

Ted Hellmers

August 31, 2004

To: Allen Cates

SUBJECT: MY PARTICIPATION IN AIR AMERICA'S ROLE IN SOUTH VIETNAM

This letter is to explain some of my experiences while flying Bell 204B helicopters in Saigon, South Vietnam, for Air America from September 1966, through March 1971.

As you know, Air America helicopters had missions for USAID and U.S. Embassy customers throughout all of South Vietnam. We had overnight stations for aircraft and crews in the cities of Canto, Nha Trang, and Da Nang. During the time I was in South Vietnam (over five years, and over five thousand hours of flight time) I landed in almost every village, hamlet, and landing field in the entire country.

The Commendation letter attached describes a typical event involving the transportation of a wounded Airman from an isolated airfield to a nearby Army hospital. Our response to this type of situation was a common everyday occurrence, but receiving such a letter acknowledging our efforts was very rare.

Another particularly memorable experience began while we were flying out of Da Nang. It was just after the Tet Offensive when our Embassy customer asked if we could get into a Marine base called Khe Sanh, near the DMZ. (A Special Forces camp located there had been under mortar fire for many days, and the bad weather had prevented Military helicopters from landing.) 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 fifteen miles off the coast. We flew many roundtrips 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 we made a difference in the lives of the critically injured men we transported. The Air America motto "Anything, Anytime, Anywhere, Professionally", certainly applied to our efforts on that day.

I would be happy to supply any other information you may need.

Sincerely, 

Ted Hellmers