



**Reconsideration Request  
for  
Active Service Determination  
and  
Veteran Status Eligibility**

**CAT/AIR AMERICA**

**December 15, 2005**

## Letter to C/MSRB

December 15, 2005

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,

Your time and effort involved with preparing the deliberation notes you sent to me are appreciated. As these notes specify the philosophy and rationale for the majority opinion, they provide a devil's advocate argument that was not available when the original application was filed. Their content enables additional merits to support the application.

This document and its attachments represent a request for reconsideration of the majority opinion and provide new evidence to support the minority opinion.

The history of Cat, Inc., later named Air America, Inc. (hereinafter referred to as CAT/AAM) as interpreted by the C/MSRB (hereinafter referred to as the "Board") is in close agreement with the version that was outlined in my initial application. However, the premise constructed by the Board from the foregoing historical account that CAT/AAM was owned by the CIA and was therefore disconnected from the U.S. government is logically flawed.

An organization chart of the Executive Branch of the U. S. Government would show the CIA under the control of the Department of State, funded by the Department of Defense, with the President of the United States as ultimate superior. This operational chain of command over CAT/AAM has significance for each point outlined by the Board. This request for reconsideration intends to clarify the nature of the relationship between the above referenced parties and its centrality to the matter of CAT/AAM eligibility for veteran status.

### **Precedence for Veteran Status**

There is precedence to support veteran status for CAT/AAM. Formation of the Flying Tigers during World War II is a compelling analogy to the creation and utilization of CAT/AAM. In 1937, Claire L. Chennault, a captain in the United States Air Force, resigned and went to China at the request of Madame Chiang Kai-shek to assist her with improvements to the Chinese Air Force.

Chennault was deeply committed to stopping aggression against China. His motivation led him to set up the American Volunteer Group (AVG), or Flying Tigers. In his autobiography Chennault said:

This strategic concept of China as a platform of air attack on Japan offered little attraction of the military planners of 1941. It was not until the Trident Conference of 1943 that I found any appreciation of my strategy or any support for the plans to implement it. This support came from two civilians, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and was offered against the strong advice of their military advisers. (*Way of a Fighter*, by Claire Lee Chennault. p. 96)

Chennault's plans coincided with President Roosevelt's interpretation of conditions in Asia at that time. Roosevelt saw Japan as a threat to China and the entire Pacific Rim, but the use of American military force was out of the question. Roosevelt accomplished through the Flying Tigers (AVG), under the leadership of Chennault, what he could not with the United States military. In his book, *Way of a Fighter*, Chennault said:

A complete communist victory in China will channelize the under currents of native unrest already swirling through Burma, India, Malaya and Indonesia into another rising tide of Communist victories. The ring of red bases can be stretched from Siberia to Saigon. Then the stage will be set for the unannounced explosion of World War III. (p. vii, Foreword)

Every U. S. president for the next 25 years echoed the same fear.

Members of the AVG were civilian and they did not come under United States military control. They did, however, support United States interests at the request of the President, and they operated United States military aircraft with approval of the President. Ultimately, all personnel who served in the AVG, regardless of their station, were granted veteran status, in spite of the fact that they were civilian and not under direct United States military control. Their activities only *appeared* to be more militant than those of CAT/AAM since the cloak of secrecy at that juncture was not as essential as it would later become for CAT/AAM.

### **Response to "Background to This Group's Activities"**

The Board referred to CAT, Inc. as an airline that started as a purely commercial enterprise. However, the Board also acknowledged that in his attempt to get U.S. government support for his airline, Chennault "publicly urged America to stop communism on and from the periphery of China." Additionally the Board acknowledged that CAT "primarily carried cargo for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and its Chinese counterpart," and that it "expanded to airlifting Chinese Nationalist food and military personnel and acting on occasion as a paramilitary adjunct to the Nationalist Air Force." (p. 3). It is not logical for CAT to be a commercial enterprise while at the same time engaging in the activities described above and having as its goal the stemming of communist aggression as well.

The Board states its interpretation of the reasons the CIA decided to purchase CAT. Summarized from the Board's statements, those reasons were 1) because the CIA intended to support covert activities against communist aggression, and 2) because the U. S. government did not want the airline to fall into communist hands. These statements by the Board indicate that it supports the view that communist aggression was the initiating factor as far as CIA action in the matter was concerned. These statements also indicate that the Board supports the view that there was a decisive and official role of the U.S. government in the matter, and further defines this role as being realized through the Departments of State and Defense.

However, the Board also describes CAT/AAM as a commercial operation, which is contradictory with the above two conclusions. It is not logical to suppose that CAT/AAM was a company that operated primarily to make money and also at the same time operated primarily to thwart communist aggression, and it is most unlikely that the U.S. government would own and operate a company specifically designed to make money.

Regarding the circumstances surrounding transfer of ownership of CAT to the U.S. government in 1949 and 1950, the Board inferred that the State Department rejected Chennault's offer, but that the CIA accepted it. However, this is not logical, since the CIA did not have the authority to purchase commercial air carriers without permission from the Departments of State and Defense and the President. The implication that Chennault used the CIA to obtain venture capital for CAT to continue as a commercial enterprise, and that the CIA gladly obliged because it gave them a tool for covert activity is not a viable conclusion. Not the CIA nor any other government agency provides venture capital for private enterprise, with the exception of the Small Business Administration which was specifically designed to make money available to small and startup ventures. However, even those funds must transfer through a bank or other lending institution. No government entity makes direct loans to private companies in the form of venture capital.

There is ample evidence to show that Chennault was on a mission in China. That mission was to stop aggression and it was his mission as far back as the late 1930's, when he asked President Roosevelt to supply him with U.S. military aircraft to support the Chinese against Japan. That mission continued when he considered communism to be a threat to all free countries along the Pacific Rim and ultimately to the United States.

### **Statement of the Political Background during CAT/AAM's Tenure**

The specter of communist aggression influenced virtually every international policy decision made by the United States government for more than twenty-five years following World War II. That the United States government considered communism to be a serious threat was reflected in President Truman's speech to a joint session of Congress in 1947. The speech referred to the situation between Greece and Turkey. It was later called "The Truman Doctrine" and was applied to Southeast Asia in a modified

form that included the term, "The Domino Theory". It was this doctrine that permeated the thinking of every United States president from Truman to Nixon, and it was the impetus for why CAT/AAM was created.

The **Pentagon Papers**, released by Daniel Ellsberg, describe U. S. concerns about the threat of communism that provided the rationale behind CAT/AAM. The Gravel Edition, Volume 1, Chapter 1, "Background to the Crisis, 1940-1950", states on page 6 that, "Events in China of 1948 and 1949 brought the United States to a new awareness of the vigor of communism in Asia, and to a sense of urgency over its containment." Chapter 2, "U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954" details the importance of Indochina, why it was necessary to protect the region from the threat of communism, and the argument against open U.S. intervention by United States troops.

### **Response to the Board's Opinion Notes**

The majority opinion is summarized in six notes that, when analyzed, reflect two basic conclusions: #1: CAT/AAM was not under military authority and it did not operate significantly in a military capacity; and #2: CAT/AAM was structured as a commercial enterprise and it operated primarily in that capacity. The Board's notes in general relate to issues of structure and operation. This request for reconsideration is in general a response to these six notes, included below for reference.

1. The group was not unique, as the U.S. Government did not create or organize CAT/Air America to fill a wartime need and its prewar character was not substantially altered by its wartime mission. Moreover, the group's mission, hauling cargo and personnel, in combat zones was not substantially different from the mission of similar airlines not in the war zone. The majority recognized some aspects of the group's activities were substantially different, but the application did not support or well define activities as to time, place, etc.
2. The group was not under military command authority, and the military did not have organizational authority over the group. Commercial interests drove and directed the overwhelming percentage of the group's activities. On one hand the airline's hierarchy determined the group's structure, location, mission, activities, and staffing/employment policies. On the other hand, the CIA and State Department determined nearly all of the group's unusual missions and activities. While it is possible the military may have had some authority over the group at times, the application did not present substantive evidence of those times and the nature of the authority.
3. The group was not integrated into the military organization in any appreciable manner.
4. The group was neither under military discipline nor subject to military justice.
5. The members of the group were not prohibited from joining the Armed Forces.

6. The group, as a whole, did not receive military training or achieve a military capacity ...

### **Structural Issues - Organizational Authority**

The United States government created and supported CAT/AAM to fill a wartime need because world opinion, treaty restraints and trade considerations prevented a military response to the various conflicts in Southeast Asia. Historical record supports the claim that the U. S. government was instrumental in the creation, direction and utilization of CAT/AAM to fill a wartime need. It would be difficult if not impossible to describe America's involvement in Korea from 1950 to 1953, with 142,091 U.S. casualties, and in Vietnam from 1959 to 1975, with 211,471 U.S. casualties as other than wartime activity. Those years correspond almost precisely to the years of CAT/AAM operation.

The United States government needed military intervention to support non-communist forces in Southeast Asia. However, political and economic concerns prevented this. CAT/AAM could engage in military activity while *appearing* to be a commercial enterprise. The CIA was directed by the Executive Branch to form a secret corporation with intent to use its employees as soldiers. The CIA operated under orders from the President of the United States through the Secretary of State, with funding through the Department of Defense.

The United States government owned CAT/AAM and while the CIA was given broad latitude it was nevertheless under direction of the Secretaries of Defense and State, as were also the Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine Corps. The President of the United States was Commander in Chief of all United States armed forces, and the President was also the Commander in Chief of CAT/AAM.

The Board suggests that CAT/AAM operations were different from military operations because CAT/AAM was under the authority of the CIA rather than the military. There is the implication that the military had command authority of the war in Vietnam. Such a conclusion is logically false. In wartime, even though the military may be given wide latitude in its operations, final decisions on policy and comprehensive strategic issues are responsibilities of the Executive Branch. High-ranking officers who have mistakenly thought otherwise sometimes had their careers abruptly terminated by their superior, the president of the United States. The military is always under the authority of the Executive Branch, as is the CIA.

The Board's statement that the majority of CAT/AAM's activities were unrelated to U.S. armed forces and that 75% of its activity was unrelated to the war is inaccurate. CAT/AAM's origin and ownership were closely held secrets. Therefore, it was necessary for it to appear to public view as a commercial airline, to compete for government contracts and to carry out other activities in order to promote the *illusion* of a commercial enterprise. Details of the numerous missions flown by Air America pilots described in the

Operational Issues section of this document clearly make the statement that the preponderance of Air America activities was military in nature.

Finally, all money received by CAT/AAM was returned to the U.S. Treasury. Therefore, it is not logical to assume CAT/AAM was intended to be a profitable commercial enterprise. Otherwise it would have captured those funds for itself. The majority of CAT/AAM activity was related to a single common cause that was shared by every member of the Executive Branch, including the Armed Forces. That cause was the defeat of communist aggression.

U.S. Air Force Brigadier General Harry C. "Heinie" Aderholt's biography, **Air Commando One: Heinie Aderholt and America's Secret Air Wars**, describes activities of the CIA as "shadow wars," and places the CIA in the realm of military activity.

... if you wanted to fight Communists in those days, the CIA was the place to do it...the CIA had become not only the last refuge for covert military operations, but the progenitor of shadow wars that stemmed the spread of Communism among emerging nations... (p. 72)

(From: **Air Commando One: Heinie Aderholt and America's Secret Air Wars**, by Warren A. Trest. Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000.)

The following group of paragraphs incorporates material from a U.S. Air Force document, **The United States Air Force Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia**, by Earl H. Tilford. It substantiates the administrative role of the Executive Branch in policy and procedure with regard to Air America, and the strong alignment with and coordination of activity between the military and Air America.

Problems in Laos were dominating President Kennedy's attention. At a White House meeting on March 9, 1961, the President directed that certain specific actions be taken to demonstrate American resolve in Laos to the Soviet Union. ....Kennedy did not, however, want to commit American soldiers to combat in Laos. Therefore sixteen Sikorsky H-34 "Choctaw" helicopters were provided to Air America...to fly men and material in Southeast Asia. (p. 34)

Later in the conflict, the Air Force developed a reconnaissance program called Yankee Team, in which President Johnson, Secretary of Defense McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff shared a keen interest. During a conference between Air Force high-ranking officers and Air America representatives, Air America was given the "responsibility for rescue coverage on the Plain of Jars during all Yankee Team missions." (p.50)

The directive was clear that Air America was to work in tandem with the U.S. Air Force so that together they could service the entire region of South Vietnam, Laos and Thailand with rescue operations. Additionally, the Navy and Marines were tapped.

Air America planes and helicopters were available to provide search and rescue support when needed. The need for their services increased when, throughout June 1964, the

communists continued their offensive across northern Laos. By July the tempo of Air Force and Navy air operations over Laos was beyond the limited capabilities of the Air Rescue Service unit at Nakhon Phanom...the urgent problem in Laos required an immediate remedy....In July 1964, Air America asked for four additional H-34s from Department of Defense resources. CINCPAC protested that all Navy and Marine H-34s in the Pacific had operational commitments....The Secretary of Defense solved the controversy by instructing the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to order CINCPAC to loan the four helicopters to Air America. Admiral Felt then took the H-34s from the Fleet Marine Forces, Pacific, and turned them over to Air America. (p. 52)

The first large-scale search and rescue effort of the Indochina war took place November 1964. This operation involved the coordinated involvement of the Air Force, the Navy and Air America. (p. 54). It was followed by many more collaborative efforts throughout 1964 and 1965. Under the May 1964 Joint Chiefs of Staff directive, Air America remained the backbone of rescue in Laos throughout the period. (p. 59)

U.S. Air Force Colonel William M. Harris, IV, commander of the 37<sup>th</sup> Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, stated that "During my tour rescue efforts have called upon every conceivable military resource as well as ... Air America, special ground teams, clandestine operations, frogmen, aircraft carriers, tanks, and so on. There is no limitation on tactics or concepts to be employed to effect a rescue." (p. 96)

Both from a conceptual and an operational perspective, Air America was placed in the same category as the various branches of the military. Tilford's document described numerous missions and activities involving Air America that clearly illustrate their diversity as well as their military and hazardous nature. The situation in Laos, Air America's primary theater of action, was exceptionally dangerous. The following statement applies particularly to the situation for Air America, since Laos was its designated field of operation at that time.

South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and Laos each posed unique problems for rescue forces. The search and rescue task force not only had to overcome enemy opposition that varied in intensity with location and time of the war, but also had to deal with the difficulties of terrain and climate. The problem of rescue escort first focused upon Laos where aircrews who went down in enemy territory faced capture and almost certain death if not picked up quickly. Very early in the war the North Vietnamese and their Pathet Lao allies became adept at setting up flak traps, which proved very dangerous for helicopter operations. (p. 65)

The above material was excerpted from **The United States Air Force Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia**, by Earl H. Tilford. U. S. Air Force, 1992.

CAT/AAM was not a commercial enterprise designed to generate income for shareholders and investors as were some airlines hired on occasion to haul troops and cargo as part of the war effort in Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia. If the need for CAT/AAM was limited to hauling cargo and passengers the government could have used any one of several commercial carriers. Rather, CAT/AAM was entirely owned by the U.

S. Government, and it was completely and at all times at the disposal of the U.S. government. The true CAT/AAM, although hidden from public view, was still in the U. S. government organization chart and it was not the sole property of the CIA. The balance of this document will clearly show that the Executive Branch used CAT/AAM *as necessary*. The CIA, itself a tool of the U.S. government, was often the vehicle for that use, but not always. The broader demands of U. S. government policy regarding the threat of communism ultimately determined how CAT/AAM was utilized.

The assertion made by the Board that all activity in Southeast Asia by CAT/AAM was in specific and direct support of the CIA is logically false. The CIA did not have its own separate policy. The government of the United States set policy for the CIA, Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy, and CAT/AAM, and all of those entities were always at the disposal of the Executive Branch. Although those various groups were physically separate from each other, they often were required to coordinate their efforts in order to accommodate to government policy. The CIA was involved with all of the Armed Forces, and the Executive Branch perpetrated that involvement. The CIA could not enter any Armed Force facility without direct approval of the Executive Branch.

It is also misleading for the Board to imply that because CAT/AAM personnel supported allies under CIA direction therefore their activities were distinctly different from those of troops in an Army, Navy, Marine, or Air Force. The allies in WW II supported the troops of all nations who were at war against Germany. The United States supported South Korean troops against North Korea and South Vietnamese troops against North Vietnam. U.S. troops have supported the troops of other nations throughout the country's history as the need has arisen. Even in Laos, United States military personnel in civilian clothes supported Lao troops. There is no significant difference in this regard between CAT/AAM and the various branches of the military.

**Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXVIII: LAOS**, released by the State Department, reveals the authority behind CAT/AAM and the desire to keep its true purpose secret, as indicated in the following excerpted material, which contains the text of conversation between the Ambassador of Laos and the U.S. Secretary of State. It also explains why members of the other armed forces often looked at employees of CAT/AAM disparagingly. The U.S. government created a loathsome analogy intentionally to hide the true intent for their involvement in Southeast Asia.

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/index.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/index.html). Copies of volume XXVIII can be purchased from the Government Printing Office.

Source of the above material: **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

It is clear that Air America was considered a tool of the United States government to be used by the Departments of Defense and State and specifically sanctioned by the Executive Branch, and not just for gathering information by the CIA. 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

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

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.

Memorandum No 273 dated 26 November 63 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 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, 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

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

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.

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),/3/ 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.

Telegram From the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State

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

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

Joint Embassy/AIRA/ARMA message. 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 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.

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)

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.

Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Laos

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

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.

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.
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.

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/

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.

The above excerpt reveals the extent of coordination among the ambassador, the State Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and CINCPAC. It describes the chain of command that designated the use of military aircraft and the specific and intentional use of Air America personnel in lieu of military personnel.

United States ambassadors do not work for the CIA, and neither do they work independently. Ambassadors work directly for the State Department, and the Secretary of State is their direct superior who, in turn, reports to the President. The CIA would not have authority to send U.S. military aircraft without permission being granted by both the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, and authorized by the President. Authority to

provide military equipment to a civilian commercial airliner would have to come from those superior offices.

It should be noted that nowhere in the above referenced document is there any mention of Air America being *asked directly* to take military aircraft and perform military functions. Rather, the Lao ambassador followed the required chain of command and asked his own superiors who, in turn, then *ordered* the equipment to be transferred to a unit of Air America, which they owned and controlled. The same chain of command would have been followed with any other armed force under their command. In the above referenced incident, the ambassador to Laos controlled all air traffic in his area, and he controlled military traffic as well. The observation might be made here that although the U. S. Ambassador controlled U.S. military personnel in Laos, they were not denied veteran benefits.

### **Operational Issues - Integration into the Military Organization**

The Board's opinion that CAT/AAM's mission was not substantially different from any other commercial airline is challenged in the following documentation.

Operation Squaw One and Two and Operation Castor involved several CAT pilots over a period of several months. Eisenhower stated publicly the United States would not get involved in the French/Indochina conflict with direct measures, nor the Indonesian civil war. Yet, Eisenhower ordered the United States Air Force to remove the insignia from several C-119 aircraft, load them with ammunition and other war related cargo, train CAT pilots how to fly them, stage them from a United States Air Force base and send them into direct combat to drop cargo under fire into Dien Bien Phu. Several aircraft were hit with enemy gunfire and one aircraft was shot down and the crew killed.

President Eisenhower ordered the United States Air Force to train several CAT pilots in a B-26, outfit them with ammunition and bombs and then he ordered the crew into combat in Indonesia. One aircraft was shot down and the pilot was sentenced to death. He was released after President Kennedy took office and certain concessions were made to Indonesia. The act of dropping ammunition and employing firepower while under fire constitutes military combat business and is *substantially* different from activities of a commercial airline.

In 1959, and until the Geneva Accords in 1962, Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy ordered Special Forces units to leave the United States, land in Bangkok, Thailand, remove all military insignia and clothing, board Air America aircraft in complete secrecy and fly to Laos. Their mission was to train Laotian troops in the art of warfare. This mission required them to go into combat with these troops. They were cut off from the outside world in civilian clothes. Their only means of support was through Air America, but Air America, according to Mr. Ben Densely, who was a member of the Special Forces unit and later an Air America pilot, did not just move people and supplies. Air America was directly involved in the missions and carried teams into hazardous areas in direct support for the United States Army. The Army's refusal to acknowledge Operation

Hot Foot and White Star does not alter their existence, which has been well chronicled. That type of work was *substantially* different from the activities of a commercial airline.

Air America had tried to use experienced F/W pilots in 1960 to fly the H-19A helicopters. However, those particular models were under-powered, the pilots lacked helicopter skills, and flying conditions were challenging. These factors called for a major adjustment. In July & August 1960, Marine Corps pilots who were about to rotate to the States or separate from their military obligation on Okinawa were hired to fly these helicopters out of Vientiane.

The situation improved, but still the H-19A was not suited for Laos and its elevated terrain. President Kennedy ordered 4 H-34s to be sent to Bangkok to replace them in December 1960. In March 1961, the Marine Corps moved a portion of their squadron off the USS Bennington into Bangkok for transfer to AAM. These H-34s were operated out of Udorn by "sheep dipped" military pilots and mechanics called temporaries who were hastily drawn from the three stateside military branches. (Notes from former Marine Corps pilot and AAM Captain Harry R. Casterlin, who was with AAM from 1961 to 1974 when the war in Laos ended)

The work in Laos from 1962 to mid 1963 was relatively quiet, but then the war in Vietnam and Laos intensified dramatically. *In 1964, Secretary of State Dean Rusk ordered the commanding officer of all Pacific forces to appoint Air America as the primary search and rescue unit in direct support for United States military aircraft operating in Laos.* Through the following years the Air Force improved their SAR capability but from 1964 through 1965, Air America was the backbone for SAR activity in Laos. AAM remained the secondary SAR thereafter and several SAR missions, under fire, were conducted by Air America through 1973. Air America pilots manned T-28 aircraft to support Air America and the United States Air Force in SAR situations. The T-28 was a combat aircraft and Air America pilots dropped bombs on enemy combatants for almost two years. These activities were chronicled in the books **Air Commando One** and **Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia**, referenced earlier in this document.

The "Water Pump" operation organized by the Air Force and described in **Air Commando One** is an example.

(The Air Force) would interface with the CIA and other agencies in Thailand and Laos.... the Water Pump detachment opened a forward operating location at Wattay airport and began training Air America and Thai pilots as well as Laotian aircrews to fly T-28 combat missions.... trained Water Pump personnel (Air Force) flew as combat controllers with Air America pilots over Laos to direct air strikes in support of friendly forces. (Pp. 140-141)

In the Water Pump operation, the contingent of Air Force enlisted men who worked side-by-side with Air America pilots as combat controllers were referred to as "Butterfly."

