for the Special Forces, since their work was clandestine in nature and they worked closely with C.I.A. operatives, and often in civilian clothes. The C.I.A. has this information and said they would provide it to you if asked by the DoD. As you know, they will not provide it to me directly. I would assume they would provide you with documents to prove that claim if asked.

I am personally aware of the work conducted by Air America employees because I was there while it was being done and participated. Job descriptions were essentially the same in Vietnam as they were in Laos. Supplies that included ammunition and food and water to outlying areas were typical loads. Most of the work was done with Bell 204B helicopters, but large fixed wing C-46's and C-47's carried cargo to smaller fields from main stations like Da Nang, Nha Trang and Saigon, where it was then loaded on to helicopters.

The attached statements support the position that Air America employees did service the United States Army in Laos and in Vietnam. It is inconsistent with reason to maintain that Air America employees be denied veteran status simply because their work was secret. I submit this letter and accompanying documentation as proof for the claim that Air America employees should be accorded veteran status eligibility within the spirit and intent of PL 95-202.

Yours truly,


Allen Cates