The enlisted and nonrated officer FAC's in Laos were known by their call sign, Butterfly. The Butterfly controllers belonged to the Water Pump detachment but flew in the right seat of plans piloted by Air America pilots. They initially spotted targets for the T-28's

operating over Laos but later directed air strikes by jet aircraft that were diverted from North Vietnam to hit targets in Laos. (p. 146)

The above-cited references contain many salient points about the operations of CAT/AAM, some of which are incorporated into this document. However, a broader understanding of the integration, cooperation and collaboration between the U.S. military, the CIA, and CAT/AAM under the auspices of the U.S. government through the Departments of State and Defense can be gained from reading both books in their entirety. The connection among these entities is, indeed, an implicit assumption that pervades the text of both sources.

Few people understand the role U.S. military personnel played in the CIA. General Aderholt was an Air Force officer, but he conducted training for the CIA in counterinsurgency warfare in Virginia. Aderholt later was instrumental in training Air America personnel using U.S. military experts as instructors. The notion that CAT/AAM was a civilian profit centered enterprise was fostered by the U.S. government, and it was an intentional falsehood, as will be revealed in this document. *The majority of CAT/AAM's activity was covert and military related.* Whatever portion of CAT/AAM activity that might have been described as commercial was performed or made to appear as performed in order to protect the cover that was essential to support covert operations. In this sense even the purported "commercial" activity would also be defined as covert. The logical conclusion from this is that all activity of CAT/AAM was of a covert nature.

The operations of CAT/AAM cannot and must not be defined by references to documents designed to foster or maintain the illusion of CAT/AAM as commercial. It must be remembered that all recorded material about CAT/AAM that was written at the time while they were in operation and that might have had potential to reach public view would likely have been phrased in such a way as to obscure the true nature of CAT/AAM. This would apply particularly to official documentation. For this reason, all such recorded material must be interpreted with great care and in light of CAT/AAM's highly unique situation. In fact, those circumstances warrant that reliance might be more appropriately placed on personal records and reports or analyses written *after* the point had passed when compromise of the cover was no longer a concern.

CAT/AAM had imbedded CIA personnel in their ranks. It is not known whether those individuals would qualify for veteran status, as CAT/AAM employees should by all rights. However, they performed the same duties and encountered the same hazards. The CIA case officers that worked in Laos are now referred to as the SKY group. They either carried AAM identification cards, or were from some other airline, but they were on a different pay and benefit package. Many were contract employees and did not qualify for civil service retirement.

General Aderholt was a U.S. military officer, as were many of those who worked with him. They operated in Laos secretly and they automatically qualified for veteran status for their service. The differences between them and those who worked directly for the CIA and carried AAM identification, and those who worked for Air America, Inc., are not clear and do not seem significant. The U.S. government owned all of those entities

and the individuals within them operated under similar circumstances and performed similar jobs.

Although CAT/AAM is sometimes loosely placed with commercial groups such as Birdair and Continental Air Services, there were significant differences between them. One difference was that Air America facilities were located on U.S. bases in Thailand and Vietnam and were under the protection of U.S. armed forces. This did not apply to the other referenced air services. Another difference was that CAT/AAM employees - just as military personnel - did not have the ability to negotiate salaries based upon mission requirements, since the U.S. government directly owned them. Employees of the other referenced air services did have that option. In **Air Commando One**, General Aderholt describes how he used Birdair on certain occasions near the end of the war in Cambodia. He refers to financial negotiations that took place with Birdair in the context of missions performed. This kind of transaction would not and could not have occurred with CAT/AAM.

There were other analogies between CAT/AAM and the U.S. military with respect to operations. For example, both on occasion made routine missions or "milk runs." Both had non-combatants. In fact, only about 10 to 20 percent of the military were actually involved with direct combat. The rest were support personnel, none of whom were prevented from obtaining VA benefits.

It is important for the Board to have a clear understanding of the similarity between CAT/AAM and the military branches with regard to autonomy and organizational authority. Individual members of the armed forces are on contract, but they are permitted to leave the service when their contracts are completed. Individuals who have spent the required amount of time retire from the service and do so even during wartime conditions. Some come back and some do not. However, the armed forces as *units* do not have the autonomy to come and go at will. This same restriction applied to CAT/AAM as a unit.

Given the above conditions, the analogy made by the Board between CAT/AAM and commercial carriers like Continental Air Services, Bird Air, Arizona helicopter and others does not hold up. Commercial carriers, while their work on occasions was unique, could depart the war zone at any time. The Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force did not have that privilege as a unit. They could not because they were part of the United States government and controlled by the Executive Branch; neither could CAT/AAM, because it, too, was part of the United States government and controlled by the Executive Branch.

Just like a military unit, CAT/AAM did not, as a unit, have the autonomy to leave its post, since it was under orders that came from the same source, as did the military. CAT/AAM's responsibility in this regard was on par with the military, and this points to a significant similarity between the two. At the same time it indicates a significant difference between CAT/AAM and other air services, which did enjoy the freedom as units to leave at their own discretion. Statements made by the Board that imply CAT/AAM employees operated at the whim and caprice of local management are

inaccurate. They were unable to do so because the Executive Branch of the United States government controlled the management of CAT/AAM.

### **Details of Air America Missions, Operations and Activity in Southeast Asia**

The situation in Laos intrigued the media because of the secrecy involved with missions there. Media fascination with the secret war in Laos effectively identified Air America with Laos. Air America also operated extensively in Vietnam, but its presence there did not make good headline material. As a result its involvement in that area is not well known.

Mark Albertson served with Air America as a flight mechanic in Vietnam. He never served in the U.S. military. He did not serve in Laos and was not part of the SAR activity in that area. He was wounded in Vietnam and spent over a year recovering before returning to work. This is an unedited excerpt from a letter written by Mark.

Here is the information on my medical treatment after I was wounded on 7 Nov. 1968.

1. Was taken to a nearby Special Forces "A" Team camp for initial treatment.
2. Flew on another AAM 204B to Saigon's Third Field Army Hospital where I had an emergency operation on my left hand. I stayed at the hospital approximately 10 to 12 days.
3. Med-a-vac from Saigon to Clark Air Force Base hospital on a C-141 where I remained two weeks. The doctors were concerned that I had a bad infection and it wasn't responding to normal treatment. They started me on mega doses of antibiotics using Novocain and antibiotics mixed together and a different set of antibiotics mixed in a drip tube and administered intravenously.
4. After being released from Clark I went to Andrews Air Force Base via Elmendorf and Scott Air Force Bases on several different C-141's. From Andrews I took a commercial flight to Pittsburgh, PA where I went to see a Doctor named W.W. White who was recommended to me by one of my doctors while I was at Clark.
5. Reconstructive surgery was performed in February 1969 in Pittsburgh and at that time it was discovered that the AK-47 round that hit my left hand did not go through my hand but instead it traveled up my forearm and lodged behind my elbow thus causing the bad infection that was so hard to get under control.
6. In January 1970 I was released from medical care and returned to Saigon where I was assigned to an aircraft maintenance supervisors position until my employment was terminated by AAM in September 1970 due to manpower cut backs.

After reviewing those little flight logs we carried to keep track of flight hours, meals and RON's I discovered that I didn't really write down that much information on the various missions that I flew on as a flight mechanic.

1. 27 Sept. 1966 on N1304X flying in the CanTho region (V17) we took out four

wounded from a Special Forces camp. Probably Vietnamese

2. 6 Oct. 1966 on N1307X with Captain James - flew in the Saigon area. Flew a General and five people with him – did recon work.
3. 11 Oct. 1966 on N1304X with Captain Greenway - flew a Special Forces Sergeant from V17 to his “A” team camp. V17 was a Special Forces “B” team camp that supported all the “A” teams in the Delta area.
4. 13 Oct. 1966 on N1304X with Captain Greenway – Took mail to a Special Forces camp. May have been V193
5. 14 Oct. 1966 on N1304X with Captain Greenway – V17 and V193 did a lot of flying into Special Forces camps – mail and supplies were main cargo.
6. 6 Jan. 1967 on N8513F with Captains Mehaffey and Lawson – had a couple of US Army door gunners for a recon flight in the V169 and V173 areas.
7. 13 Sept. 1967 on N1303X with Captains James and Basham – flew a two star general around by the name of Forsytie. Block hours of 5+27
8. 31 Oct. 1967 on N1303X with Captains Peyton and Basham – only comment was “did a lot of work for the army” Block hours of 11+06
9. 31 Mar. 1968 on N1306X with Captains Barker and Rausch – flying out of the Saigon area we heard a mayday in the afternoon from an Army huey. We were the first chopper on the scene so we picked up the crew of five Americans.
10. 28 Apr. 1968 on N1305X with Captains Rolston and Lawson – we were doing low-level recons for MACV. We spotted some VC trucks and the Army on board shot them up a bit with small arm’s fire then a FAC came around and dumped artillery on them and finally the Air Force bombed the site.
11. 11 May 1968 on N1304X with Captains Barker and Collard flying out of V17 – our ship was used as a command post for an US Army Search and Destroy operation.
12. 12 May 1968 on N1304X with Captains Collard and Barker – we went out to an LST mother ship this afternoon for a med-a-vac. An American Navy gunner on a PBR boat was shot while bending over. The round went from his chest through his lung and liver. We took him to a US medical facility at Dom Tam, on the way there two American doctors we had on board worked on him. He died about five minutes after we got him on the ground. Loss of blood was the main reason. There’s more to this story but I think you have enough information for your needs. A very sad day for all of us involved.
13. On several occasions we flew US Army Paymasters around to outposts so old MPC could be exchanged for new MPC by the US personnel at these locations.

14. I remember one flight out of Pleiku where we had a US Army General and his VIP party on board for the day. We flew at his direction. The only reason I remember this particular flight is we dropped off our passengers and went back to Pleiku to refuel. At the POL dump some Army Captain came up to us as I was about to start refueling and said he wasn't running a gas station and for us to go somewhere else for fuel. We then went back and picked up the General and his party. He wanted to go somewhere else but we told him we couldn't get fuel. He directed us back to Pleiku. When we landed the same Captain came out again to tell us we still couldn't refuel. The general informed him that he was running a gas station and that he personally (the Captain) would refuel our aircraft.

Mark's letter described typical operations in Vietnam by Air America. Landing an Air Force C-47 or a Pilatus Porter in Khe Sanh under fire is not an activity even remotely similar to that of a commercial airline. It is highly unlikely any commercial airline would have agreed to conduct such missions. Air America did on a *regular basis*.

After Mark Albertson was separated from Air America he worked for United Parcel Service and recently retired. At the bottom of the above referenced letter he added the following note.

During the first Gulf War UPS along with other airlines were activated in what is known as Civilian Air Reserve Fleet (CRAF). UPS B747's were used in that war and we did a lot of flying in support of the military. When the war was over a bunch of us received an Air Metal from the Air Force if we flew six or more missions into the desert. So it seems the Air Force knows me when they want to as I received the Air Metal from them, for only two weeks of work.

I don't need any vet benefits I was just hoping my children would think of their father as a warrior for his country instead of as some sort of mercenary for hire.

The application for veteran status is presented precisely for the reason Mark stated and all CAT/AAM employees share this view.

Contained in **The Pentagon Papers** is a suggestion by French Undersecretary of State, André Bougenot, in the presence of Premier Laniel, to Douglas MacArthur 11, Counselor of the Department of State, that the United States might commit its naval aircraft to the battle at Dien Bien Phu without risking American prestige or committing an act of belligerency by placing such aircraft, painted with French insignia, and construed as part of the French Foreign Legion, under nominal French command for an isolated action consisting of air strikes lasting two or three days. Further on in the papers there is a direct insinuation by the United States government that it would not even contemplate such a plan. Subsequently, the fall of Dien Bien Phu made the plan and its possible consequences moot. (**The Pentagon Papers**, Gravel Addition, Volume 1, Chapter 2, "U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954")

The truth is, however, the above chain of events *actually happened*. However, it did *not* involve naval aircraft or U.S. military pilots. The planes came from the United States Air Force, but the *crews were CAT/AAM civilian pilots and United States military personnel trained them*. This was not a CIA plan. It was controlled by the United States Air Force in accordance with approval from the Secretaries of Defense and State and the President of the United States, who hoped no one would find out. CAT pilots were chosen because the United States could not legally use United States military flight crews, and perhaps more importantly, because the CAT crews were already in close proximity. The logistics was far easier than using American military. Ironically, France chose to honor those same American civilian aircrews during a special ceremony in 2004, while America chose to remain silent about these events.

The C-119 aircraft that were used to drop supplies at Dien Bien Phu departed from Clark Field in the Philippines. They were U.S. Air Force aircraft, fueled with U.S. Air Force gas by U.S. Air Force personnel and flown by CAT aircrews. Eisenhower said America would not get involved in France's war in Indochina. Eisenhower also said America would not get involved in Indonesia politics and their civil war. The B-26 aircraft that bombed and strafed pro-communist positions operated from Clark Field also. They, too, were maintained and fueled by U.S. Air Force personnel, but CAT pilots operated them.

The B-26 was flown out of Clark Field, just like the C-119 aircraft. The book **Air Commando One** reveals this truth and discusses the plight of Allen Pope, who was one of the pilots. He was shot down, captured, tried and convicted and was sentenced to death. He was released through an agreement made by the Kennedy administration. For all intents and purposes, Allen Pope was conducting military operations in accordance with instructions from the President of the United States. Allen was branded a mercenary, but a mercenary would not have had access to a United States Air Force base and a United States Air Force aircraft. The truth was that Allen Pope was a soldier and a patriot.

The United States government had good reasons for making CAT/AAM appear to be a commercial carrier. The secrecy veil would have been pierced had the government created CAT/AAM to operate in accordance with the Board's Notes # 3,4,5 and 6 above. Direct military training did exist for the C-119, B-26, C-130 and the CH-47 and the book **Air Commando One** discusses this training at length. *Most of Air America's employees came directly from the Army, Navy, Air Force or Marines and were already trained in the aircraft they would fly*. The only training needed was recurrent. This training was required for the certificate they were operating under, but it should be understood that recurrent training is necessary to keep accidents from happening. It would not make any difference whether the training was conducted by the military or by civilian instructors who had been trained by the military. By conducting recurrent training internally, CAT/AAM's secrecy cover was kept intact. The Air Force C-130 crews brought the aircraft to be used by Air America pilots from Japan to Udorn. *Air America crews piloted the aircraft and they operated in Laos because the Air Force could not legally fly into Laos*. For all intents and purposes, Air America was not different from other armed forces

units, but the demand for secrecy prevented open disclosure and acknowledgment of that fact.

The following is an excerpt from a Project CHECO report prepared by the United States Air Force. (Project CHECO Report "The Fall of Site 85" 9 August 1968)

As conceived in evacuation plans, the decision to evacuate was reserved for the Ambassador, Vientiane. First priority of evacuees was allocated to the 13 TSQ/TACAN personnel; however, enough helicopters were to be provided to permit a total of 155 to be lifted out. The others, guerrillas, were to be extracted when the Local Area Defense Commander deemed appropriate. Five helicopters, three USAF and two Air America, were designated as the force required to accomplish 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. 89] Subsequently, some USAF messages expressed the desire for Air America helicopters to RON Site 85, not 98. 90] However, this was not changed; it was feared helicopter presence at Site 85 would have provoked an enemy attempt to destroy these lucrative targets. If they had been destroyed, the planned emergency lift capability would have vanished. But the point was well taken, for weather also might have disrupted the rescue flight from Site 98 to Site 85.

Following a decision to evacuate, the Ambassador was to notify 7/13 AF TACC at Udom AB, Thailand who could in turn notify 7AF at Tan Son Nhut AB, Vietnam. Weather permitting, 7 AF was to scramble or divert four A-1 aircraft to provide cover for the evacuation, suppress enemy fire, and FAC or subsequent jet strikes. The LADC and an attache-provided FAC were to help direct the strikes. The plan allowed a limited night evacuation capability (the RON helicopters at Site 98), but pre-supposed a daylight effort."

This particular CHECO report is highly significant because of what it includes and what it omits. For that reason it offers directly and indirectly perhaps the most convincing support of all for Air America's true role in Southeast Asia, its connection with the United States military and the chain of command under which it operated. Clearly Air America was designated by the senior military commander in Southeast Asia as part of the evacuation plan. This plan was not approved by a contract between a commercial enterprise and the United States military. *Air America was included because it was part of the organizational structure* that began with the President and included the Department of State and its ambassador to Laos, the CIA, the Department of Defense and Joint Chiefs of Staff, the United States Air Force, and Air America.

What was omitted from the CHECO report is the identity of those who made the rescue of Site 85. It is significant because this piece of information would secure all links in the chain of command over Air America; from the evacuation plan that specified Air America for rescue to the actual execution of that plan if it did indeed use Air America for rescue.

Although the CHECO report does not name Air America as the rescue agent at Site 85, an account by two Air America pilots who participated in the rescue evacuation substantiate Air America's involvement. Their eyewitness story is detailed in Timothy Castle's book, **One Day Too Long**.

There were at least two Air America helicopters on Site 85 the day the North Vietnamese bombed it with the AN-45 Colt aircraft. Captain Dick Elder, Captain Phil Goddard and Captain Ted Moore, all Air America personnel, were on the site briefing for an infiltration of Hmong troops in the immediate area when the bombing started. Ted Moore had vacated the site temporarily to carry some supplies for the troops and was airborne. Phil Goddard jumped in his aircraft and was able to get airborne while rockets were landing in close proximity. He spotted the other helicopter and the Colt. The flight mechanic in Ted's aircraft (not a sharp shooter as has been reported) carried an automatic weapon. (It was an AK-47, but Air America flight crews were issued automatic weapons for protection.) Ted was able to fly along side of the Colt while Woods, the flight mechanic, fired his weapon at the aircraft, which caused it to crash. Dick Elder remained on the ground and was firing at the other aircraft with a small arm pistol. None of this information was contained in the CHECO report.

Air America Captain Phil Goddard and Ken Wood were on duty at 20 Site Alternate on March 11<sup>th</sup>. Each was flying a Bell helicopter that was actually a U.S. military helicopter "on loan" to Air America. The loan was a guise as part of the U.S. government cover of Air America's true nature. The decision to evacuate, as described in the attached CHECO report, followed the appropriate chain of command. What is *not* said in the CHECO report is that Air America actually rescued some of the Americans on the site. Air America was notified through the appropriate channels and the CIA air officer at 20 Site Alternate ordered Goddard to Site 85 at first light.

According to Goddard, the weather was not good, contrary to what was reported by the CHECO report, and he had to fly up the slope and slip in under the clouds that were hugging the landing pad. He was met both by Americans and indigenous personnel and lifted clear of the site. According to Castle's book, Captain Ken Wood became involved indirectly since his original mission was to Site 36. He responded to an emergency beeper and performed a heroic act of rescue during the early stages of the evacuation. Normally AAM flight crews communicated by VHF and although that is not mentioned in Castle's book, it can be assumed Wood and Goddard were in radio contact with each other. Phil Goddard's participation is described in the Notes section of Castle's book.

The significant point about the above event is not the rescue, which was certainly heroic, but the unbroken chain of command it establishes between Air America and the source of its authority. Site 85 was not a one-time event. This type of activity was conducted regularly by Air America. Details of this particular incident are only known because of the site's importance and because a book was written about the event. It is obvious that Air America was not a commercial enterprise.

As might be expected given the covert nature of Air America operations, Castle did not clearly understand Air America's role in Southeast Asia and he relegates Air America's rescues somewhat to that of "ambulance chasing". He also treats the CIA as some external organization that was not controlled by the executive branch. Internal squabbles existed within the armed services and between the CIA, ambassador and MACV. That was pointed out in Aderholt's book, but all of them worked for the executive branch and the President was their ultimate superior. Castle was a door gunner for the Air Force and operated out of Thailand. He also thought that Air America was a commercial enterprise that just happened to wander into an Air Force operation. His attitude is typical of the normal inter-service rivalry and the stigma the U.S. government intentionally attached to Air America's activity. However, when the CHECO report and his book are taken in context together it is obvious Air America was just as much a part of the Executive Branch as was the Air Force. According to Castle, the CIA bestowed disability and honorary awards to some of their personnel who were on Site 85, and awards that included the Air Force Cross, the nation's second highest military award, to some of the military personnel involved. However, the Air America flight crews who risked their life that day received no acknowledgement.

The absence of a show of military discipline in military style was part of the ruse to protect the secrecy veil. This veil was so opaque that even the majority of Air America employees were not aware that the government owned the airline. However, the military had the authority to terminate any Air America employee at any time and Air America management did not have any option but to comply. This authority is written in all military contracts, but it does imply that a certain amount of discipline was available from the military over Air America. This authority to terminate was written in the contracts that were signed by military officers. In fact, it was not unusual for terminated Air America employees to be sent home without explanation.

### **Air America and the Vietnam War**

The historical account of the Vietnam War attributes the conclusion of that conflict to President Nixon's 1969 doctrine. That account has failed to incorporate the strategic role played by Air America. The United States government intentionally obscured the existence of this hidden air force. In reality, the war ended as a result of indirect and less noticeable events that were triggered by Nixon's doctrine. The following account of Air America activity and related events during the Vietnam War is highly detailed and descriptive. *This accounting must be made in order to substantiate the uniqueness of Air America's services, to provide for the record evidence of the sacrifices of Air America personnel and to assure that the strategic role of Air America in the Vietnam War is fully understood and acknowledged.*

In the spring of 1969, there was a turning point in the war in Vietnam. On the surface it appeared Nixon's Vietnamization program was working, but there were other events transpiring that few people knew about. In a speech to the American public, Nixon said the North Vietnamese were violating the 1962 Geneva Accords by using Laos to infiltrate South Vietnam with fresh troops and supplies. He said, however, American troops were

not dying in Laos. That was not true since several American flight crews lost their life in the attempt to stem the flow, and they included U.S. military crews and Air America employees.

The Vietnamization program *appeared* to be working because thousands of North Vietnamese troops were pulled from South Vietnam to defend the supply line commonly called the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The trail was under attack, not by American troops, but by Laotian soldiers pressed into service and trained by the CIA. Essentially, a new front was established in Laos to weaken the North Vietnamese offensive. This tactic reduced pressure on the South Vietnamese Army and made it appear that they were winning the war without the Americans. Although this action was attributed to the CIA as a sponsored clandestine adventure, it actually was conceived, ordered and directed by the United States government. The CIA was simply a tool for implementation, as was the U.S. military and Air America.

The Laotian military structure did not have the capability to provide aerial support for food and water, ammunition, troop replacements and evacuation of the wounded, and American military forces could not legally do so. Civilian contractors filled the slots and Air America flight crews, using an unheard of precedent of operating non-FAA certified United States military aircraft, became conscripted soldiers without their knowledge.

Prior to 1969, many landing strips in the region were carved out of hillsides under the direction of Brigadier General Harry C. Aderholt. In his biography, **Air Commando One** (referenced earlier), General Aderholt explains his role in Laos and the close relationship the Air Force had with Air America. General Aderholt worked at the heart of both the U.S. Air Force and the CIA special operations worldwide. In 1964, he became commander of the famed First Air Commando Wing, and he fought to build up special operational capabilities for both American and South Vietnamese airmen. In 1966-67, he and his men set the record for interdicting the flow of enemy trucks over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and North Vietnam. This biography of Heinie Aderholt tells the story of a renowned leader of counterinsurgency operations. The book also integrates U.S. Air Force and CIA accounts of some of the most pivotal events of the past fifty years.

Aderholt was responsible for the very successful Air Force C-130 aircraft flights into Tibet, which were manned by Air America pilots. U.S. military pilots could not be used for political reasons and the C-130 was the best aircraft for the job. It was not an easy job however. The trip was long and tedious and very often the returning flights had barely enough fuel to land. The logistics, primitive conditions, plans and changes in aircraft weights and balances were all controlled by Aderholt and were extremely demanding. The integration of the Air Force and Air America is described in great detail and leave little doubt about Air America's veteran role in Southeast Asia.

Air America flight crews had been operating in Laos since 1959. Most of them had at least five years experience in the immediate area and some had more than 15 years with the company. These crewmembers found a way to survive in a war torn country, but they were not totally prepared to act as combat soldiers. They were well trained, and armed for

protection, but rarely fully briefed about circumstances surrounding their missions. Demands stemming from the need for secrecy sometimes trumped pragmatic method.

One hundred and forty six Air America flight crewmembers were killed in action from 1950 through 1975. (**Dudley Foster Report**) Fifty-five of them, representing 38% of the total, died from 1969 through 1973. Most of them died in United States military aircraft that were loaned to Air America by the Departments of Defense and State. Rarely was a civilian employee of a private corporation loaned U.S. military aircraft for operations in a combat environment in the entire history of the United States. More significantly, at least two aircraft were shot down over Laos, not by the North Vietnamese, nor the Pathet Lao, but by Chinese anti aircraft guns operated by Chinese military personnel in Laos.

The C-123 provider was an Air America workhorse. The original AAM aircraft were N-registered, meaning they were U.S. registered. Later, all of the aircraft were converted to C-123 K models with two jet engines added. All of them were property of the United States Air Force, not FAA certified, and operated by civilian aircrews. After 1969, there were normally six C-123 aircraft stationed in Udorn, Thailand, which is 30 miles south of Vientiane, and six C-123's in Vientiane, Laos. The fixed wing flight crews were all stationed in Vientiane and those assigned to fly the Udorn based aircraft would either deadhead across the border in the early morning, or would remain overnight in Udorn the night before. Each aircraft was capable of carrying 18,000 pounds of cargo and crews normally flew two to four missions a day, seven days a week.

No one knows the exact amount of cargo that was carried, but a close average can be easily estimated. Using an average load of at least 10,000 pounds and an average of two flights a day, and assuming some time was lost to aircraft in maintenance and weather delays, at least eight aircraft a day carried 20,000 pounds five days a week, and that is a very conservative estimate. This lasted at least from January 1969 until December 1973 representing 960 flight days (four years times 12 = 48 times 20 days a month). That would mean in just that period, and not counting all the years prior to 1969, the C-123 aircraft easily carried 154 million pounds of cargo. These statistics do not include the fleet of C-46's, C-47s and the Caribous that Air America operated. Many of the flights, and the majority of the C-46 flights were airdrop loads, where the aircraft was flying in an elliptical pattern at precise altitude to drop food, water and ammunition with pinpoint accuracy to refugee camps and battlefield locations. The craft were flown without protection into situations that routinely exposed them to gunfire.

Virtually every one of those missions was of a military nature. The fact that the C-123 aircraft were operating on a USAID contract was merely a cover. Missions flown by these craft, such as hauling ammunition to U.S. Air Force personnel in civilian clothes as was done in the Site-85 program and the FAC Steve Canyon program, were not typical of USAID work.

The Vientiane aircraft carried mostly food, water, troops and fuel. The Udorn aircraft carried ammunition. All of the bombs and rockets used by the T-28s and Cessna Forward air control aircraft based in various places in Laos, and manned by United States Air

Force pilots in civilian clothes, were delivered by the C-123K. There were no navigational aids in Laos. All flying was conducted by time and distance, visual reference and years of experience. The cargo was then distributed to various locations by the helicopter fleet, which consisted of United States Marine Corps H-34 helicopters, modified H-34 helicopters called "Twin Packs", Huey helicopters on loan from the United States Army and a fleet of short takeoff and landing aircraft, which were primarily Helio Couriers and Pilatus Porters. The helicopter fleet was also responsible for troop placements and withdrawals deep in enemy territory, and Air America personnel manned them all. (Note: Some of the helicopters were owned by Air America. These were the Bell 204B aircraft and they were N-registered)

All medical evacuations were handled by Air America manned helicopters from elevated pads in the mountains and often under enemy fire. There were times when the crafts were forced to stop flying and wash blood from the decks with buckets of water because they became too slippery. It was difficult to remain focused because of the carnage. Young fighting boys with missing limbs and in some cases missing faces where shrapnel had removed the nose, mouth and eyes and leaving only the orifices to a living person in terrible agony were carried from the battlefield to the hospital by Air America. This type of activity was exact in nature to that of the Marines and Army in Vietnam. Air America was also ordered to carry the dead, which is a sobering experience.

Mr. Dudley Foster, who was imbedded with Air America, and was actually a CIA employee, conducted in-depth research about CAT/AAM's killed in action personnel. The following information is paraphrased from his report. (**Combat Losses in China and Southeast Asia, prepared by Dudley Foster**)

A detailed description of one C-123 that follows its history from the U.S. Air force to Air America and its eventual disappearance is summarized in the following paragraphs. It represents a typical C-123 day, but in this case, the flight ended in tragedy. The flight crew taxied from the Air America ramp in Udorn down the taxiways along side the active runway to a location on the airfield called Pepper Grinder. There, they shut down and United States Air Force personnel loaded 18,000 pounds of ammunition, which included white phosphorus, on the aircraft. The pilot in command was Captain George Ritter. The co-pilot was First Officer Roy Townley. The senior Air Freight Specialist was Ed Weissenback and his assistant was Khamphanh Saysongkham, who was either Thai or Lao. John McRainey was flying a C-123 K the same day out of Pepper Grinder. John's load of bombs was designated for Lima Site 20A. George's aircraft was scheduled to fly to Lima Site 69A, which was further to the west.

Both planes departed at the same time and climbed out to the north to the normal altitude of 9,000 feet since the C-123 was not pressurized. John reached his destination, unloaded and headed back to Udorn for another load. George Ritter and his crew never reached 69A and were never heard from again. John reported later the ground was obscured by clouds and there was a stronger than normal wind from the south that day. George's flight path would take him north to where the Mekong turned to the west and then west to 69A staying well south of the Mekong and Pak Beng.

The Chinese were building a road in accordance with an aid contract from the southern part of China, south through Pak Beng to the Mekong River. It was known the Chinese had heavy anti-aircraft guns near Pak Beng, but there had been no reports of aircraft coming under their fire. There was no explanation as to why the Chinese needed heavy anti-aircraft guns in a neutral country.

Jim Rhyne, Chief Pilot fixed wing Laos, loaded a Volpar (A converted Beech C-45 with twin turbo prop engines) with leaflets soliciting any information about the crew and offering a reward. He and the Senior AFS (Kicker) Mr. Bobby Herald were in the vicinity of Pak Beng where they thought the C-123 might have gone down to drop their leaflets. They were hit with heavy anti-aircraft gunfire and Jim was severely wounded. His leg was amputated at the ankle, but he eventually returned to flying.

There was no obvious reason for the Chinese to fire on unarmed aircraft, and a complaint should have been lodged. However, an analysis of the historical events in that time period shows that Nixon was making an unprecedented trip to China during this period and China was soon to become a member of the United Nations. China was shortly thereafter granted inclusion in the United Nations. The significant connection between this and the incident described above is that a complaint to China *would likely* have been made if America had openly been in Laos with U.S. military pilots. China was a key player in the drama of Southeast Asia as they were in Korea. The United States was not in a position to complain about a supposedly civilian airline that was illegally carrying ammunition to U.S. troops in civilian clothes in a neutral country. White phosphorous was used by the Forward Air Controller aircraft manned by U.S. Air Force pilots. *Air America personnel were supporting U.S. troops and dying while doing it.*

The Chinese shot down another C-123K in March 1973. Captain James Ackley, First Officer Clarence Driver, AFS Chudchai Chiewchongsuk and AFS Kenekeo Narissak were all killed.

Flight Mechanic Alfredo Alor was killed in a Marine Corps H-34 helicopter operated by Air America by a rotor blade after the aircraft was forced down by small arms fire in the southern part of Laos in May 1972.

Captain John M. Bannerman, First Officer Charles McCarthy, AFS B. Somchai and AFS Suthi Chipaibul were flying a U.S. Air Force C-7 Caribou when they were hit by 37 MM near Saravane Laos in November 1972. The aircraft crashed and all died. Air America was supplying Laotian troops in the southern part of Laos in a paramilitary role and the fighting was very heavy in Saravane.

Captain Harvey Potter and training captain John Beardsley died in March 1970 from burns received in a U.S. Marine Corps H-34 that crashed while supplying Laotian troops near Louang Prabang north of Vientiane. FM Joe Gaculais was severely burned, but survived and eventually returned to flying. Joe's burn scars were obvious and extreme. Mrs. Potter and Mrs. Beardsley were quickly packed up and shipped out of Udom. Both of them eventually had to sue the government to get the life insurance promised to them when their husbands were killed.

Gerald Booth and FM Montano Centeno were killed in a U.S. Marine Corps H-34 in July 1969, when it crashed in an elevated pad over looking the PDJ. He was supplying the Laotian troops with food, water, and ammunition.

Captain Howard Boyles, First Officer Jack Cavill, AFS Pracit Chaichana, flying a U.S. Air Force C-123K, were killed in February 1973, after being hit by a missile near Thakhet to the east of Vientiane and north of Savannekhet. AFS Sourinch parachuted and survived.

Captain Herbert Clark was killed in June 1971, after his C-46 was hit by enemy ground fire and crashed. Three of the AFS crewmembers bailed out and survived, but Trikit Thuttanon was also killed.

In April 1973, Captain Charles Osterman, FO Terry Clark and FM Valeriano Rosales were flying a U.S. Army Huey and were hit by a stella heat-seeking missile near Huong Hoa SVN in Vietnam. All three were killed and the aircraft destroyed.

The C-130 was capable of carrying huge loads at much faster speeds than other cargo aircraft. They were also pressurized, but entry into the airfields in Laos had to be done visually. There were no navigation aids and the weather in Laos during the smoky season was like flying in a glass of milk. In April 1970, Captain Kevin Cochrane was trying to land at LS-20 Alternate, which was nestled in between two ridgelines. There was only one way in and one way out of this airfield because a limestone mountain called a karst was at one end. The C-130 was a big plus for the war effort. They were able to carry many wounded soldiers at faster speeds to the hospital in Thailand, and bring back fresh troops the same day. On this day Kevin hit Phu Bia, a few miles east of Lima Site 20A. Other crewmembers included FO Robert McKean, AFS Gerald Delong and Billy Hester, as well as training FO Huey Rodgers and Flight Engineer Milton Smart.

In July 1972, Captain Ben Coleman flew into a mountain trying to drop arms to Laotian troops in heavy battle. The weather was bad that day and the clouds were touching the trees at it often does in the mountains in Laos. The crash also killed FO John Grover and AFS Thanom Khanthaphengxay. They were flying a DHC-6 Twin Otter. All of them were highly experienced. Jack Grover previously was a Porter captain in Vietnam and accepted an FO position in Laos.

Ernesto Cruz was a highly experienced flight mechanic and often conducted line training for new flight mechanics. In January 1971, he was flying with Bill Foster in a U.S. Marine Corps H-34 and conducting line training with FM Reginald Boston. A rocket either hit the aircraft, or one of the grenades exploded while on a pad north of LS20A. Ernesto was killed. Boston lost an eye and was severely burned. Foster was also injured.

In August 1969 Ralph "Cotton" Davis loaded up his Porter at LS20A, took off and was climbing parallel to Sky Line ridge adjacent to the runway when he was hit by small arms fire and killed instantly. The aircraft crashed and burned and all aboard were killed. Management initially placed the blame on Cotton for overloading the aircraft, but an autopsy revealed a bullet in his heart.

The Porter was an impressive aircraft. It had a 550-shaft horsepower turbine engine and a 48-foot wingspan. It could land on a dime and had phenomenal takeoff capability. In Laos it was used to make airdrops to troop pads deep in the mountains. It was popular because it was powerful and could operate at very slow speeds, but this capability also made its mission difficult and precarious in the weather conditions often encountered in

Laos. In March 1971, Ben Franklin crashed his Porter into a mountain slope and was killed after taking off from a mud filled airstrip.

A sniper round to the head killed William Gibbs in May 1969. He was flying a U.S. Marine Corps H-34 helicopter near Louang Prabang and was taking off from an outlying pad after delivering supplies to Laotian troops.

Norman Grammer was flying a U.S. Army Huey and approaching Lima Site 20A when his aircraft crashed after completing a re-supply flight. All crewmembers were killed. The exact cause of the accident was never fully explained. A reliable source said it could have been caused by mechanical failure due to pilot induced mast bumping while trying to remain in visual contact with the ground in bad weather. It was confirmed that one blade came off the main rotor system and the aircraft plummeted from a high altitude. The FM was Glenn Woods. Mr. Woods was the flight mechanic who shot down the AN-45 Colt North Vietnamese aircraft that had been bombing Lima Site 85 in 1968.

Captain William Reeves, FO Joel Gudahl, AFS Praves Satarakia and AFS Thonkham Khammanphet were killed when their C-123K hit a mountain in bad weather near Ban Namm Eui, Laos. They were carrying 12,000 pounds of ordnance and five passengers.

Captain Howard Kelly, FO Milton Matheson and AFS Nguyen Van Hanh were killed when their U.S. Air Force C-47 hit a mountain in bad weather just north of Danang in January 1969. Howard was a WW II pilot who was shot down and escaped by walking across the Pyrenees. He had years of experience. Milt Matheson was also a retired Air Force pilot.

Danang had a navigation aid that was used by the Air Force and the Marine Corps. The C-47 aircraft in Vietnam were on loan from the United States military. As part of Air America's strategy of secrecy, it was common practice for the military UHF navigation equipment to be replaced by incompatible VHF units when the aircraft changed hands from the military to Air America. Howard took off from Danang and flew to Hue in the north. In bad weather there was no way to get back without flying beneath the clouds along the beach. Unfortunately all aircraft in the region were forced to take the same action, so communication between them was critical to prevent collision. Because of the incompatibility between the military UHF radios and Air America VHF radios, there could be no communication, so Howard took the safer route and crossed the mountains to the north of Danang through a passage. This time the passage was closed and Howard and Milton crashed.

Air America personnel were not briefed as to why they were operating U.S. military aircraft yet not able to have communication with aircraft in use by the military. This was part of Air America's covert strategy, since much of the military gear did not always meet FAA certification and could not be modified to meet those requirements. Lack of radio contact in combat areas was deadly and this situation either caused or contributed to several crashes. In March 1971, Kenneth Houp had a mid-air collision with an Army Cobra. Ken was flying a Porter and all Air America Porters had VHF only with no additional navigation aids. Both were trying to land in Can Tho in the southern part of SVN. It is unprecedented that an airfield with hundreds of landings a day would operate with some on VHF and some on UHF, each unable to hear or speak to each other.

There has been very little written about the flight mechanics (FM) & airfreight specialists (AFS) employed with Air America. The military called them crew chiefs, combat air crewmen, or load masters. The responsibilities were multiple and with Air America they soon became masters of many trades. The large fixed wing aircraft required one or more AFS crewmembers and were often referred to as "kickers." They were absolutely essential to operations. Many of them made the supreme sacrifice with their lives.

Air America's helicopter flight mechanics performed many of the same duties as the "kickers" but stayed up country with their aircraft. Flight mechanics put in long hours. After a full day of flying with the crews, the flight mechanics performed scheduled or unscheduled maintenance on the aircraft, usually outside with poor lighting and in primitive conditions. Although the incentive to do a good job was part of their work ethic, they also had to fly in those same aircraft.

Flying with Air America was seldom routine for the flight mechanics. Situations were unpredictable and required experience and expertise. Flight mechanics flew looking at where they had been, blind to where they were going, and hoping the pilot didn't run out of altitude, airspeed and ideas. They were members of the crew, they provided another set of eyes and ears, and they often aided in decision-making.

Flight mechanic Willie Parker received serious burns on his hand from an accident in an H-34. When Bill Foster was hit with an enemy mortar, or RPG, he received substantial injuries. There were two flight mechanics on board. It was a line training flight and Ernesto Cruz was killed. The other flight mechanic, Reggie Boston, received third degree burns and lost one eye.

Lowell Pirkle died performing service for his country. As a flight mechanic he could not have been in a position to see the RPG that exploded in the crew compartment at a site near L-54. The pilots escaped, but Lowell and a Lao military officer died instantly.

Feliciana Manolo was a flight mechanic flying a H-34 in July 1972. He was killed by gunfire while attempting a medical evacuation near Pakse in the southern part of Laos. The Filipino flight mechanics flew the H-34 for the most part. Many of them were wounded or killed.

Jon Merkel was flying as co-captain in an H-34 with John Ford near Tha Lin Noi Laos in February 1970. A single bullet through the cockpit window killed him.

In April 1971, Harry Mulholland had a mid-air collision with an Air Force U-17 and was killed. This was another situation when a fatal accident was caused by Air America's reliance on communication equipment that was incompatible with the military.

Lloyd Randell was killed in a Porter in bad weather trying to land at Lima Site 20A in April 1972.

Pilot James Rausch crashed in a training accident in 1967, just out of Saigon. He was seriously hurt but recovered. Later in 1972, he was flying near Ban Houi Sai with a Thai co-pilot in a Marine Corps H-34. They were delivering a load of food, guns and water to troops at an outlying field and ran into enemy gunfire. A single round killed James.

Frank Thorsen learned how to fly as a civilian. He flew a converted Volpar with turbine engines that were used as a high altitude radio relay for the U.S. military after Site 85 was demolished, and also as a photo recon aircraft. Pilots would fly in a circle at 25,000 feet on oxygen for hours on end. It was a tedious and thankless job. The photo recon work was equally dangerous, but livelier. These missions required two crewmembers and they were often shot at by enemy troops. In July 1973, Frank was killed with a single round.

Leonard Wiehrdt was a retired Air Force pilot. He started out with Air America flying the C-47 in Saigon. In April 1972, he was flying a Porter near LS69A and ran into the ground. He sustained severe head injuries and probably died on impact.

## Conclusion

Considering the volume of flights from 1950 through 1975, the number of years covered representing a quarter of a century, and the conditions under which Air America operated; one hundred forty six killed in action was a relatively small number. Yet, it should be remembered, these individuals were *supposed* to be civilians. On a comparable basis with other similar airlines in the area it is apparent that Air America's mission was *not* similar. The above details of those pilots and support crew killed in action clearly define as military the operations of Air America. Air America employees were as much soldiers in combat roles as Air Force, Navy & Marine or Army soldiers.

Air America was instrumental in ending the Vietnam conflict and it was used by the President of the United States specifically for that purpose. Air America afforded Nixon the military presence he needed in Laos while at the same time it enabled him to make it appear to the rest of the world as if the United States was following the restrictions of the 1962 Geneva Accords. Without Air America, Nixon's Vietnamization program likely would have failed.

Nixon had another problem. He needed to know what the North Vietnamese were thinking to obtain an edge at the bargaining table in Paris. Once again he turned to Air America for the solution.

Air America had two H-500 helicopters used in Laos, but they were in fact only cover for two H-500P helicopters that each cost over one million in 1972 dollars. Air America also had 6 Twin-Packs, which were converted Marine Corps H-34 aircraft fitted with two 900-shaft horsepower turbine engines. The 500P had an extra rotor blade and a tail rotor that was altered to make less noise. The engine had a muffler and it was called the quiet helicopter.

LORAN ground Navigation Systems were a relatively new concept in those years as were terrain following radar and forward looking infrared radar, commonly called FLIR. The two 500P aircraft were outfitted with FLIR. It was an elaborate configuration that used liquid nitrogen in the system. From the pilot's perspective it consisted of a television monitor that displayed objects according to heat so that images appeared as negatives. The pilot could discern the shape of a person, but was unable to determine the identity. A car could be seen only if it had been recently driven and was still warm. Flying with the monitor was a challenge. A blade of grass looked like a tree when the craft was parked on the ground. The pilot tended to go backwards involuntarily when coming to a hover.

The Vinh mission was for the 500P to go into North Vietnam with a crew to splice into the main phone line. A series of antennas that resembled spider webs was placed in trees in locations where the telephone signals could be relayed from antenna to antenna and finally to a place where the telephone conversations could be monitored in safety. The missions for the Twin Packs were to act as search and rescue for the 500P when it conducted its mission and to place the spider web antennas in the trees. Two Twin Otter aircraft equipped with Terrain Following Radar were used in the mission as well. The

navigation aids allowed the crew to find an object as small as a tree in the middle of the night. Pilots were equipped with night goggles and learned to fly with them so that they could place intelligence-gathering teams in small landing pads without the use of lights.

Several weeks of intensive training were required to learn how to place the antenna in a tree while flying with night goggles. The result of this elaborate secret mission was that Air America was responsible for furnishing information to the American negotiators at the Paris peace talks, which allowed the United States government to obtain a final peace plan and secure the release of the POWs held in Hanoi.

The war in Vietnam was over for American troops in uniform. The war in Laos ended in 1974. The NVA could now travel through Laos with their guns and troops without fear. As soon as they got their troops in place and their logistics organized they attacked South Vietnam and the country folded practically over night. There were no more U.S. troops to stop them and the South Vietnamese Army was never a match for the NVA. Air America was the last to leave Saigon in 1975, and they were involved with the evacuation of Danang, Nha Trang and Saigon. Even at the very end the Administration refused to tell the Navy who Air America really was. Air America personnel were treated as insurgents and many were arrested when they landed on the ships designated to receive refugees. Eventually some of the truth was revealed.

As information about Air America began to reach public awareness and its secrecy was compromised, this hidden air force created by the United States government was no longer required. The corporation was dissolved in 1976, its assets sold, the employees scattered and the money returned to the U.S. Treasury from where it originated.

The Board's premise that at times CAT/AAM personnel conducted parallel military duty and therefore do not qualify as veterans since they were not actually in direct support of a U.S. military unit is an exercise in semantics that denies eligibility to a rightful beneficiary. In light of the information included in this reconsideration request, and the Congressional spirit and intent when Public Law 95-202 was passed, veteran eligibility could not be withheld from the employees of CAT/AAM.

Air America was composed of the sum total of all its parts. No single unit had more or less strategic value than any other. The foregoing documentation is an attempt to clearly define and illuminate the unique structure and operations CAT/Air America. However, for the convenience of the C/MSRB, this organization is delineated as follows into its component parts so that the Board will have an opportunity if it is so inclined to decide which unit or units, if any, it feels may not qualify for veteran status.

The application is hereby filed for,

1. The U.S., and Foreign Civilian employees of CAT, Inc., who operated in Korea under operation Book Lift in 1950 and 1951 in support of America's mission to stop the spread of communism, and any necessary ground support personnel necessary to support that mission.

2. The U.S., and Foreign Civilian employees of CAT, Inc., who operated Air Force C-119 aircraft to drop ammunition and other supplies to French troops at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, and any ground support personnel necessary to support that mission.

3. The U.S., and Foreign Civilian employees of CAT, Inc. who operated B-26 aircraft in Indonesia, and any ground support personnel who supported that mission from 1958 when the mission was commenced through 1961 while any crewmember was imprisoned as a result of that mission.

4. The U.S., and Foreign Civilian employees of CAT, Inc., now named Air America, Inc., who operated fixed wing and helicopter aircraft in support of U.S. Army Special Forces in Laos in operation Hot Foot and operation White Star from 1959 through 1962, the Tibet airlift from Thailand, Mill Pond and any necessary ground support personnel in country who had supervisory positions.

5. The U.S., and Foreign Civilian employees of Air America Inc. who operated fixed wing aircraft in Laos in direct support of the United States Air Force operating in Laos in the Steve Canyon program, and commonly called Ravens, the Site 85 operation, photo recon, the Harp program and SAR operations for U.S. military flight crews from 1964 through 1974 when the war in Laos was declared over, and any necessary ground support personnel in country who had supervisory positions.

6. The U.S., and Foreign Civilian employees of Air America Inc. who operated helicopters in Laos in direct support for the Steve Canyon program, site 85 operation and SAR operations for U.S. military flight crews from 1964 to 1974 when the war in Laos was declared over, and any necessary ground support personnel in country who had supervisory positions.

7. The U.S., and Foreign Civilian employees of Air America Inc. who operated helicopters in Vietnam in direct support of the U.S. Army Special Forces from 1964 through 1975 when the U.S. evacuated Saigon, and any necessary ground support personnel in country that had supervisory positions.

And,

The U.S., and Foreign Civilian employees of Air America Inc. who operated fixed wing aircraft in Vietnam in direct support of the U.S. Army Special Forces from 1964 through 1975 when the U.S. evacuated Saigon, and any necessary ground support personnel in country who had supervisory positions.

Yours truly,

*Allen Cates*

Allen Cates

**Acknowledgements in alphabetical order:**

Brigadier General H.C. Aderholt, whose book, **Air Commando One**, is extremely beneficial in order to understand CAT/AAMs role in Southeast Asia. No other Air Force officer has done more to promote CAT/AAM than Heinie Aderholt. He is a true warrior and a valued friend.

Harry R. Casterlin, who served in the United States Marine Corps prior to Air America, was one of the original helicopter pilots working in Laos. He served with Air America from September 1961 until the war in Laos ended in 1974. Mr. Casterlin has spent several years collecting Air America history and has written several documentaries. His time and effort to assist with the editing of this document is greatly appreciated.

Martha Gregory is manager of the Research Wizard service of the Tulsa City-County Library in Tulsa, Oklahoma. On her own time she has spent hours proof reading, editing and conducting research on CAT/AAM. This document may not have been finished without her assistance and guidance. Ms. Gregory wrote a very good article for a local newspaper about Robert Rousselot, who was the VP Operations of CAT/ AAM until he left the company in 1963.

**Internal Attachments:**

Truman Doctrine

The Pentagon Papers, Chapter one and Two

Project CHECO Report "The Fall of Site 85"

CAT/AAM Combat Losses In China and Southeast Asia, prepared by Dudley Foster

**External Attachments:**

Air Commando One by Warren A. Trest

One Day Too Long by Timothy Castle

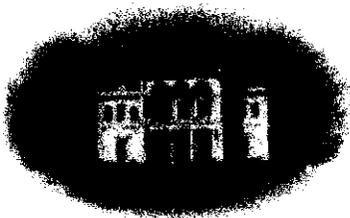
Search And Rescue in Southeast Asia by Earl H. Tilford

Way of a Fighter by Claire Lee Chennault

## Truman Doctrine

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*The Avalon Project*



*at Yale Law School*

## *Truman Doctrine*

### **PRESIDENT HARRY S. TRUMAN'S ADDRESS BEFORE A JOINT SESSION OF CONGRESS, MARCH 12, 1947**

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Congress of the United States:

The gravity of the situation which confronts the world today necessitates my appearance before a joint session of the Congress. The foreign policy and the national security of this country are involved.

One aspect of the present situation, which I wish to present to you at this time for your consideration and decision, concerns Greece and Turkey.

The United States has received from the Greek Government an urgent appeal for financial and economic assistance. Preliminary reports from the American Economic Mission now in Greece and reports from the American Ambassador in Greece corroborate the statement of the Greek Government that assistance is imperative if Greece is to survive as a free nation.

I do not believe that the American people and the Congress wish to turn a deaf ear to the appeal of the Greek Government.

Greece is not a rich country. Lack of sufficient natural resources has always forced the Greek people to work hard to make both ends meet. Since 1940, this industrious and peace loving country has suffered invasion, four years of cruel enemy occupation, and bitter internal strife.

When forces of liberation entered Greece they found that the retreating Germans had destroyed virtually all the railways, roads, port facilities, communications, and merchant

marine. More than a thousand villages had been burned. Eighty-five per cent of the children were tubercular. Livestock, poultry, and draft animals had almost disappeared. Inflation had wiped out practically all savings.

As a result of these tragic conditions, a militant minority, exploiting human want and misery, was able to create political chaos which, until now, has made economic recovery impossible.

Greece is today without funds to finance the importation of those goods which are essential to bare subsistence. Under these circumstances the people of Greece cannot make progress in solving their problems of reconstruction. Greece is in desperate need of financial and economic assistance to enable it to resume purchases of food, clothing, fuel and seeds. These are indispensable for the subsistence of its people and are obtainable only from abroad. Greece must have help to import the goods necessary to restore internal order and security, so essential for economic and political recovery.

The Greek Government has also asked for the assistance of experienced American administrators, economists and technicians to insure that the financial and other aid given to Greece shall be used effectively in creating a stable and self-sustaining economy and in improving its public administration.

The very existence of the Greek state is today threatened by the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by Communists, who defy the government's authority at a number of points, particularly along the northern boundaries. A Commission appointed by the United Nations security Council is at present investigating disturbed conditions in northern Greece and alleged border violations along the frontier between Greece on the one hand and Albania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia on the other.

Meanwhile, the Greek Government is unable to cope with the situation. The Greek army is small and poorly equipped. It needs supplies and equipment if it is to restore the authority of the government throughout Greek territory. Greece must have assistance if it is to become a self-supporting and self-respecting democracy.

The United States must supply that assistance. We have already extended to Greece certain types of relief and economic aid but these are inadequate.

There is no other country to which democratic Greece can turn.

No other nation is willing and able to provide the necessary support for a democratic

Greek government.

The British Government, which has been helping Greece, can give no further financial or economic aid after March 31. Great Britain finds itself under the necessity of reducing or liquidating its commitments in several parts of the world, including Greece.

We have considered how the United Nations might assist in this crisis. But the situation is an urgent one requiring immediate action and the United Nations and its related organizations are not in a position to extend help of the kind that is required.

It is important to note that the Greek Government has asked for our aid in utilizing effectively the financial and other assistance we may give to Greece, and in improving its public administration. It is of the utmost importance that we supervise the use of any funds made available to Greece; in such a manner that each dollar spent will count toward making Greece self-supporting, and will help to build an economy in which a healthy democracy can flourish.

No government is perfect. One of the chief virtues of a democracy, however, is that its defects are always visible and under democratic processes can be pointed out and corrected. The Government of Greece is not perfect. Nevertheless it represents eighty-five per cent of the members of the Greek Parliament who were chosen in an election last year. Foreign observers, including 692 Americans, considered this election to be a fair expression of the views of the Greek people.

The Greek Government has been operating in an atmosphere of chaos and extremism. It has made mistakes. The extension of aid by this country does not mean that the United States condones everything that the Greek Government has done or will do. We have condemned in the past, and we condemn now, extremist measures of the right or the left. We have in the past advised tolerance, and we advise tolerance now.

Greece's neighbor, Turkey, also deserves our attention.

The future of Turkey as an independent and economically sound state is clearly no less important to the freedom-loving peoples of the world than the future of Greece. The circumstances in which Turkey finds itself today are considerably different from those of Greece. Turkey has been spared the disasters that have beset Greece. And during the war, the United States and Great Britain furnished Turkey with material aid.

Nevertheless, Turkey now needs our support.

Since the war Turkey has sought financial assistance from Great Britain and the United States for the purpose of effecting that modernization necessary for the maintenance of its national integrity.

That integrity is essential to the preservation of order in the Middle East.

The British government has informed us that, owing to its own difficulties can no longer extend financial or economic aid to Turkey.

As in the case of Greece, if Turkey is to have the assistance it needs, the United States must supply it. We are the only country able to provide that help.

I am fully aware of the broad implications involved if the United States extends assistance to Greece and Turkey, and I shall discuss these implications with you at this time.

One of the primary objectives of the foreign policy of the United States is the creation of conditions in which we and other nations will be able to work out a way of life free from coercion. This was a fundamental issue in the war with Germany and Japan. Our victory was won over countries which sought to impose their will, and their way of life, upon other nations.

To ensure the peaceful development of nations, free from coercion, the United States has taken a leading part in establishing the United Nations, The United Nations is designed to make possible lasting freedom and independence for all its members. We shall not realize our objectives, however, unless we are willing to help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes. This is no more than a frank recognition that totalitarian regimes imposed on free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States.

The peoples of a number of countries of the world have recently had totalitarian regimes forced upon them against their will. The Government of the United States has made frequent protests against coercion and intimidation, in violation of the **Yalta agreement**, in Poland, Rumania, and Bulgaria. I must also state that in a number of other countries there have been similar developments.

At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between

alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one.

One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.

The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio; fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.

I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.

I believe that our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political processes.

The world is not static, and the status quo is not sacred. But we cannot allow changes in the status quo in violation of the **Charter of the United Nations** by such methods as coercion, or by such subterfuges as political infiltration. In helping free and independent nations to maintain their freedom, the United States will be giving effect to the principles of the **Charter of the United Nations**.

It is necessary only to glance at a map to realize that the survival and integrity of the Greek nation are of grave importance in a much wider situation. If Greece should fall under the control of an armed minority, the effect upon its neighbor, Turkey, would be immediate and serious. Confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East.

Moreover, the disappearance of Greece as an independent state would have a profound effect upon those countries in Europe whose peoples are struggling against great difficulties to maintain their freedoms and their independence while they repair the damages of war.

It would be an unspeakable tragedy if these countries, which have struggled so long against overwhelming odds, should lose that victory for which they sacrificed so much. Collapse of free institutions and loss of independence would be disastrous not only for

them but for the world. Discouragement and possibly failure would quickly be the lot of neighboring peoples striving to maintain their freedom and independence.

Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to the West as well as to the East.

We must take immediate and resolute action.

I therefore ask the Congress to provide authority for assistance to Greece and Turkey in the amount of \$400,000,000 for the period ending June 30, 1948. In requesting these funds, I have taken into consideration the maximum amount of relief assistance which would be furnished to Greece out of the \$350,000,000 which I recently requested that the Congress authorize for the prevention of starvation and suffering in countries devastated by the war.

In addition to funds, I ask the Congress to authorize the detail of American civilian and military personnel to Greece and Turkey, at the request of those countries, to assist in the tasks of reconstruction, and for the purpose of supervising the use of such financial and material assistance as may be furnished. I recommend that authority also be provided for the instruction and training of selected Greek and Turkish personnel.

Finally, I ask that the Congress provide authority which will permit the speediest and most effective use, in terms of needed commodities, supplies, and equipment, of such funds as may be authorized.

If further funds, or further authority, should be needed for purposes indicated in this message, I shall not hesitate to bring the situation before the Congress. On this subject the Executive and Legislative branches of the Government must work together.

This is a serious course upon which we embark.

I would not recommend it except that the alternative is much more serious. The United States contributed \$341,000,000,000 toward winning World War II. This is an investment in world freedom and world peace.

The assistance that I am recommending for Greece and Turkey amounts to little more than 1 tenth of 1 per cent of this investment. It is only common sense that we should safeguard this investment and make sure that it was not in vain.

The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died. We must keep that hope alive.

The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms.

If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world -- and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own nation.

Great responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events.

I am confident that the Congress will face these responsibilities squarely.



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**The Pentagon Papers,  
Chapters One and Two**

# The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1

Chapter I, "Background to the Crisis, 1940-50"

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Section 3, pp. 29-42

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The resultant U.S. policy has most often been termed "neutrality." It was, however, also consistent with the policy of deferring to French volition announced by President Roosevelt's Secretary of State on 3 April 1945. It was a policy characterized by the same indecision that had marked U.S. wartime policy. It was, moreover, a policy formulated with an undertone of indifference: at the time, Indochina appeared to be one region in which the U.S. might enjoy the luxury of abstention.

When open warfare broke out between the DRV and France in December, 1946, John Carter Vincent, Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs, in a memorandum to Under Secretary Acheson of 23 December 1946, recommended that the latter call in the French Ambassador to highlight inherent dangers. The memorandum included this acute analysis:

Although the French in Indochina have made far-reaching paper-concessions to the Vietnamese desire for autonomy, French actions on the scene have been directed toward whittling down the powers and the territorial extent of the Vietnam "free state." This process the Vietnamese have continued to resist. At the same time, the French themselves admit that they lack the military strength to reconquer the country. In brief, with inadequate forces, with public opinion sharply at odds, with a government rendered largely ineffective through internal division, the French have tried to accomplish in Indochina what a strong and united Britain has found it unwise to attempt in Burma. Given the present elements in the situation, guerrilla warfare may continue indefinitely.

Secretary Acheson acted on Mr. Vincent's suggestion, and expressed to the Ambassador views summarized as follows:

We had anticipated such a situation developing in November and events have confirmed our fears. While we have no wish to offer to mediate under present conditions we do want the French GOVT to know that we are ready and willing to do anything which it might consider helpful in the circumstances. We have been gratified to learn of Moutet's mission and have confidence in his moderation and broad viewpoint. We believe however that the situation is highly inflammatory and if present unsettled conditions continue, there is a possibility that other powers might attempt to bring the matter up before the Security Council. If this happens, as in the case of Indonesia, the question will arise whether the matter is one of purely French internal concern or a situation likely to disturb the peace. Other powers might likewise attempt some form the Chinese press. We would be point of view it seems important possible. Mr. Acheson added that attempt to reconquer the country that the British had found unwise of intervention as has been suggested in opposed to such steps, but from every that the question be settled as soon as he wondered whether the French would through military force which was a step to attempt in Burma.

On 8 January, 1947, the Department of State instructed the American Ambassador in Paris that the U.S. would approve sale of arms and armaments to France "except in cases which appear to relate to Indochina." On the same date, 8 January 1947, the French conveyed to the Department of State a message that:

... the French Government appreciated the understanding attitude that Mr. Acheson had shown in discussing the problem of Indochina; that it had taken note of Mr. Acheson's offer of "good offices" and appreciated the spirit in which the offer was made; and that the French Government did not feel that it could avail itself of our offer but must continue to handle the situation single-handedly along the lines stated by Moutet. [The emissary] went on to say that the principal objective of the French military was to restore order and reopen communications. He said that after this was done the French Government would be prepared to discuss matters with the Vietnamese. He said that the French Government had every intention of living up to the agreement of last March 6 and the *modus vivendi* of September 15, once order was restored. [He was] asked . . . whether he thought the French military could restore order within any foreseeable future time. He seemed to think, without much evidence of conviction, that they could.

There then ensued an interesting exchange between the U.S. official and the French representative in which the Frenchman sketched a claim of American culpability for the war:

Speaking personally, I told him that I thought there was one flaw in the French approach to the problem worth mentioning. I had in mind an apparent assumption by the French that there was an equality of responsibility as between the French and the Vietnamese. I said that this did not seem to me to be the case; that the responsibility of France as a world power to achieve a solution of the problem was far greater than that of the Vietnamese; and that the situation was not one which could be localized as a purely French-Vietnamese one but might affect adversely conditions throughout Southeast Asia.

[The emissary] quickly substituted the word "authority" for "responsibility" and said that the French were now faced with the problem of reasserting their authority and that we must share the responsibility for their delay in doing so because we had not acceded to French requests in the autumn of 1945 for material assistance.

Early in February, the U.S. Ambassador in Paris was instructed to reassure Premier Ramadier of the "very friendliest feelings" of the U.S. toward France and its interest in supporting France's recovering economic, political and military strength:

In spite any misunderstanding which might have arisen in minds French in regard to our position concerning Indochina they must appreciate that we have fully recognized France's sovereign position in that area and we do not wish to have it appear that we are in any way endeavoring to undermine that position, and French should know it is our desire to be helpful and we stand ready to assist in any appropriate way we can to find a solution for the Indochinese problem. At the same time we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that there are two sides to this problem and that our reports indicate both a lack of French understanding of the other side (more in Saigon than in Paris) and the continued existence of a dangerously outmoded colonial outlook and methods in the area. Furthermore, there is no escape from the fact that the trend of times is to effect that colonial empires in the XIX Century sense are rapidly becoming things of the past. Action Britain in India and Burma and the Dutch in Indonesia are outstanding examples of this trend, and the French themselves took cognizance of it both in their new Constitution and in their agreements with Vietnam. On the other hand we do not lose sight of the fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections and it should be obvious that we are not interested in seeing

colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by Kremlin.

Frankly we have no solution of problem to suggest. It is basically matter for two parties to work out themselves and from your reports and those from Indochina we are led to feel that both parties have endeavored to keep door open to a settlement. We appreciate fact that Vietnam started present fighting in Indochina on December 19 and that this action has made it more difficult for French to adopt a position of generosity and conciliation. Nevertheless we hope that French will find it possible to be more than generous in trying to find a solution.

Thus, the U.S. chose to remain outside the conflict; the announced U.S. position was, in the words of Secretary of State George C. Marshall, to hope that "a pacific basis of adjustment of the difficulties could be found." Events conspired against this hope, however, and as the fighting continued, the prospect of a Moscow-controlled state in Vietnam continued to draw the U.S. nearer to involvement. On 13 May 1947, the Department of State furnished the following guidance to U.S. diplomats in Paris, Saigon, and Hanoi:

Key our position is our awareness that in respect developments affecting position Western democratic powers in southern Asia, we essentially in same boat as French, also as British and Dutch. We cannot conceive setbacks to long-range interests France which would not also be setbacks our own. Conversely we should regard close association France and members French Union as not only to advantage peoples concerned, but indirectly our own.

In our view, southern Asia in critical phase its history with seven new nations in process achieving or struggling independence or autonomy. These nations include quarter inhabitants world and their future course, owing sheer weight populations, resources they command, and strategic location, will be momentous factor world stability. Following relaxation European controls, internal racial, religious, and national differences could plunge new nations into violent discord, or already apparent anti-Western Pan-Asiatic tendencies could become dominant political force, or Communists could capture control. We consider as best safeguard against these eventualities a continued close association between newly-autonomous peoples and powers which have long been responsible their welfare. In particular we recognize Vietnamese will for indefinite period require French material and technical assistance and enlightened political guidance which can be provided only by nation steeped like France in democratic tradition and confirmed in respect human liberties and worth individual.

We equally convinced, however, such association must be voluntary to be lasting and achieve results, and that protraction present situation Indochina can only destroy basic voluntary cooperation, leave legacy permanent bitterness, and irrevocably alienate Vietnamese from France and those values represented by France and other Western democracies.

While fully appreciating difficulties French position this conflict, we feel there is danger in any arrangement which might provide Vietnamese opportunity compare unfavorably their own position and that of other peoples southern Asia who have made tremendous strides toward autonomy since war.

While we are still ready and willing do anything we can which might be considered helpful, French will understand we not attempting come forward with any solution our own or intervene in situation. However, they will also understand we inescapably concerned with situation Far East generally, upon which developments Indochina likely have profound effect.

For your INFO, evidence that French Communists are being directed accelerate their agitation French colonies even extent lose much popular support France (URTEL 1719 Apr 25) may be indication Kremlin prepared sacrifice temporary gains with 40 million French to long range colonial strategy with 600 million dependent people, which lends great urgency foregoing views DEPT much concerned lest French efforts find QUOTE true representatives Vietnam UNQUOTE with whom negotiate result creation impotent puppet GOVT along lines Cochinchina regime, or that restoration Baodai [sic] may be attempted, implying democracies reduced resort monarchy as weapon against Communism. You may refer these further views if nature your conversations French appears warrant.

The U.S. position may have influenced the French to revise the first Ha Long Bay Agreement (December, 1947) and when the second agreement was signed in June, 1948, the U.S. promptly instructed the U.S. Ambassador to "apply such persuasion and/or pressure as is best calculated [to] produce desired result" of France's "unequivocally and promptly approving the principle of Viet independence." Again, however, the Ambassador was instructed to avoid ostensible intervention while making it clear that the U.S. foresaw France's losing Indochina if it persisted to ignore American advice. These instructions were repeated at the end of August, 1948, with the assertion that the Department of State "believes nothing should be left undone which will strengthen truly nationalist groups in Indochina and induce present supporters of the Viet Minh to come to the side of that group."

The first suggestions that the U.S. became tangibly involved in Vietnam appear in a reported conversation of the U.S. Ambassador with the French Foreign Office in September, 1948. The U.S. Ambassador again urged on France legislation or other definite action to move toward the unification of Vietnam, and the immediate negotiation of concrete steps toward autonomy as envisaged by the Ha Long Bay Agreement. He then told the French representative that:

US is fully appreciative difficulties which face French Government in Indochina at this time and reminds him that US had already indicated its willingness, if French Government so desired, to give public indication its approval of concrete steps by French Government to come to grips with basic. political problem of Indochina. I informed him that US also willing under similar circumstances to consider assisting French Government with respect to matter of financial aid for Indochina through ECA but could not give consideration to altering its present policy in this regard unless real progress made in reaching non-Communist solution in Indochina based on cooperation of true nationalists of that country.

As negotiations proceeded with Bao Dai preliminary to the Elysee Agreement, the Department of State instructed the American Ambassador in Paris, on 17 January 1949, that:

While the Department is desirous of the French coming to terms with Bao Dai or any truly nationalist group which has a reasonable chance of winning over the preponderance of Vietnamese, we cannot at this time irretrievably commit the U.S. to support of a native government which by failing to develop appeal among Vietnamese might become virtually a puppet government separated from the people and existing only by the presence of French military forces.

Following the Elysee Agreement, the U.S. was better disposed toward providing aid in Indochina. On 10 May 1949, the American Consul in Saigon was informed that the U.S. desired the "Ba6 Dai experiment" to succeed, since there appeared to be no other alternative:

At the proper time and under the proper circumstances, the Department will be prepared to do its part by extending recognition to the Bao Dai government and by expressing the possibility of complying with any request by such a government for U.S. arms and economic assistance. It must be understood, however, that an aid program of this nature would require Congressional approval. Since the U.S. could, however, scarcely afford backing a government which would have the color and be likely to suffer the fate of a puppet regime, it must be clear that France will offer all necessary concessions to make the Bao Dai solution attractive to the nationalists. This is a step of which the French themselves must see the urgency and necessity in view of the possibly short time remaining before Communist successes in China are felt in Indochina. Moreover, the Bao Dai government must through its own efforts demonstrate the capacity to organize and conduct affairs wisely so as to insure the maximum opportunity for obtaining requisite popular support.

But "anti-communism" initially proved to be no better guideline for the formulation of American policy in Indochina than it had been for the French. Indeed, early U.S. attempts to discern the nature and extent of communist influence in Vietnam devolved to the seeming paradox that if Ho Chi Minh were communist, he seemed to have no visible ties with Moscow. For example, a State Department appraisal of Ho Chi Minh provided to the U.S. Ambassador in China in July, 1948, was admittedly speculative:

1. Depts info indicates that Ho Chi Minh is Communist. His long and well-known record in Comintern during twenties and thirties, continuous support by French Communist newspaper *Humanite* since 1945, praise given him by Radio Moscow (which for past six months has been devoting increasing attention to Indochina) and fact he has been called "leading communist" by recent Russian publications as well as *Daily Worker* makes any other conclusion appear to be wishful thinking.

2. Dept has no evidence of direct link between Ho and Moscow but assumes it exists, nor is it able to evaluate amount of pressure or guidance Moscow exerts. We have the impression Ho must be given or is retaining large degree latitude. Dept considers that USSR accomplishing its immediate aims in Indochina by (a) pinning down large numbers of French troops, (b) causing steady drain upon French economy thereby tending to retard recovery and dissipate ECA assistance to France, and (c) denying to world generally surpluses which Indochina normally has available thus perpetuating conditions of disorder and shortages which are favorable to growth of communism. Furthermore, Ho seems quite capable of retaining and even strengthening his grip on Indochina with no outside assistance other than continuing procession of French puppet govts.

In the fall of 1948, the Office of Intelligence Research in the Department of State conducted a survey of communist influence in Southeast Asia. Evidence of Kremlin-directed conspiracy was found in virtually all countries except Vietnam:

Since December 19, 1946, there have been continuous conflicts between French forces and the nationalist government of Vietnam. This government is a coalition in which avowed communists hold influential positions. Although the French admit the influence of this government, they have consistently refused to deal with its leader, Ho Chi Minh, on the grounds that he is a communist.

To date the Vietnam press and radio have not adopted an anti-American position. It is rather the French colonial press that has been strongly anti-American and has freely accused the U.S. of imperialism in Indochina to the point of approximating the official Moscow position. Although the Vietnam radio has been closely watched for a new position toward the U.S., no change has appeared so far. Nor does there seem to have been any split within the coalition government of Vietnam.

*Evaluation.* If there is a Moscow-directed conspiracy in Southeast Asia, Indochina is an anomaly *so far*. Possible explanations. are:

No rigid directives have been issued by Moscow.

The Vietnam government considers that it has no rightist elements that must be purged.

The Vietnam Communists are not subservient to the foreign policies pursued by Moscow

A special dispensation for the Vietnam government has been arranged in Moscow.

Of these possibilities, the first and fourth seem most likely.

### III. ORIGINS OF THE U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM

#### A. THE POLICY CONTEXT

Events in China of 1948 and 1949 brought the United States to a new awareness of the vigor of communism in Asia, and to a sense of urgency over its containment. U.S. policy instruments developed to meet unequivocal communist challenges in Europe were applied to the problem of the Far East. Concurrent with the development of NATO, a U.S. search began for collective security in Asia; economic and military assistance programs were inaugurated; and the Truman Doctrine acquired wholly new dimensions by extension into regions where the European empires were being dismantled. In March, 1947, President Truman had set forth the following policy guidelines:

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. I believe we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.

The President went on to underscore the U.S. determination to commit its resources to contain communism. While he clearly subordinated military aid to economic and political means, he did assert the U.S. intent to assist in maintaining security:

To insure the peaceful development of nations, free from coercion, the United States has taken a leading part in establishing the United Nations. The United Nations is designed to make possible freedom and independence for all its members. We shall not realize our objectives, however, unless we are willing to help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes.

In the year 1947, while U.S. military assistance began to flow into Greece to ward off subversive aggression, the U.S. inaugurated the European Recovery Plan (ERP). ERP was aimed at economic recovery in Western Europe, especially in countries such as France and Italy where post-war depression was fostering marked leftward political trends. In one of the high level appraisals of the situation that the U.S. had to counter in 1947, the Harriman Committee on Foreign Aid has concluded that:

The interest of the United States in Europe . . . cannot be measured simply in economic terms. It is also strategic and political. We all know that we are faced in the world today with two conflicting ideologies. .

Our position in the world has been based for at least a century on the existence in Europe of a number of strong states committed by tradition and inclination to the democratic concept. .

The fall of the Czechoslovakian Government in February 1948 brought about the Brussels Pact, a Western European collective defense and economic collaboration arrangement. The blockade of Berlin, which began on 1 April 1948, accelerated U.S. movement toward membership in the alliance. On June 11, 1948 the U.S. Senate adopted a resolution advising the Executive to undertake the:

Progressive development of regional and other collective arrangements for individual and collective self-defense in accordance with the purposes, principles, and provisions of the Charter [of the UN], association of the United States, by constitutional process, with such regional and other collective arrangements as are based on continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, and as affect its national security.

That same month, Congress passed the Economic Cooperation Act, and in July, 1948, opened negotiations for a North Atlantic Alliance. The North Atlantic Treaty was signed in April, 1949, and entered into force in August of that year.

In the same omnibus foreign assistance legislation which had authorized ECA in June, 1948, Congress had provided for a China Aid. Program. This measure met almost immediate failure, for Mao's armies spread unchecked over the China mainland, and by mid-1949 the position of the nationalists there was untenable. The "failure" of U.S. aid-which was termed such by Congressional critics-no less than the urgent situation in Europe and the exploding of the first Soviet nuclear device in September, 1949, figured in Congressional action on military assistance legislation.

On October 6, 1949, Congress passed the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) through which U.S. arms, military equipment and training assistance might be provided world-wide for collective defense. In the first appropriations under MDAP, NATO countries received 76% of the total, and Greece. and Turkey (not yet NATO members), 16%. But Korea and the Philippines received modest aid, and the legislators clearly intended the law to underwrite subsequent appropriations for collective security in Asia. The opening paragraph of the law not only supported NATO, but foreshadowed the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty:

An Act to Promote the Foreign Policy and Provide for the Defense and General Welfare of the United States by Furnishing Military Assistance to Foreign Nations, Approved October 6, 1949.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the "Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949."

#### FINDINGS AND DECLARATION OF POLICY

The Congress of the United States reaffirms the policy of the United States to achieve international peace and security through the United Nations so that armed force shall not be used except in the common interest. The Congress hereby finds that the efforts of the United States and other countries to promote peace and security in furtherance of the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations require additional measures of support based upon the principle of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid. These measures include the furnishing of military assistance essential to enable the United States and other nations dedicated to the purposes and principles of

the United Nations Charter to participate effectively in arrangements for individual and collective self-defense in support of those purposes and principles. In furnishing such military assistance, it remains the policy of the United States to continue to exert maximum efforts to obtain agreements to provide the United Nations with armed forces as contemplated in the Charter and agreements to achieve universal control of weapons of mass destruction and universal regulation and reduction of armaments, including armed forces, under adequate safeguards to protect complying nations against violation and evasion.

The Congress hereby expresses itself as favoring the creation by the free countries and the free peoples of the Far East of a joint organization, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, to establish a program self-help and mutual cooperation designed to develop their economic and social well-being, to safeguard basic rights and liberties and to protect their security and independence.

The Congress recognizes that economic recovery is essential to international peace and security and must be given clear priority. The Congress also recognizes that the increased confidence of free peoples in their ability to resist direct or indirect aggression and to maintain internal security will advance such recovery and support political stability.

While Congress was deliberating on MDAP, the staff of the National Security Council, at the request of the Secretary of Defense, had been reexamining U.S. policy toward Asia. In June, 1949, the Secretary had noted that he was:

... increasingly concerned at the ... advance of communism in large areas of the world and particularly the successes of communism in China.

A major objective of United States policy, as I understand it, is to contain communism in order to reduce its threat to our security. Our actions in Asia should be part of a carefully considered and comprehensive plan to further that objective.

The NSC study responding to the Secretary's request is remarkable for the rarity of its specific references to Indochina. The staff study focused, rather, on generalities concerning the conflict between the interests of European metropolises and the aspirations of subject Asian peoples for independence. The following extract is from the section of the study dealing with Southeast Asia:

The current conflict between colonialism and native independence is the most important political factor in southeast Asia. This conflict results not only from the decay of European imperial power in the area but also from a widening political consciousness and the rise of militant nationalism among the subject peoples. With the exception of Thailand and the Philippines, the southeast Asia countries do not possess leaders practiced in the exercise of responsible power. The question of whether a colonial country is fit to govern itself, however, is not always relevant in practical politics. The real issue would seem to be whether the colonial country is able and determined to make continued foreign rule an overall losing proposition for the metropolitan power. If it is, independence for the colonial country is the only practical solution, even though misgovernment eventuates. A solution of the consequent problem of instability, if it arises, must be sought on a non-imperialist plane. In any event, colonial-nationalist conflict provides a fertile field for subversive communist activities, and it is now clear that southeast Asia is the target of a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin. In seeking to gain control of southeast Asia, the Kremlin is motivated in part by a desire to acquire southeast Asia's resources and communication

lines, and to deny them to us. But the political gains which would accrue to the USSR from communist capture of southeast Asia are equally significant. The extension of communist authority in China represents a grievous political defeat for us; if southeast Asia also is swept by communism we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia. The United States should continue to use its influence looking toward resolving the colonial nationalist conflict in such a way as to satisfy the fundamental demands of the nationalist-colonial conflict, lay the basis for political stability and resistance to communism, and avoid weakening the colonial powers who are our western allies. However, it must be remembered that the long colonial tradition in Asia has left the peoples of that area suspicious of Western influence. We must approach the problem from the Asiatic point of view in so far as possible and should refrain from taking the lead in movements which must of necessity be of Asian origin. It will therefore be to our interest wherever possible to encourage the peoples of India, Pakistan, the Philippines and other Asian states to take the leadership in meeting the common problems of the area.

It would be to the interest of the United States to make use of the skills, knowledge and long experience of our European friends and, to whatever extent may be possible, enlist their cooperation in measures designed to check the spread of USSR influence in Asia. If members of the British Commonwealth, particularly India, Pakistan, Australia and New Zealand, can be persuaded to join with the United Kingdom and the United States in carrying out constructive measures of economic, political and cultural cooperation, the results will certainly be in our interest. Not only will the United States be able thus to relieve itself of part of the burden, but the cooperation of the white nations of the Commonwealth will arrest any potential dangers of the growth of a white-colored polarization.

On December 30, 1949, the National Security Council met with President Truman presiding, discussed the NSC staff study, and approved the following conclusions:

As the basis for realization of its objectives, the United States should pursue a policy toward Asia containing the following components:

a. The United States should make known its sympathy with the efforts of Asian leaders to form regional associations of non-Communist states of the various Asian areas, and if in due course associations eventuate, the United States should be prepared, if invited, to assist such associations to fulfill their purposes under conditions which would be to our interest. The following principles should guide our actions in this respect:

Any association formed must be the result of a genuine desire on the part of the participating nations to cooperate for mutual benefit in solving the political, economic, social and cultural problems of the area.

The United States must not take such an active part in the early stages of the formation of such an association that it will be subject to the charge of using the Asiatic nations to further United States ambitions.

The association, if it is to be a constructive force, must operate on the basis of mutual aid and self-help in all fields so that a true partnership may exist based on equal rights and equal obligations.

United States participation [words illegible] association formed will be in accord with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations dealing with regional arrangements.

b. The United States should act to develop and strengthen the security of the area from Communist external aggression or internal subversion. These steps should take into account any benefits to the security of Asia which may flow from the development of one or more regional groupings. The United States on its own initiative should now

Improve the United States position with respect to Japan, the Ryukyus and the Philippines.

Scrutinize closely the development of threats from Communist aggression, direct or indirect, and be prepared to help within our means to meet such threats by providing political, economic, and military assistance and advice where clearly needed to supplement the resistance of the other governments in and out of the area which are more directly concerned.

Develop cooperative measures through multilateral or bilateral arrangements to combat Communist internal subversion.

Appraise the desirability and the means of developing in Asia some form of collective security arrangements, bearing in mind the following considerations:

The reluctance of India at this time to join in any anti-Communist security pact and the influence this will have among the other nations of Asia.

The necessity of assuming that any collective security arrangements which might be developed be based on the principle of mutual aid and on a demonstrated desire and ability to share in the burden by all the participating states.

The necessity of assuring that any such security arrangements would be consonant with the purposes of any regional association which may be formed in accordance with paragraph 3-a above.

The necessity of assuring that any such security arrangement would be in conformity with the provisions of Article 51 of the Charter relating to individual and collective self-defense.

c. The United States should encourage the creation of an atmosphere favorable to economic recovery and development in non-Communist Asia, and to the revival of [words illegible] non-discriminatory lines. The policy of the United States should be

adapted to promote, where possible, economic conditions that will contribute to political stability in friendly countries of Asia, but the United States should carefully avoid assuming responsibility for the economic welfare and development of that continent.

h. The United States should continue to use its influence in Asia toward resolving the colonial-nationalist conflict in such a way as to satisfy the fundamental demands of the nationalist movement while at the same time minimizing the strain on the colonial powers who are our Western allies. Particular attention should be given to the problem of French Indo-China, and action should be taken to bring home to the French the urgency of removing the barriers to the obtaining by Bao Dai or other non-Communist nationalist leaders of the support of a substantial proportion of the Vietnamese. . .

i. Active consideration should be given to means by which all members of the British Commonwealth may be induced to play a more active role in collaboration with the United States in Asia. Similar collaboration should be obtained to the extent possible from other non-Communist nations having interests in Asia.

j. Recognizing that the non-Communist governments of South Asia already constitute a bulwark against Communist expansion in Asia, the United States should exploit every opportunity to increase the present Western orientation of the area and to assist, within our capabilities, its governments in their efforts to meet the minimum aspirations of their people and to maintain internal security.

Thus, in the closing months of 1949, the course of U.S. policy was set to block further communist expansion in Asia: by collective security if the Asians were forthcoming, by collaboration with major European allies and commonwealth nations, if possible, but bilaterally if necessary. On that policy course lay the Korean War of 1950-1953, the forming of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization of 1954, and the progressively deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

## **B. THE U.S. ENTERS THE WAR**

On December 30, 1949, the French signed over ten separate implementing agreements relating to the transfer of internal administration in Vietnam to Bao Dai's State of Vietnam, in accordance with the Elysee Agreement of March 8, 1949. By January, 1950, Mao's legions had reached Vietnam's northern frontier, and North Vietnam was moving into the Sino-Soviet orbit. A Department of State statement enunciated U.S. policy as of 20 January 1950:

DEPT still hopeful Bao Dai will succeed in gaining increasing popular support at Ho's expense and our policy remains essentially the same; to encourage him and to urge FR toward further concessions.

The start made by Bao Dai, the qualities exhibited by him, and his initial reception seem to have been better than we might have anticipated, even discounting optimism of FR sources. Transfer of power apparently well received. FR success in disarming and interning fleeing CHI Nationalists without serious intervention to the present by CMI COMMIES also encouraging.

However, more recently, marked opposition has been encountered which demonstrates at least

that Bao Dai's popular support has not yet widened. Increased Viet Minh MIL activity is disquieting. This CLD be special effort by Ho, timed to coincide with transfer of power and the arrival of CHI COMMIES armies on frontier, and to precede Bangkok Conference, or CLD be evidence of increasing strength reinforced by hopes of CR1 COMMIE support, direct or indirect.

DEPT has as yet no knowledge of negotiations between Ho and Mao groups although radio intercept of New China News Agency release of JAN 17 indicates that Ho has messaged the "GOVTS of the world" that "the GOVT of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is the only legal GOVT of the Vietnam people" and is "ready to establish DIPL relations with any GOVT which WLD be willing to cooperate with her on the basis of equality and mutual respect of national sovereignty and territory so as to defend world peace and democracy." Ho's radio making similar professions. .

Nature and timing of recognition of Bao Dai now under consideration here and with other GOVTS. .

First the Chinese Communists, and then the Soviets recognized the DRV. On 29 January 1950, the French National Assembly approved legislation granting autonomy to the State of Vietnam. On February 1, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson made the following public statement:

The recognition by the Kremlin of Ho Chi Minh's communist movement in Indochina comes as a surprise. The Soviet acknowledgment of this movement should remove any illusions as to the "nationalist" nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina.

Although timed in an effort to cloud the transfer of sovereignty by France to the legal Governments of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, we have every reasonable [words illegible] governments will proceed in their development toward stable governments representing the true nationalist sentiments of more than 20 million peoples of Indochina.

French action in transferring sovereignty to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia has been in process for some time. Following French ratification, which is expected within a few days, the way will be open for recognition of these legal governments by the countries of the world. whose policies support the development of genuine national independence in former colonial areas. Ambassador Jessup has already expressed to Emperor Bao Dai our best wishes for prosperity and stability in Vietnam, and the hope that closer relationship will be established between Vietnam and the United States.

Formal French ratification of Vietnamese independence was announced on 2 February 1950, President Truman approved U.S. recognition for Bao Dai the same date, and on 4 February, the American Consul General in Saigon was instructed to deliver the following message to Bao Dai:

Your Imperial Majesty:

I have Your Majesty's letter in which I am informed of the signing of the agreements of March 8, 1949 between Your Majesty, on behalf of Vietnam, and the President of the French Republic, on behalf of France. My Government has also been informed of the ratification on February 2, 1950 by the French Government of the agreements of March 8, 1949;

Since these acts establish the Republic of Vietnam as an independent State within the French Union, I take this opportunity to congratulate Your Majesty and the people of Vietnam on this happy occasion.

The Government of the United States of America is pleased to welcome the Republic of Vietnam into the community of peace-loving nations of the world and to extend diplomatic recognition to the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. I look forward to an early exchange of diplomatic representatives between our two countries.

Recognition of Bao Dai was followed swiftly by French requests for U.S. aid. On May 8, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson released the following statement in Paris:

The [French] Foreign Minister and I have just had an exchange of views on the situation in Indochina and are in general agreement both as to the urgency of the situation in that area and as to the necessity for remedial action. We have noted the fact that the problem of meeting the threat to the security of Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos which now enjoy independence within the French Union, is primarily the responsibility of France and the Governments and peoples of Indochina. The United States recognizes that the solution of the Indochina problem depends both upon the restoration of security and upon the development of genuine nationalism and that United States assistance can and should contribute to these major objectives.

The United States Government, convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development.

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# The Pentagon Papers

Gravel Edition

Volume 1, Chapter 2, "U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954"  
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

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Section 2, pp. 75-107

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## II. LEVERAGE: FRANCE HAD MORE THAN THE UNITED STATES

It is sometimes asserted that France could not have continued the war in Indochina without American aid, but that the United States failed to use its considerable leverage on the French to force them to take more positive steps towards granting complete independence to the Associated States. An examination of Franco-American relations between 1950-1954 suggests, however, that American leverage was severely limited and that, given the primacy accorded in U.S. policy to the containment of communism in Southeast Asia, French leverage on the United States was the stronger of the two.

### A. AMERICAN LEVERAGE ON FRANCE

#### 1. NATO and Marshall Plan

In the first postwar decade, France was relatively weak and depended upon the United States through NATO and the Marshall Plan for its military security and economic revival. But neither NATO nor the Marshall Plan offered usable fulcrums for influencing French policy on Indochina. Both were judged by the U.S. Government and public to be strongly in the American national interest at a time when the Soviet threat to Western Europe, either through overt aggression or internal subversion, was clearly recognizable. A communist take-over in France was a real possibility. (The French Communist Party was the largest political party in the nation, and, at the time, quite militant in character.) Thus, an American threat to withdraw military and economic support to metropolitan France if it did not alter its policies in Indochina was not plausible. To threaten France with sanctions in NATO or through the Marshall Plan would have jeopardized a U.S. interest in Europe more important than any in Indochina.

#### 2. Military Assistance Program

The chief remaining source of influence was the military assistance program to the French in Indochina. Announced by President Truman on May 8, 1950, in response to an urgent French request of February 16, 1950, for military and economic assistance, the purpose of the aid was to help the French in the prosecution of the war against the Viet Minh. The American Ambassador in Paris was called to the Quay d'Orsay, following a determination by the French Government that "it should set forth to the United States Government fully and frankly the extreme gravity of the situation in Indochina from French point of view as a result of recent developments and the expectation that at least increased military aid will be furnished to Ho Chi Minh from Communist China." He was told:

...that the effort in Indochina was such a drain on France that a long-term program of assistance was necessary and it was only from the United States that it could come. Otherwise . . . it was very likely that France might be forced to reconsider her entire policy with the possible view to cutting her losses and withdrawing from Indochina . . . looking into the future it was obvious . . . that France could not continue indefinitely to bear this burden alone if the expected developments in regard to increased assistance to Ho Chi Minh came about...

Although the decision to extend aid to the French military effort in Indochina was taken before the outbreak of the Korean War, it clearly was heavily influenced by the fall of Nationalist China and the arrival of Communist Chinese troops on the Indochina border in December, 1949. The Ho Chi Minh regime was recognized as the legal government of Vietnam by the Chinese Communists on January 18, 1950, and twelve days later the Soviet Government similarly announced its recognition. The NSC was thereupon asked "to undertake a determination of all practicable United States measures to protect its security in Indochina and to prevent the expansion of communist aggression. in that area." In NSC 64 (February 27, 1950) it concluded that:

It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.

The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard. [Doc. 1]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, referring on April 5, 1950, to intelligence estimates indicating that the situation in Southeast Asia had deteriorated, noted that "without United States assistance, this deterioration will be accelerated." Therefore, the rationale for the decision to aid the French was to avert Indochina's sliding into the communist camp, rather than aid for France as a colonial power or a fellow NATO ally.

U.S. assistance, which began modestly with \$10 million in 1950, reached \$1,063 million in fiscal year 1954, at which time it accounted for 78% of the cost of the French war burden. The major portion of the increase came in the last year of the war, following the presentation in 1953 of the Navarre Plan, which called for the enlargement of Franco-Vietnamese forces and a dynamic strategy to recapture the initiative and pave the way for victory by 1955. The optimistic endorsement of the Navarre Plan by Lt. General John W. O'Daniel, head of the MAAG in Indochina, as being capable of turning the tide and leading to a decisive victory over the Viet Minh contributed to Washington's agreement to substantially raise the level of assistance. But equally important, the Navarre Plan, by being a concrete proposal which held out the promise of ending the long war, put France in a position to pressure the United States for more funds to underwrite the training and equipping of nine additional French battalions and a number of new Vietnamese units.

### 3. U.S. Supports Independence for Associated States

Throughout the period of assistance to the French military effort, American policy makers kept in mind the necessity of encouraging the French to grant the Associated States full independence and to take practical measures in this direction, such as the training of Vietnamese officers and civil servants. Such active persuasion was delicate and difficult because of the high sensitivity of the French to any "interference" in their "internal" affairs.

A reading of the NSC memorandum and the France-American diplomatic dialogue of the time indicates that Washington kept its eyes on the ultimate goal of the de-colonialization of Indochina. Indeed, it was uncomfortable in finding itself forced by the greater necessity of resisting Viet Minh communism in the same bed as the French. American pressure may well have helped account for the public declaration of Premier Joseph Laniel of July 3, 1953, that the independence and sovereignty of the Associated States would be "perfected" by transferring to them various functions which had remained under French control, even though no final date was set for complete independence. At an NSC meeting on August 6, 1953 President Eisenhower stated that assistance to the French would be determined by three conditions:

- (1) A public French commitment to "a program which will insure the support and cooperation of the native Indochina";
- (2) A French invitation for "close [U.S.] military advice";
- (3) Renewed assurances on the passage of the EDC.

Consistent with these, Washington's decision of September 9, 1953, to grant \$385 million towards implementation of the Navarre Plan was made dependent upon a number of conditions. The American Ambassador was instructed to inform Prime Minister Laniel and Foreign Minister Bidault that the United States Government would expect France to:

- .. continue pursue policy of perfecting independence of Associated States in conformity with July 3 declaration;
- facilitate exchange information with American military authorities and take into account their views in developing and carrying out French military plans Indochina;
- assure that no basic or permanent alteration of plans and programs for NATO forces will be made as result of additional effort Indochina...

#### *4. Limitation on American Leverage*

The United States attempted to use its military assistance program to gain leverage over French policies, but was severely constrained in what it could do. The U.S. military mission (MAAG) in Saigon was small and limited by the French in its functions to a supply-support group. Allocation of all U.S. aid to the Associated States had to be made, by agreement, solely through the French. Thus, MAAG was not allowed to control the dispensing of supplies once they arrived in Vietnam. MAAG officers were not given the necessary freedom to develop intelligence information on the course of the war; information supplied by the French was limited, and often unreliable or deliberately misleading. The French resisted repeated U.S. admonitions that the native armies of the Associated States be built up and consequently they did not create a true national Vietnamese army. With some minor exceptions, the French excluded American advisors from participating in the training for the use of the materials being furnished by the U.S.

General Navarre viewed any function of MAAG in Saigon beyond bookkeeping to be an intrusion upon internal French affairs. Even though it would have been difficult beyond 1952 to continue the war without American aid, the French never permitted participation by U.S. officials in strategic planning or policy making. Moreover, the French suspected the economic aid mission of being over-sympathetic to Vietnamese nationalism. The director of the economic aid program, Robert Blum, and the DCM of the American Embassy, Edmund Gullion, were subjected to French criticisms of their pro-Vietnamese views, although the American Ambassador, Donald Heath, remained staunchly pro-French. Thus, French officials insisted that American assistance be furnished with "no strings attached" and with virtually no control over its use. Underlying this attitude was a deep-seated suspicion that the United States desired to totally supplant the French, economically as well as politically, in Indochina.

## B. FRENCH LEVERAGE ON THE UNITED STATES

French leverage over the United States was made possible by the conviction, apparently firmly held in Washington, that the maintenance of a non-Communist Indochina was vital to Western-and specifically American-interests.

### 1. *Primarily It Was France's War*

The most fundamental fact was that the French were carrying on a war which the United States considered, rightly or wrongly, to be essential. Thus, the French were always able to threaten simply to end the war by pulling out of Indochina. By the early 1950's, with the French nation tired of the "la sale guerre," this would not have been an unpopular decision within France. Paris was thereby able to hint-which it did-that if U.S. assistance was not forthcoming, it would simply withdraw from Indochina, leaving to the United States alone the task of the containment of communism in Southeast Asia. When the Laniel Government requested in the fall of 1953 a massive increase in American assistance, the State Department representative at an NSC meeting asserted that "if this French Government, which proposes reinforcing Indochina with our aid, is not supported by us at this time, it may be the last such government prepared to make a real effort to win in Indochina." In effect, then, because of the overriding importance given by Washington to holding the communist line in Indochina, the French in being able to threaten to withdraw possessed an important instrument of blackmail.

The upshot of this was that U.S. leverage was quite minimal. Since the French were, in a way, fighting a U.S. battle as well as their own to prevent communist control of Indochina, any ham-fisted U.S. pressure was bound to weaken the French resolve and capability. Consequently, the leverage which the U.S. attained through its aid could be used for little more than to urge greater efficiency and determination on France. In other words, Washington could move Paris to formulate a Navarre type plan, but could not influence the way France conducted the war, nor could it move France on political issues in dispute.

### 2. *Expectation of French Success*

The temptation to "go along" with the French until the Viet Minh was defeated was all the more attractive because of the expectation of victory which pervaded official Washington. Before Dien Bien Phu, General O'Daniel consistently reported that victory was within reach if the United States continued its support. In November, 1953, General O'Daniel submitted a progress report on the Navarre Plan which summarized what the French had been doing and what remained to be accomplished. The report said that French Union forces held the initiative and would begin offensives in mid-January, 1954 in the Mekong Delta and in the region between Cape Varella and Da Nang. Meanwhile, a relatively small force would attempt to keep the Viet Minh off balance in the Tonkin Delta until October, 1954, when the French would begin a major offensive North of the 19th parallel. The report concluded by assessing that the Navarre Plan was basically sound and should be supported since it would bring a decisive victory.

O'Daniel's optimism was not duplicated by other observers. CINCPAC, for one, considered the report over-optimistic, stating that political and psychological factors were of such crucial importance that no victory would be possible until the Vietnamese were able to capture villages and until psychological warfare operations could be undertaken to win over the people. The Army attaché in Saigon was even less sanguine. He flatly stated that the French, after six months of the Navarre Plan, were still on the defensive and showed no sign of being able to win the war in the future. The attaché's views were, moreover, concurred in by the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, who observed that other high U.S. military officers in Indochina agreed with the attaché and found O'Daniel's report unwarrantedly optimistic.

### 3. American Policy in Europe: The EDC

An important source of French leverage was to be found outside of Far Eastern affairs. A primary objective of American foreign policy in 1953-1954 was the creation of a European Defense Community (E.D.C.). The purpose of the EDC was to "envelope" a new West German Army into an integrated six nation army which would go a long way towards providing for the defense of Western Europe. Washington officials expected that the EDC would permit a reduction (but not complete elimination) of American ground forces in Europe. The membership of France in the EDC-as a counter-weight to the proposed re-arming of Germany-was essential to its adoption by the five other European nations. Because of the high priority given to EDC in American planning, there was a strong reluctance to antagonize the French in Indochina. This was reinforced by knowledge that the French placed a far lower priority on EDC, in part because of the traditional French fear of an armed Germany, in part because the French estimate of Soviet intentions in Western Europe differed from that of the United States in that it placed a low probability on a direct Soviet intervention.

Apparently unnoticed at the time was an implicit contradiction in the American policy of pushing the French simultaneously on both adopting the EDC and on making a greater effort in Indochina. The latter required increased French forces in the Far East. But the French National Assembly would not adopt the EDC unless, at a minimum, it was assured that French forces in Europe would be on parity with those of Germany. Thus, the French argued that the possible coming into effect of the EDC prevented them from putting larger forces into Indochina. After the loss of North Vietnam and the French rejection of EDC, the Chairman of an Interdepartmental Working Group set up to formulate a new American policy on Indochina for the post-Geneva period observed that "our policies thus far have failed because we tried to hit two birds with one stone and missed both."

### 4. French Desire for Negotiations

French leverage was also demonstrated by their ability to have the Indochina problem placed on the agenda for the Geneva Conference at the time of the Quadripartite Foreign Minister's meeting in February 1954 in Berlin. The Geneva Conference had been called to work out a political settlement for the Korean War. Dulles did not wish to negotiate on Indochina until there was a marked improvement in the military situation of the French and they could negotiate from a position of far greater strength. But the Laniel Government was under mounting pressure from French public opinion to end the Indochinese war. At Berlin the French delegation insisted, despite American objections, that Indochina be inscribed on the Geneva agenda. Foreign Minister Bidault reportedly warned that if the United States did not acquiesce on this point, EDC would doubtlessly be scuttled.

Dulles did succeed in opposing Soviet efforts to gain for Communist China the status of a sponsoring power at Geneva and forced the acceptance in the Berlin communiqué of a statement that no diplomatic recognition would be implied in the Chinese invitation to the conference. In return for this concession, however, the French were able to give highly visible evidence of their interest in ending the war soon through negotiations. Ironically, this had a double-edged effect: in Paris the "peace faction" was mollified; but in Hanoi plans were made to step up the intensity of the war so as to make a show of strength prior to the beginning of the Geneva Conference. Thus, the coming battle of Dien Bien Phu came to have a crucial significance in large measure because of the very inclusion of the Indochina item for the Geneva Conference. As Ellen Hammer has written:

This was the last opportunity before the Geneva Conference for the Viet Minh to show its military strength, its determination to fight until victory. And there were those who thought that General Giap was resolved on victory, no matter the cost, not only to impress the enemy but also to convince his Communist allies that the Viet Minh by its own efforts had earned a seat at the

conference table and the right to a voice in its own future. For the French . . . upon the outcome of the battle depended much of the spirit in which they would send their representatives to Geneva.

### 5. Conclusion: Incompatibility of American and French Objectives

In summary, one must take notice of the paradox of U.S. policy vis-à-vis the French with respect to Indochina, 1950-1954. American interests and objectives were basically different from those of the French. The United States was concerned with the containment of communism and restricting the spread of Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. The immediate U.S. objective was supporting a domino. France, on the other hand, was fighting primarily a colonial war designed to maintain the French presence in Southeast Asia and avoid the crumbling of the French Union. Despite occasional pledges to the "perfectionment" of independence for the Associated States--pledges which were usually given under circumstances which were forcing France to "justify" the war, in part to receive further American assistance--France was *not* fighting a long and costly war in order to thereafter completely pull out.

The fact that the American and French means--pushing for military victory--converged in 1950-1954 obscured the fact that the ends of the two nations were inherently incompatible. This further led to a basic incompatibility in the two strands of American policy: (1) Washington wanted France to fight the war and win, preferably with American guidance and advice; and (2) having achieved success at great cost in what the French viewed at least initially as more a "colonial" than "anti-communist" war, Washington expected the French to withdraw magnanimously. (A Frenchman might have asked how France, even if it wished to, could have left Indochina without creating similar pressures for withdrawal from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, where over one million Frenchmen lived.) In this inherent inconsistency can be found much of the explanation for the lack of American leverage over France during the pre-Geneva years.

### III. PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMUNIST THREAT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA AND TO BASIC U.S. INTERESTS

Three major perceptions dominated U.S. thinking and policy-making on Indochina during the years 1950-1954. The first was the growing importance of Asia in world politics. The process of devolution from colonial empires to independent states, it was thought, would create power vacuums and conditions of instability which would make Asia susceptible to becoming a battleground in the growing East-West cold war conflict. Second, there was an undeniable tendency to view the worldwide "communist threat" in monolithic terms. This was perhaps understandable given the relatively extensive influence then exerted by the Soviet Union over other communist nations, and the communist parties in non-communist states. Moreover, the West, and especially the U.S., was challenged by the expansionist policies openly proclaimed by leaders of virtually all the communist movements. Third, the attempt of the patently Communist Ho Chi Minh regime to evict the French from Indochina was seen as part of the Southeast Asian manifestation of the communist world-wide aggressive intent. The resistance of France to Ho, therefore, was seen as a crucial stand on the line along which the West would contain communism.

#### A. "DOMINO PRINCIPLE" BEFORE KOREA

These three perceptions help explain the widely held assumption in official Washington that if Indochina was "lost" to communism, the remaining nations of Southeast Asia would inexorably succumb to communist infiltration and be taken over in a chain reaction. This strategic conception of the communist threat to Southeast Asia pre-dated the outbreak in June 1950 of the Korean War. It probably had its period of gestation at the time of the Nationalist withdrawal from mainland China. NSC 48/1 was the key document in framing this conception. Drawn up in June 1949, after Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson had expressed concern at

the course of events in Asia and had suggested a widening of the previous country-by-country memorandum approach to a regional plan, NSC 48/1 included the statements that "the extension of communist authority in China represents a grievous political defeat for us . . . If Southeast Asia is also swept by communism, we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia."

It was Russia rather than China that was seen in 1949 as being the principal source of the communist threat in Asia. Although it was conceded that in the course of time China (or Japan or India) may attempt to dominate Asia:

now and for the foreseeable future it is the USSR which threatens to dominate Asia through the complementary instruments of communist conspiracy and diplomatic pressure supported by military strength. For the foreseeable future, therefore, our immediate objective must be to contain and where feasible to reduce the power and influence of the USSR in Asia to such a degree that the Soviet Union is not capable of threatening the security of the United States from that area and that the Soviet Union would encounter serious obstacles should it attempt to threaten the peace, national independence or stability of the Asiatic nations.

NSC 48/1 also recognized that "the colonial-nationalist conflict provides a fertile field for subversive communist movements, and it is now clear that Southeast Asia is the target for a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin."

At this time, the NSC believed that the United States, as a Western power in any area where the bulk of the population had long been suspicious of Western influence, should insofar as possible refrain from taking any lead in Southeast Asia. The United States should instead "encourage the peoples of India, Pakistan, the Philippines and other Asian states to take the leadership in meeting the common problems of the area," recognizing "that the non-communist governments of South Asia already constitute a bulwark against communist expansion in Asia." NSC 48/2 pointed out that particular attention should be given to the problem of Indochina where "action should be taken to bring home to the French the urgency of removing the barriers to the obtaining by Bao Dai or other non-communist nationalist leaders of the support of a substantial proportion of the Vietnamese."

### *B. IMPORTANCE OF INDOCHINA*

Indochina was of special importance because it was the only area adjacent to China which contained a large European army which was in armed conflict with communist forces. The Chinese Communists were believed to be furnishing the Viet Minh with substantial material assistance. Official French sources reported that there were some Chinese troops in Tonkin, as well as large numbers ready for action against the French on the Chinese side of the border. The first NSC memorandum dealing solely with Indochina (NSC 64) [Doc. 1] was adopted as policy on February 27, 1950. This paper took note of Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh and estimated that it was doubtful that the French Expeditionary forces, combined with Indochinese troops, could successfully contain Ho Chi Minh's forces should they be strengthened by either Chinese troops crossing the border, or by communist-supplied arms and material in quantity.

NSC 64-written, it should be noted, by the Truman Administration and before the outbreak of the Korean War-observed that "the threat of Communist aggression against Indochina is only one phase of anticipated communist plans to seize all of Southeast Asia." It concluded with a statement of what came to be known as the "domino principle":

It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.

The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard.

### *C. IMPACT OF START OF KOREAN WAR*

The outbreak of the Korean War, and the American decision to resist North Korean aggression, sharpened overnight our thoughts and actions with respect to Southeast Asia. The American military response symbolized in the most concrete manner possible the basic belief that holding the line in Southeast Asia was essential to American security interests. The French struggle in Indochina came far more than before to be seen as an integral part of the containment of communism in that region of the world. Accordingly, the United States intensified and enlarged its programs of aid in Indochina. Military aid shipments to Indochina acquired in 1951 the second highest priority, just behind the Korean war program.

A consequence of the Korean War, and particularly the Chinese intervention, was that China replaced the Soviet Union as the principal source of the perceived communist threat in Southeast Asia. This was made explicit in NSC 124/2 (June 1952) [Doc. 13] which stated that "the danger of an overt military attack against Southeast Asia is inherent in the existence of a hostile and aggressive Communist China."

The "domino principle" in its purest form was written into the "General Considerations" section of NSC 124/2. It linked the loss of any single state of Southeast Asia to the stability of Europe and the security of the United States:

2. Communist domination, by whatever means, of all Southeast Asia would seriously endanger in the short term, and critically endanger in the longer term, United States security interests.

a. The loss of any of the countries of Southeast Asia to communist control as a consequence of overt or covert Chinese Communist aggression would have critical psychological, political and economic consequences. In the absence of effective and timely counteraction, the loss of any single country would probably lead to relatively swift submission to or an alignment with communism by the remaining countries of this group. Furthermore, an alignment with communism of the rest of Southeast Asia and India, and in the longer term, of the Middle East (with the probable exceptions of at least Pakistan and Turkey) would in all probability progressively follow. Such widespread alignment would endanger the stability and security of Europe.

b. Communist control of all of Southeast Asia would render the U.S. position in the Pacific offshore island chain precarious and would seriously jeopardize fundamental U.S. security interests in the Far East.

c. Southeast Asia, especially Malaya and Indonesia, is the principal world source of natural rubber and tin, and a producer of petroleum and other strategically important commodities. The rice exports of Burma and Thailand are critically important to Malaya, Ceylon and Hong Kong and are of considerable significance to Japan and

India, all important areas of free Asia.

d. The loss of Southeast Asia, especially of Malaya and Indonesia, could result in such economic and political pressures in Japan as to make it extremely difficult to prevent Japan's eventual accommodation to communism.

The possibility of a large-scale Chinese intervention in Indochina, similar to the Chinese intervention in Korea, came to dominate the thinking of American policy-makers after the start of the Korean War. Such an intervention would not have been surprising given the larger numbers of Chinese troops massed along the Tonkin border and the material assistance being given to the Viet Minh. The NIE of December 1950 considered direct Chinese intervention to be "impending." The following year it was estimated that after an armistice in Korea the Chinese would be capable of intervention in considerable strength, but would be inhibited from acting overtly by a number of factors, including the risk of American retaliation and the disadvantages attendant upon involvement in another protracted campaign. By early 1952, as the French position showed signs of deterioration, intelligence authorities believed that the Chinese would be content to continue aiding the Viet Minh without undertaking direct involvement (except for material aid) unless provoked into it. Thus, the intelligence community, after estimating a high risk of Chinese intervention at the start of the Korean War, gradually reduced its estimate of Indochina being broadened into a wider war as the Viet Minh showed signs of doing well enough on their own.

Nevertheless, the NSC undertook in 1952 to list a course of action for the "resolute defense" of Indochina in case of a large-scale Chinese intervention. It included the provision of air and naval forces; the interdiction of Chinese communication lines, including those in China proper; and a naval blockade of the China coast. If these "minimum courses of action" did not prove to be sufficient, the U.S. should take air and naval action "against all suitable military targets in China," when possible in conjunction with British and French forces.

In prescribing these recommended actions, the NSC focused on the less likely contingency of a Chinese intervention rather than the more likely contingency of the continued deterioration of the French position in Indochina itself. It did so despite the fact that NSC 124/2 conceded that the "primary threat" was the situation in Indochina itself (increasing subversive efforts by indigenous communist forces, increased guerrilla activity, and increased Viet Minh civil control over population and territory). Apparently, the NSC wanted to make clear that direct U.S. involvement in Indochina was to be limited to dealing with direct Chinese involvement. In the absence of this contingency, however, and to meet the existing situation in Indochina, the NSC recommended that the United States increase its level of aid to French Union forces but "without relieving the French authorities of their basic military responsibility for the defense of the Associated States."

#### *D. REPUBLICAN ADMINISTRATION AND FAR EAST*

Two events in 1953 served to deepen the American commitment in Indochina. The first was the arrival of a Republican Administration following a long period in which the G.O.P. had persistently accused the Truman Administration of being responsible for the "loss" of China to communism. The writings and speeches of John Foster Dulles before the election left no doubt that he regarded Southeast Asia as a key region in the conflict with communist "imperialism," and that it was important to draw the line of containment north of the Rice Bowl of Asia--the Indochina peninsula. In his first State of the Union Message on February 3, 1953, President Eisenhower promised a "new, positive foreign policy." He went on to link the communist aggression in Korea and Malaya with Indochina. Dulles subsequently spoke of Korea and Indochina as two flanks, with the principal enemy--Red China--in the center. A special study mission headed by Representative Walter Judd, a recognized Republican spokesman on Asia, surveyed the Far East and reported on its view of the high stakes involved:

The area of Indochina is immensely wealthy in rice, rubber, coal, and iron ore. Its position makes it a strategic key to the rest of Southeast Asia. If Indochina should fall, Thailand and Burma would be in extreme danger, Malaya, Singapore and even Indonesia would become more vulnerable to the Communist power drive. . . . Communism would then be in an exceptional position to complete its perversion of the political and social revolution that is spreading through Asia. . . . The Communists must be prevented from achieving their objectives in Indochina.

The Republican Administration clearly intended to prevent the loss of Indochina by taking a more forthright, anti-communist stand.

#### *E. IMPACT OF KOREAN ARMISTICE*

Second, the armistice in Korea created apprehension that the Chinese Communists would now turn their attention to Indochina. President Eisenhower warned in a speech on April 16, 1953, that any armistice in Korea that merely released armed forces to pursue an attack elsewhere would be a fraud. Secretary Dulles continued this theme after the Korean armistice in a speech on September 2, 1953, on the war in Indochina. After noting that "a single Communist aggressive front extends from Korea on the north to Indochina in the south" he said:

Communist China has been and now is training, equipping and supplying the Communist forces in Indochina. There is the risk that, as in Korea, Red China might send its own Army into Indochina. The Chinese Communist regime should realize that such a second aggression could not occur without grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina. I say this soberly . . . in the hope of preventing another aggressor miscalculation.

Underlying these warnings to China was the belief that the difference between success or failure in avoiding a takeover of all Vietnam by Ho Chi Minh probably depended upon the extent of Chinese assistance or direct participation. Signaling a warning to China was probably designed to deter further Chinese involvement. Implicit in the signals was the threat that if China came into the war, the United States would be forced to follow suit, preferably with allies but, if necessary, alone. Furthermore, the Eisenhower Administration implied that in keeping with its policy of massive retaliation the United States would administer a punishing nuclear blow to China without necessarily involving its land forces in an Asian war.

#### *F. DEEPENING OF U.S. COMMITMENT TO CONTAINMENT*

In addition to the new mood in Washington created by the strategic perceptions of a new Administration and the Korean armistice, the Viet Minh invasion of Laos in the spring of 1953 and the deepening war weariness in France served to strengthen those who favored a more assertive policy in Indochina. The United States rushed supplies to Laos and Thailand in May 1953 and provided six C-119's with civilian crews for the airlift into Laos. It increased substantially the volume and tempo of American military assistance to French Union forces. For fiscal year 1954, \$460 million in military assistance was planned. Congress only appropriated \$400 million, but following the presentation by the French of the Navarre Plan an additional \$385 million was decided upon by the NSC. No objection was raised when France asked our views in August, 1953, on the transfer of its battalion in Korea to Indochina and subsequently took this action. The Navarre Plan, by offering a format for victory which promised success without the direct involvement of American military forces, tended, because of its very attractiveness, to have the effect of enlarging our commitment to assist the French towards achieving a military solution.

In the last NSC paper approved before the Indochina situation was totally transformed by the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Conference, the "successful defense of Tonkin" was said to be the "keystone of the defense of mainland Southeast Asia except possibly Malaya." NSC 5405 [Doc. 20] took some, but probably not sufficient, account of the deterioration in the French position which had occurred since NSC 124/2 was approved eighteen months earlier. It, nevertheless, repeated the domino principle in detail, including the admonition that "such is the interrelation of the countries of the area that effective counteraction would be immediately necessary to prevent the loss of any single country from leading to submission to, or an alignment with, communism by the remaining countries of Southeast Asia and Indonesia." The document also noted that:

In the conflict in Indochina, the Communists and non-Communists worlds clearly confront one another in the field of battle: The loss of the struggle in Indochina, in addition to its impact in Southeast Asia and South Asia, would therefore have the most serious repercussions on U.S. and free world interests in Europe and elsewhere.

The subject of possible negotiations was broached in NSC 5405, following the observation that political pressures in France may impel the French Government to seek a negotiated rather than a military settlement. It was noted (before Dien Bien Phu) that if the Navarre Plan failed or appeared doomed to failure, the French might seek to negotiate simply for the best possible terms, irrespective of whether these offered any assurance of preserving a non-communist Indochina.

In this regard the NSC decided the U.S. should employ every feasible means to influence the French Government against concluding the struggle on terms "inconsistent" with the basic U.S. objectives. The French should be told that: (1) in the absence of a marked improvement in the military situation, there was no basis for negotiation on acceptable terms; (2) the U.S. would "flatly oppose any idea" of a cease-fire as a preliminary to negotiations, because such a cease-fire would result in an irretrievable deterioration of the Franco-Vietnamese military position in Indochina; (3) *a nominally non-communist coalition regime would eventually turn the country over to Ho Chi Minh with no opportunity for the replacement of the French by the United States or the United Kingdom.* [Emphasis Added]

### G. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, two comments can be made:

a. With the growing perception of a Chinese threat to Indochina, and, therefore, to all of Southeast Asia, the U.S. Government tended to concentrate on the military rather than the political aspects of the French-Viet Minh struggle. In consequence, American attention focused on (1) deterring external intervention from China, and (2) assisting the French in successfully prosecuting the war through the implementation of the Navarre Plan. The result of this was that the encouragement and support of the non-communist nationalist governments in the Associated States was almost inadvertently given lower priority. The United States was reluctant to press the French too strongly on taking measures to foster Vietnam nationalism because of its overriding interest in halting the potential sweep of communism through Southeast Asia. Moreover, it was easier to develop a policy for dealing with the external threat of intervention than to meet the internal threat of subversion, or the even more difficult process of finding and sustaining a genuine nationalist alternative to the Viet Minh.

b. The "domino theory" and the assumptions behind it were never questioned. The homogeneity of the nations of Southeast Asia was taken as a given, as was the linkage in their ability to remain democratic, or at an acceptable minimum, non-communist, nations. Undoubtedly, in the first decade of the cold war there existed an unfortunate stereotype of a monolithic communist expansionary bloc. It was reinforced by a somewhat

emotional approach on the part of many Americans to communism in China and Asia. This "syndrome" was, in part, the result of the "fall" of China, which some felt could have been averted, and a few hoped would still be reversed.

Accordingly, not sufficient cognizance was taken of the individuality of the states of Southeast Asia and the separateness of their societies. Probably there was some lack of knowledge in depth on the part of Washington policy-makers about the area. No one before World War II had expected that the United States would be called upon to take a position of leadership in these remote colonial territories of our European allies. In hindsight, these shortcomings may have led to the fallacious belief that a neutralist or communist Indochina would inevitably draw the other states of Asia into the communist bloc or into neutralism. But the "fallacy" was neither evident then, nor is it demonstrable now in retrospect.

#### IV. THE INTERAGENCY DEBATE OVER U.S. INTERVENTION IN INDOCHINA

##### A. THE GENERAL POLICY CONTEXT

The debate over the wisdom and manner of American intervention in Indochina was based primarily on the desirability of military involvement, not on questions concerning Indochina's value to United States security interests in the Far East. The Eisenhower Administration was in general agreement with the rationale for American interest in Indochina expressed by the Truman Administration. The United States Government first came to full grips with the question of intervention in late 1953-early 1954 as the fall of Indochina seemed to become imminent.

##### 1. The Final Truman Program (NSC 124)

NSC 124 (February, 1952) considered imperative the prevention of a Communist take-over in Indochina. It recognized that even in the absence of "identifiable aggression" by Communist China, the U.S. might be forced to take some action in order to prevent the subversion of Southeast Asia. In case of overt Chinese intervention, NSC 124 recommended: (1) naval, air and logistical support of French Union forces; (2) naval blockade of Communist China; (3) attacks by land and carrier-based aircraft on military targets in Mainland China. It stopped short of recommending the commitment of U.S. ground forces in Indochina.

##### 2. Eisenhower Administration's "Basic National Security Policy"

NSC 162/2 [Doc. 18], adopted in October, 1953, ten months after the Republican Administration took office, was the basic document of the "New Look." After commenting on U.S. and Soviet defense capabilities, the prospect of nuclear parity and the need to balance domestic economic policy with military expenditures, it urged a military posture based on the ability "to inflict massive retaliatory damage" on the enemy. Indochina was listed as an area of "strategic importance" to the U.S. An attack on such important areas "probably would compel the United States to react with military force either locally at the point of attack or generally against the military power of the aggressor." The use of tactical nuclear weapons in conventional war situations was recommended, but they were not specifically suggested for use in Indochina.

##### B. THE QUESTION OF INTERVENTION WITH GROUND FORCES

##### 1. The Problem Is Presented

In late 1953, the Army questioned prevalent assumptions that ground forces would not be required in

Indochina if the area was as important to U.S. security interests as the NSC papers stated. The Army urged that the issue be faced squarely in order to provide the best possible preparation for whatever courses of action might be undertaken. The Plans Division of the Army General Staff pointed out that under current programs the Army did not have the capability of providing divisional forces for operations in Indochina while maintaining its existing commitments in Europe and the Far East. Army also suggested a "reevaluation of the importance of Indochina and Southeast Asia in relation to the possible cost of saving it."

With the deterioration of the French military situation in Indochina, the first serious attention came to be given to the manner and size of a U.S. intervention. The question to be faced was: how far was the U.S. prepared to go in terms of force commitments to ensure that Indochina stayed out of Communist hands? The Defense Department, though not of a single mind on this question, pressed for an early determination of the forces the U.S. would be willing to dispatch in an emergency situation. The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Robert Anderson, proposed to Secretary of Defense Wilson on January 6, 1954, that the U.S. decide immediately to employ combat forces in Indochina on the "reasonable assurance of strong indigenous support of our forces," whether or not the French Government approved. But Vice Admiral A. C. Davis, Director of the Office of Foreign Military Affairs in OSD, wrote:

...Involvement of U.S. forces in the Indochina war should be avoided at all practical costs. If, then, National Policy determines no other alternative, the U.S. should not be self-duped into believing the possibility of partial involvement--such as "Naval and Air units only." One cannot go over Niagara Falls in a barrel only slightly.

Admiral Davis then went on:

Comment: If it is determined desirable to introduce air and naval forces in combat in Indochina it is difficult to understand how involvement of ground forces could be avoided. Air strength sufficient to be of worth in such an effort would require bases in Indochina of considerable magnitude. Protection of those bases and port facilities would certainly require U.S. ground force personnel, and the force once committed would need ground combat units to support any threatened evacuation. It must be understood that there is no cheap way to fight a war, once committed.

## 2. NSC: State and Defense Views

The evident disparity between, on the one hand, our high strategic valuation of Indochina, and on the other, our unwillingness to reach a firm decision on the forces required to defend the area became the subject of the NSC's 179th meeting on January 8, 1954. At this meeting the Council discussed NSC 177 on Southeast Asia, but it decided not to take up the Special Annex to NSC 177 which laid out a series of choices which might face the United States if the French military position in Indochina continued to deteriorate. Nevertheless, the NSC at that time did make some headway on the problem it had posed for itself.

According to summary notes taken of the meeting, State and Defense were at considerable variance on what should be done in either of two contingencies: first, French abandonment of the struggle; second, a French demand for substantial U.S. forces (ground, sea, and air). The State view considered the French position so critical already as (in the rapporteur's words) to "force the U.S. to decide now to utilize U.S. forces in the fighting in Southeast Asia." The Defense representative refused to underwrite U.S. involvement. He reportedly stated that the French could win by the spring of 1955 given U.S. aid and given "improved French political relations with the Vietnamese . . . The commitment of U.S. forces in a 'civil war' in Indochina will be an admission of the bankruptcy of our political

policies re Southeast Asia and France and should be resorted to only in extremity." He urged that every step be taken to avoid a direct American commitment.

The Council meeting reached two important conclusions, both fully in keeping with the Defense position. First, it decided that a discussion of contingencies for U.S. involvement missed the essential point that the French were capable of winning provided they gained native political and military cooperation. Second, NSC 177 was, as Defense suggested, inadequate in that the study failed to come to grips with the fact that eventual success in Indochina depended upon French ability to solve the problem of how to obtain Vietnamese support for the war effort.

### 3. *The JCS View*

The NSC meeting of January 8 still left open the question of U.S. action in the event troops were indisputably necessary to prevent the "loss" of Indochina. In this regard, the Joint Chiefs of Staff kept their options open. The Chiefs thought that the Navarre Plan was fundamentally sound, but was being steadily undercut by the gulf separating the French from the Vietnamese, by General Navarre's failure to implement U.S. recommendations, and by hesitancy in Paris over the necessary political concessions to the Bao Dai government. Yet JCS refused either to rule out the use of U.S. combat forces or to back unequivocally their employment.

### 4. *Formation of Special Working Group on Indochina*

Dissatisfaction with NSC 177 and the NSC's subsequent failure in NSC 5405 to resolve the ground force commitment issue led to the formation of a working group to evaluate the French military effort, to make recommendations concerning future U.S. contributions to it, and to devote attention to the various contingencies under which the U.S. might be called upon to intervene directly in the war. The working group, under the chairmanship of General G. B. Erskine (USMC, Ret.), was composed of representatives from the Departments of State and Defense, the Joint Chiefs, and CIA. The group was responsible to NSC through General W. Bedell Smith, Under Secretary of State, who had been appointed by the Council to head the Special Committee on the U.S. and Indochina.

### 5. *The Erskine Report, Part I: Motivate the French*

The first section of Erskine's two-part report, dated February 6, 1954, was based on the assumption that U.S. policy toward Indochina would not require resort to overt combat operations by U.S. forces. Within that framework, the report adhered closely to the Defense Department position that the French, if properly motivated, could win in Indochina, but that their failure to carry through on needed reforms would require U.S. consideration of active involvement. The report noted that:

There is in Indo-China, or programmed for Indo-China . . . , a sufficient amount of equipment and supplies and a potential manpower pool sufficient eventually to defeat the Communists decisively if properly utilized and maintained and if the situation continues to permit this manpower to be converted into military effectiveness. Success will ultimately be dependent upon the inspiration of the local population to fight for their own freedom from Communist domination and the willingness of the French both to take the measures to stimulate that inspiration and to more fully utilize the native potential.

The Erskine Report (Part I) recommended: (1) augmentation of the French air force, but not using American personnel; (2) additional U.S. military assistance support of \$124 million (supplementing FY 1954

commitments of \$1.115 billion); (3) elevation of MAAG's status to that of Military Mission, with expanded personnel and advisory authority over training and planning; (4) assignment of additional U.S. personnel with the mission of acting as instructors and performing other key duties within the French forces; (5) Presidential letters to the Heads of State of the Associated States reaffirming our support of their independence and explaining our motivations in assisting them through the French; (6) an effort be undertaken to persuade Bao Dai to take a more active part in the anti-Viet Minh struggle. The report concluded that the program of recommended changes could bring about victory over the Viet Minh if it received full French approval and barring Chinese intervention.

#### 6. *The Erskine Report, Part II: Intervention Only After Geneva?*

The second part of the Erskine Report [Doc. 24] did not appear until March 17, 1954, and unlike the first, was the responsibility only of the Defense Department and the Joint Chiefs, with the State Department position "reserved." The report confirmed previous determinations that the loss of Indochina would be a major military and political setback for the United States. It recommended that prior to the start of the Geneva Conference, the U.S. should inform Britain and France that it was interested only in military victory in Indochina and would not associate ourselves with any settlement which falls short of that objective. It further recommended that in the event of an unsatisfactory outcome at Geneva, the U.S. should pursue ways of continuing the struggle in concert with the Associated States, the United Kingdom, and other allies. The National Security Council was therefore requested to determine the extent of American willingness to commit combat forces to the region with or without French cooperation. But with the Dien Bien Phu siege just beginning, and the Geneva Conference six weeks away, the Erskine Report suggested that the United States influence and observe developments at the Geneva Conference before deciding on active involvement.

#### 7. *NSC 177 Annex Raises Intervention Question Anew*

Following the second part of the Erskine Report, the President evidently decided that the Special Annex to NSC 177, which had been withdrawn in January 1954, should be redistributed for consideration by the Council's Planning Board. The Annex to NSC 177 posed the fundamental choice between (a) acceptance of the loss of Indochina, which would be followed by U.S. efforts to prevent further deterioration of our security position in Southeast Asia, or (b) direct military action to save Indochina before the French and Vietnamese became committed to an unacceptable political settlement at Geneva.

Among the alternative courses of action outlined in the Annex, two in particular—both geared to direct U.S. action prior to a Geneva settlement—were discussed. Under the first, based on French consent to continue fighting, the U.S. was urged to (1) seek a Franco-Vietnamese settlement of the independence issue, (2) insist upon a build-up of indigenous forces with U.S. advisory and material support, (3) demand the maintenance of French forces in the field at their then present level, and (4) prepare to provide sufficient U.S. forces to make possible the success of a joint effort. Full internationalization of the war would be discussed with the French later, thereby discounting immediate action in concert with the British or Asian nations.

The second alternative assumed a French pull-out. In such a case the United States could either accept the loss of Indochina, or adopt an active policy while France gradually withdrew its troops. Should we accept the latter course, our "most positive" step offering "the greatest assurance of success" would be, NSC estimated, to join with indigenous forces in combatting the Viet Minh until they were reduced "to the status of scattered guerrilla bands." U.S. land, sea, and air forces would be involved.

The Annex was based upon assumptions that U.S. involvement against the Viet Minh would not provoke massive Chinese intervention, would not lead to direct Soviet involvement, and that there would be no

resumption of hostilities in Korea. It acknowledged that any change in these assumptions would seriously jeopardize the success of the alternatives proposed. In particular, it noted that U.S. participation heightened the risk of Chinese intervention, and Chinese entry would alter radically both the immediate military situation and U.S. force requirements.

#### 8. *Army Questions Feasibility of Air-Naval intervention and Outlines Ground Forces Requirements*

The principal result of the discussions on the NSC 177 Special Annex was to bring into the open the issue of the costs in manpower and materiel of a U.S. involvement. The Army was critical of contingency planning that was based on the assumption that U.S. air and naval forces could be used in Indochina without the commitment of ground combat forces. General Matthew B. Ridgway, Army Chief of Staff, later wrote in his Memoirs that he was quite disturbed at talk in high government circles about employing air-naval power alone in Indochina. An Army position paper [Doc. 31] submitted to the NSC in the first week of April, 1954, argued as follows:

1. U.S. intervention with combat forces in Indochina is not militarily desirable...
2. A victory in Indochina cannot be assured by U.S. intervention with air and naval forces alone.
3. The use of atomic weapons in Indochina would not reduce the number of ground forces required to achieve a victory in Indochina.
4. Seven U.S. divisions or their equivalent, with appropriate naval and air support, would be required to win a victory in Indochina if the French withdraw and the Chinese Communists do not intervene. However, U.S. intervention plans cannot be based on the assumption that the Chinese Communists will not intervene.
5. The equivalent of 12 U.S. divisions would be required to win a victory in Indochina, if the French withdraw and the Chinese Communists intervene.
6. The equivalent of 7 U.S. divisions would be required to win a victory in Indochina if the French remain and the Chinese Communists intervene.
7. Requirements for air and naval support for ground force operations are:
  - a. Five hundred fighter-bomber sorties per day exclusive of interdiction and counter-air operations.
  - b. An airlift capability of a one division drop.
  - c. A division amphibious lift.
8. Two U.S. divisions can be placed in Indochina in 30 days, and an additional 5 divisions in the following 120 days. This could be accomplished without reducing U.S. ground strength in the Far East to an unacceptable degree, but the U.S. ability to meet its NATO commitment would be seriously affected for a considerable period. The amount of time required to place 12 divisions in Indochina would depend upon the industrial and personnel mobilization measures taken by the government .

#### 9. *Defense-JCS "Solution": Rectify French Deficiencies*

Faced with estimates that U.S. air-naval action could not turn the tide, and that U.S. ground forces of appropriate size would impinge upon other commitments, DoD and the JCS took the position that an alternative military solution existed within the reach of the French which required no U.S. intervention. DoD argued that the three reasons for France's deteriorating position were (1) lack of the will to win; (2) reluctance to meet Indochinese demands for true independence; (3) refusal to train indigenous personnel for military leadership. Defense believed that premature U.S. involvement would therefore beg the basic question of

whether the U.S. was prepared to apply the strongest pressure on France, primarily in the European context, to attempt to force the French in Paris and in Indochina to take appropriate measures to rectify these deficiencies. Only if these measures were forthcoming, DoD held, should the U.S. seriously consider committing ground forces in defense of the interests of France and the Associated States. The net effect of the Defense-JCS position was to challenge the notion that a quick U.S. military action in Indochina would be either feasible or necessary.

### *C. THE NEW APPROACH: "UNITED ACTION"*

At this juncture the Eisenhower Administration began giving serious consideration to broadening any American military intervention in Indochina by making it part of a collective venture along with its European and Asian allies. Secretary of State Dulles in a speech on March 29 warned the public of the alarming situation in Indochina and called for "united action"--without defining it further--in these words:

Under the conditions of today, the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, would be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that the possibility should not be passively accepted but should be met by united action. This might involve serious risks. But these risks are far less than those that will face us a few years from now if we dare not be resolute today.

Under Secretary of State W. Bedell Smith's Special Committee on the U.S. and Indochina, to which the Erskine working group had reported, issued a study on April 2. This report went beyond the question of holding Indochina and agreed that whatever that area's fate, the U.S. should begin developing a system of mutual defense for Southeast Asia. For the short term, the Smith Committee favored American sponsorship of a mutual defense treaty directed against Communist aggression in Indochina and Thailand. In the long run, it recommended promotion of a "regional and Asian mutual defense arrangement subscribed and underwritten by the major European powers with interests in the Pacific."

The State Department's thinking in early April 1954 was not greatly at variance from that of Defense and the Smith Committee. Perhaps more so than Defense, State was concerned about the Chinese reaction to a U.S. military intervention. It urged caution and suggested that in any type of "united action" the U.S. make clear to both the Chinese and the allies that the intervention would not be aimed at the overthrow or destruction of the Peking regime. State recommended: (1) no U.S. military intervention for the moment, nor should it be promised to the French; (2) planning for military intervention continue; (3) discussions with potential allies on possibility of forming a regional grouping in the event of an unacceptable settlement at Geneva.

#### *1. Presidential Decision to Support Only "United Action"*

Meanwhile, the President decided, following a meeting of Secretary Dulles and Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, with Congressional leaders on April 3, that the U.S. would not undertake a unilateral intervention. Any U.S. military involvement in Indochina would be contingent upon (1) formation of a coalition force with U.S. allies to pursue "united action"; (2) declaration of French intent to accelerate independence of Associated States; (3) Congressional approval of U.S. involvement (which was thought to be dependent upon (1) and (2)).

These policy guidelines undoubtedly influenced the NSC which, at a meeting on April 6, developed the somewhat incompatible objectives that the U.S. (a) "intervene if necessary to avoid the loss of Indochina, but advocate that no steps be left untaken to get the French to achieve a successful conclusion of the war on their own" and (b) support as the best alternative to U.S. intervention a regional grouping with maximum Asian participation.

The President accepted the NSC recommendations but decided that henceforth the Administration's primary efforts would be devoted toward: (1) organizing regional collective defense against Communist expansion; (2) gaining British support for U.S. objectives in Southeast Asia; (3) pressing France to accelerate its timetable for Indochinese independence. The President would seek Congressional approval for U.S. participation in a regional arrangement, if it could be put together, and meanwhile contingency planning for mobilization would commence.

## 2. Rejection of Unilateral Intervention

Thus, as the curtain began to fall on the French effort at Dien Bien Phu, and the question of what the U.S. would do became critical, the U.S. Government backed away from unilateral intervention. The Defense Department was reluctant to intervene following the Army's presentation of the view that air-naval action alone would not do the job and ground forces would be needed. The very recent experience of the Korean War mitigated strongly against another American involvement in an Asian land war. Furthermore, the President was not willing to enter into such a venture unless it was cloaked with Congressional approval. Such approval, in turn, depended upon the participation of the allies. Hence, Secretary Dulles undertook the task of persuading Britain, France and the Asian allies to participate in a coalition for "united action" in Indochina.

## V. THE ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE "UNITED ACTION"

### A. THE BERLIN CONFERENCE OF 1954

Negotiations for a political settlement of the French-Viet Minh war were practically assured when it was decided at the Big Four meeting in Berlin in February 1954 that the Indochina question would be added to the agenda of an upcoming international conference at Geneva which was to discuss primarily a settlement of the Korean War. The period between the Berlin and Geneva conferences (i.e., between February and May 1954) unexpectedly witnessed a denouement of the Indochina drama with the siege and fall of Dien Bien Phu, the U.S. decision not to intervene, and the unsuccessful U.S. attempt to rally its allies together in order to form a collective force in pursuance of "united action."

### 1. Viet Minh Strategy and French Attitudes

The half-year before the Berlin Foreign Ministers conference of February 1954 saw both a marked step up of Viet Minh military activity and the presentation of a peace feeler from Ho Chi Minh. The Vietnam Peoples Army (VPA) began to change its strategy against the French from guerrilla activities to conventional battle deployments. This was accompanied by an increase in the amount of Chinese military assistance, no doubt facilitated by the end of armed conflict in Korea. Thus, the Viet Minh appeared to be showing a newly found strength and confidence, although at the time the French refused to recognize this either publicly or to themselves.

Meanwhile, Ho Chi Minh put out a peace feeler in late November 1953 in reply to a questionnaire submitted by a correspondent for the Swedish newspaper *Expressen*. The one pre-condition set by Ho for negotiations was French recognition of Vietnamese independence. In subsequent weeks, the peace feeler was repeated on several occasions, but each time it failed to indicate the place at which talks might be held, nor did it propose a scope for the talks.

Nothing resulted directly from these peace feelers, but indirectly they added to the mounting public and political sentiment in France for an end to the seemingly interminable and costly war. The armistice agreement

negotiated at Panmunjom in July 1953 served as an example which many Frenchmen hoped could be followed in the negotiation of a cease-fire with the DRV. A widespread disenchantment with the Indochina war pervaded France. This was reflected in public statements by Prime Minister Laniel that Paris would be satisfied with an "honorable solution" to the war.

The French then adopted a policy toward the war of "keep fighting-keep talking." There was an increase in French military activity and confidence stimulated by the Navarre Plan, but this was offset by a growth in the size and influence of the peace faction in France, as indicated by the "dovish" votes of the National Assembly favoring an early settlement of the protracted war. Premier Laniel and French officials told the U.S. Embassy that they considered the Ho Chi Minh offer pure propaganda, but said also that Ho's move had produced the intended impact on public and military circles in France and Indochina. Laniel mentioned that President Vincent Auriol had become so excited by Ho's proposal that he told Laniel "to consult representatives of three Associated States immediately with view to seeking earliest possible opening of negotiations with representatives of Ho Chi Minh. Laniel had flatly refused . . ." But American officials were skeptical. The U.S. Embassy reported that a Laniel speech of November 24, 1953, "left considerable latitude for negotiations," and that Ho's offers had increased the pressure for a settlement.

## 2. Early U.S. Opposition to Negotiations

The consistent U.S. policy was to attempt to steer the French clear of the negotiating table pending substantial military gains on the battlefield. In bilateral U.S.-French talks in July, 1953, while the Korean armistice was being discussed at Panmunjom, Foreign Minister Bidault told Secretary Dulles that parallel talks should be pursued on Indochina. Bidault explained that the French public would never understand why negotiations were fit and honorable for Korea but were not for Indochina. A cease-fire in Korea, with nothing similar in prospect for Indochina, would make his government's position "absolutely impossible."

Secretary Dulles in reply stressed that "negotiations with no other alternative usually end in capitulation." In the Korean case, Dulles said, the alternative was the U.S. threat of "other and unpleasant measures" which the Communists realized we possessed. He urged the French to adopt the Navarre Plan, not only for military reasons, but because it would improve the French negotiating position. Dulles made it clear that the U.S. felt it was inadvisable to have the Indochina war inscribed on the agenda of a post-armistice political conference on Korea. The U.S. position at this time foreclosed negotiating on Indochina until after a Chinese decision to eliminate or cut down aid to the Viet Minh. In general, the U.S. sought to convince the French that military victory was the only guarantee of diplomatic success.

Dulles wished the French to continue the war because of his deep conviction that Indochina was a principal link in the line of the containment of Communism. In addition, Washington was undoubtedly influenced by optimistic reports on the progress of the war. General O'Daniel reported from Saigon that a French victory was likely if U.S. material support was forthcoming. On February 6, 1954, it was announced that forty B-26 bombers and 200 U.S. technicians to service them would be sent to Indochina. Admiral Radford told a House Foreign Relations Subcommittee, a month before the siege of Dien Bien Phu began (March, 1954), that the Navarre Plan was "a broad strategic concept which within a few months should insure a favorable turn in the course of the war."

At the Berlin Quadripartite Foreign Ministers meeting in February, however, Secretary Dulles was forced to give in on the French demand that Indochina be placed on the Geneva agenda. Bidault pressured the U.S. by threatening to scuttle the project for the European Defense Community which then was at the top of U.S. priorities. Dulles could not block Paris' determination to discuss Indochina at Geneva for it was, in the last analysis, France's war. He must have realized that the Laniel Government could not completely avoid

negotiations without alienating itself from popular opinion and bringing about its downfall at the hands of the anti-war opposition parties.

The United States successfully opposed Soviet efforts at Berlin to gain for Communist China the status of a sponsoring power, and successfully held out, furthermore, for the inclusion in the Berlin communiqué of a statement that no diplomatic recognition, not already accorded, would be implied either in the invitation to, or the holding of, the Geneva Conference.

## *B. THE ELY MISSION (MARCH 20-24)*

### *1. Dien Bien Phu Begins*

On March 13, 1954, the VPA, under the direct command of General Giap, began its assault upon Dien Bien Phu. This fortress in Northern Vietnam was to take on a political and psychological importance far out of proportion to its actual strategic value because of the upcoming Geneva Conference. The Viet Minh correctly foresaw that a show of decisive force, not to mention a victory, would markedly strengthen their hand at the conference. Further, a defeat of the French Union forces would sap the will of the French nation to continue the struggle. The Viet Minh were greatly helped by a substantial increase in the level of Chinese military aid including artillery and radar. As the battle developed, the optimism which had pervaded Washington statements, public and private, on the war was replaced with the conviction that unless new steps were taken to deal with Chinese aid, the French were bound to go under.

General Paul Ely, French Chief of Staff, arrived in Washington on March 20 to confer with U.S. officials on the war situation. Ely's principal aims were to obtain American assurance of air intervention in the event of Chinese aerial attack, and to obtain further U.S. material assistance, especially B-26 bombers. Dulles told Ely that he could not then answer regarding U.S. response to Chinese air intervention. Ely subsequently contended in his *Mémoires* that he received a promise from Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to push for prompt American approval of interdiction should the contingency arise. As to the supply of bombers, twenty-five additional B-26's were promised.

### *2. Operation Vulture (Vautour)*

According to subsequent French reports, General Ely was asked to stay 24 hours longer than planned in Washington, during which time Admiral Radford made an informal but major proposal to him. Radford is said to have suggested a nighttime raid against the perimeter of Dien Bien Phu by aircraft of the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy. The plan, named Operation Vulture, called for about sixty B-29's to take off from Clark Field near Manila, under escort of 150 fighters of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, to conduct a massive strike against VPA positions on the perimeter of Dien Bien Phu.

Operation Vulture, according to French sources, was conceived by a joint American-French military staff in Saigon. It is admitted to have been an informal proposal which had not as yet received full U.S. Government backing as policy. No record of Operation Vulture has been found in files examined. In an interview in 1965, Admiral Radford stated that no plans for "Operation Vulture" existed, since planning to aid Dien Bien Phu by an air strike never proceeded beyond the conceptual stage. Nevertheless, such an operation probably was the subject of informal discussions both in Vietnam, and between Radford and Ely.

## *C. "UNITED ACTION" AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO EITHER NEGOTIATIONS OR TO UNILATERAL U.S. INTERVENTION*

## 1. Formulation of U.S. Policy

By late March the internal debate within the Eisenhower Administration had reached the point where it was recognized that: (a) unilateral U.S. intervention in the Indochina War would not be effective without ground forces; (b) the involvement of U.S. ground forces was logistically and politically undesirable; (c) preferably, "free world" intervention in Indochina to save the area from communism would take the form of a collective operation by allied forces. This was the import of the NSC deliberations, the Ridgway Report, the Report of Under Secretary of State W. Bedell Smith's Special Committee on the U.S. and Indochina, and President Eisenhower's general train of thought.

Accordingly, Secretary Dulles in his discussions with General Ely went beyond the question of immediate assistance to the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu and broached the possible establishment of a regional defense arrangement for Southeast Asia.

This proposal was given public exposure in Secretary Dulles' speech of March 29 before the Overseas Press Club. Dulles described the importance of resisting communist aggression in Indochina in these words:

If the Communist forces were to win uncontested control over Indo-China or any substantial part thereof, they would surely resume the same pattern of aggression against the other free peoples in that area.

The propagandists of Red China and of Soviet Russia make it perfectly apparent that the purpose is to dominate all of Southeast Asia.

Now Southeast Asia is an important part of the world. It is the so-called "rice bowl" . . . It is an area that is rich in many raw materials...

And in addition to these tremendous economic values, the area has great strategic value . . . Communist control of Southeast Asia would carry a grave threat to the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand . . . The entire western Pacific area, including the so-called "offshore island chain," would be strategically endangered.

He then went on call for "united action," and after noting Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh, prophesied that aggression would "lead to action in places by means of the free world's choosing, so that the aggression would surely cost more than it would gain."

In the following weeks the aim of U.S. diplomacy was to secure allied agreement to a collective defense pact consisting of ten nations: the U.S., France, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand, and the three Associated States. Secretary Dulles presented his proposal in discussions with British Ambassador Sir Roger Makins and French Ambassador Henri Bonnet. President Eisenhower addressed a personal message to Prime Minister Churchill explaining the proposed coalition. The President noted that:

Geneva is less than four weeks away. There the possibility of the Communists driving a wedge between us will, given the state of mind in France, be infinitely greater than at Berlin. I can understand the very natural desire of the French to seek an end to this war which has been bleeding them for eight years. But our painstaking search for a way out of the impasse has reluctantly forced us to the conclusion that there is no negotiated solution of the Indochina problem which in its essence would not be either a face-saving device to

cover a French surrender or a face-saving device to cover a Communist retirement. The first alternative is too serious in its broad strategic implications for us and for you to be acceptable...

Somehow we must contrive to bring about the second alternative.

President Eisenhower went on to outline the need for a coalition willing to fight the Communists, if this proved necessary. He concluded with a historical question certain to appeal to Churchill:

If I may refer again to history; we failed to halt Hirohito, Mussolini and Hitler by not acting in unit and in time. That marked the beginning of many years of stark tragedy and desperate peril. May it not be that our nations have learned something from that lesson? .

In these discussions the United States sought generally to stiffen the will of the free nations in the Indochina crisis. It emphasized both the avowed intention of France to grant real independence to the Associated States, and the condition accepted by the French at Berlin for the United States' agreeing to discuss Indochina at Geneva. That condition was that France would not agree to any arrangement which would directly or indirectly result in the turnover of Indochina to the Communists. The United States sought solid support for this position, especially from the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. Although the possibility was held out of future involvement of the United Nations in the Indochina problem, there was no thought of immediate UN action.

## 2. Initial Allied Reaction to "United Action"

Thailand and the Philippines gave a favorable response to the call for united action. The British response was one of caution and hesitancy. Churchill accepted Eisenhower's suggestion that Secretary Dulles go to London for further talks, but the British saw dangers in pressing for a defensive coalition before the Geneva conference. Eden was determined not to be "hustled into injudicious military decisions." As Eden later wrote:

I welcomed the American proposal for the organization of collective defence in South-East Asia, since this would contribute to the security of Malaya and Hong Kong and would remove the anomaly of our exclusion from the A.N.Z.U.S. Pact, to which the United States, Australia and New Zealand were party. But I felt that to form and proclaim a defensive coalition, before we went to the conference table, would be unlikely to help us militarily and would harm us politically, by frightening off important potential allies. By the beginning of May, the rains would be starting in Indo-China and extensive campaigning by either side would be impossible for several months. Since the complete collapse of the French military effort before then was improbable, I did not think that concern for the immediate military situation should be the guiding factor in our policy.

## 3. French Call for U.S. Intervention at Dien Bien Phu (April 4-5)

The French response to the proposal for united action was overtaken by military events at Dien Bien Phu. Foreign Minister Bidault contended on April 5 that the time for a coalition approach had passed and that the fate of Dien Bien Phu would be decided in the next ten days. The previous day Ambassador Douglas Dillon was called to an emergency Sunday cabinet meeting and was informed by Bidault, in the company of Laniel, that "immediate armed intervention of U.S. carrier aircraft at Dien Bien Phu is now necessary to save the situation." Bidault, reporting Navarre's desperate state in the field and the extent of Chinese intervention in support of General Giap's forces, asked the Ambassador point-blank for U.S. action, saying that "the fate of

Southeast Asia now rested on Dien Bien Phu," and that "Geneva would be won or lost depending on outcome" of the battle. The United States was now being called upon to act quickly and unilaterally to save a local situation, rather than, as Dulles desired, in concert with Asian and Western Allies.

#### 4. U.S. Decision Not to Intervene Unilaterally

In the first week of April it became clear that the question of U.S. intervention was now crucial. Fighting at Dien Bien Phu reached major proportions as Chinese-supplied artillery pounded the French and drove them backwards. Without an early intervention by an external power, or group of powers, the French position at Dien Bien Phu was likely to be overrun. In anticipation of the French request for intervention, the Eisenhower Administration decided to consult with Congressional leaders. The President appears to have thought that Congressional support was vital for whatever active role the U.S. might now take in Indochina.

Available Government documents do not provide details of the two meetings to be described below. However, on the basis of seemingly reliable published sources, it appears that on April 3 Secretary Dulles and Admiral Radford met with eight Congressmen (three Republicans and five Democrats) at the State Department. Radford apparently outlined a plan for an air strike on the Vietnam People's Army (VPA) at Dien Bien Phu using 200 planes from the aircraft carriers Essex and Boxer, stationed on maneuvers in the South China Sea. An unsuccessful air strike might need to be followed by a second air strike, but ground forces were not envisaged at this stage. It has been averred that there were atomic bombs on the aircraft carriers which could be delivered by the planes, but there is no indication that there was any serious consideration given to using nuclear weapons at Dien Bien Phu or elsewhere in Indochina. In the event of a massive Chinese troop intervention, however, it is quite possible that the U.S. would have retaliated with strategic nuclear weapons against targets in China.

The Congressional leaders raised questions about the amount of allied support for such an action, about the position of the other Joint Chiefs, about the need for ground forces if a second air strike also failed, and about the danger of a mammoth Chinese intervention which could transform Indochina into another Korean-type war. Radford apparently was forced to admit that he was the only one of the Joint Chiefs who favored the intervention plan. Dulles conceded that the allies had not as yet been consulted. In consequence, Dulles, who had been thinking of a joint Congressional resolution authorizing Presidential use of U.S. air-naval power in Indochina (which it is alleged he had ready in his pocket) left the meeting without the vital support he needed. The Congressional leaders laid down three conditions necessary for their support: (a) formation of an allied "coalition"-type force; (b) a French declaration indicating an intent to accelerate independence for the Associated States; (c) French agreement to continue their Expeditionary Corps in Indochina. Thus Congressional opposition put the brake on a possible unilateral U.S. intervention. According to a subsequent State Department Summary:

It was the sense of the meeting that the U.S. should not intervene alone but should attempt to secure the cooperation of other free nations concerned in Southeast Asia, and that if such cooperation could be assured, it was probable that the U.S. Congress would authorize U.S. participation in such "United Action."

The following day, April 4, Dulles and Radford met with the President at the White House. The President reached the decision to intervene only upon the satisfaction of the three conditions necessary for the U.S. "to commit belligerent acts" in Indochina. There would have to be a coalition "with active British Commonwealth participation"; a "full political understanding with France and other countries," and Congressional approval.

**President Eisenhower clearly did not want the U.S. to intervene alone. He also was very concerned with**

having broad Congressional support for any step which might involve the U.S. in a war. As Sherman Adams later observed:

Having avoided one total war with Red China the year before in Korea when he had United Nations support, he [Eisenhower] was in no mood to provoke another one in Indo-China by going it alone in a military action without the British and other Western Allies. He was also determined not to become involved militarily in any foreign conflict without the approval of Congress. He had had trouble enough convincing some Senators that it was even necessary to send small groups of noncombatant Air Force technicians to Indo-China.

##### 5. British Oppose "United Action"

From April 11 to 14, Secretary Dulles visited London and Paris to attempt to obtain British and French commitments to support his proposal for "United Action." According to President Eisenhower, Dulles felt that he had been given assurance of Congressional support for "United Action" if the allies approved his plan.

Dulles found the British opposed to any type of collective military action prior to the Geneva Conference. Dulles explained, according to Eden's account, that the U.S. had concluded that the French could no longer deal with the situation in Indochina, militarily or politically, alone. If the French position in Indochina collapsed, the consequences in the rest of Southeast Asia would be grave. U.S. air and naval forces were ready to intervene and some aircraft carriers had already been moved from Manila to the Indochina coast. On reflection, said Dulles, he had thought that the U.S. should not act alone in this matter and that an ad hoc coalition might be formed which might develop later into a Southeast Asia defense organization. This in itself would deter China from further interference in Indochina and would strengthen the western position at Geneva by giving evidence of solidarity.

Eden was not convinced. He drew a distinction between the long term issue of collective security in Southeast Asia--which might well be guaranteed by treaty after Geneva--and the more immediate question of "united action" in Indochina. He was opposed to any military action or warning announcement before Geneva. The British were willing to provide the French with full diplomatic support at Geneva, either as a guarantor of the final settlement or as a participant in multilateral talks if a settlement failed to materialize. In the latter case, the British were prepared to discuss a collective defense formula that would comprehend any non-Communist portion of Indochina formed as the result of the Geneva deliberations. But they would not, prior to Geneva, commit themselves to united action.

Britain's distinction between the appropriateness of a united approach after, as opposed to before, the Conference was founded on serious doubts about the true import of united action. As Dulles correctly judged, behind Britain's push for a settlement was the "fear that if fighting continues, we will in one way or another become involved, thereby enhancing risk of Chinese intervention and possibility further expansion of war." Eden charged that action prior to the Conference would not only destroy chances for a peaceful settlement, but would critically raise the risk of a wider war. American planning admitted the strong possibility of direct Chinese intervention, and his own intelligence staff had concluded that Western involvement would bring on the Chinese by land and air once the Viet Minh effort became "seriously endangered."

Thus, while Dulles was angered at the way he felt the British were writing off Indochina, Eden was highly pessimistic about Dulles' militancy in an area of uncertain value for which the United States had ambiguous, high-risk plans. There was considerable difference, in Eden's mind, between warnings to Communist China against direct intervention before the fact (which the British went along with in mid-1953) and united action, which would, despite any allied assurances to Peking, be interpreted by the Chinese as provocative.

British suspicions, furthermore, were an extension of the belief that Indochina need not be entirely lost at Geneva in the absence of united action. London was apparently puzzled by American talk of the "loss" of Indochina, for to 10 Downing Street, "French cannot lose the war between now [April 1954] and the coming of the rainy season however badly they may conduct it." [Doc. 35] While Dulles kept telling the British that only united action through the formation of a coalition could ensure against a complete Communist diplomatic triumph at Geneva, Eden was equally convinced that the best way to assure continuation of the war would be united action, and that the French, even after Dien Bien Phu, were still strong enough to prevent the Communists from gaining all Indochina.

Even before Dulles' April flight to London to sound out the British on united action, the Churchill government was closely questioning American evaluations of Indochina. In an April 1 cable, for instance, Dulles vented his disturbance at Britain's refusal to accept the view that the loss of Indochina would ultimately affect their security interests in Malaya, Australia, and New Zealand. This was indeed the case, as Dulles discovered for himself once he talked to Eden in London and later at Geneva. Eden steadfastly refused to buy Dulles' analogy between Indochina and Malaya, retorting that the situation in Malaya was "well in hand" while that in Indochina was clearly not. Admiral Radford concluded in late April from talks with the British chiefs of staff that the U.K. policy seemed "to be on a very narrow basis strictly in terms of local U.K. interest without regard to other areas of the Far East such as Japan."

The British simply could not accept the domino principle even as they admitted Southeast Asia's security value to the free world. By the opening of the Geneva Conference, the U.S.-U.K. relations had reached a low point: Dulles was insisting that the British were the major roadblock to implementation of united action, while Eden was clinging to the notion that a negotiated settlement leading to partition would be the best outcome of an impossibly complex politico-military situation in Indochina.

#### 6. French Oppose "United Action"

Secretary Dulles fared little better in selling "united action" in Paris than he did in London, but for somewhat different reasons. The French were seeking a quick action to avoid an imminent military defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Dulles, however, refused to be torn from a collective allied approach to the Indochina War. The French feared that a coalition arrangement would lead to an internationalization of the war and take control of it out of their hands. They, therefore, only desired local assistance at Dien Bien Phu along the lines of Operation Vulture.

Furthermore, another objection to "united action" from the French viewpoint was that it would only delay or impede the very negotiations leading towards a settlement which the French increasingly desired. The U.S. objective was to keep alive the French determination to continue the war. Dulles feared that the French would use Geneva to find a face-saving formula for a French surrender. Premier Laniel reaffirmed to Dulles in Paris that his government would take no action which directly or indirectly turned Indochina over to the Communists. But he also called attention to the increasing desire on the part of many in France to get out of Indochina at any cost. The French stressed that it was necessary to await the results of the Geneva Conference and that they could not give the impression in advance that they believed Geneva would fail.

#### 7. Aborted Working Group on Collective Defense in Southeast Asia (April 20)

Immediately upon returning to Washington on April 15 Secretary Dulles invited representatives of the United Kingdom, France, the Associated States, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Thailand to attend a meeting on the 20th to set up an ad hoc defense group for the Southeast Asia region. The delegates were to work on a draft for a future organization. The Secretary had been under the impression from his talk in

London with Eden that the U.K., while rejecting immediate "united action" in Indochina, would have no objection to such a preliminary meeting.

On April 18, just two days before the scheduled meeting, the British Ambassador informed Dulles that there would be no British participation. The reasons:

no understanding on the part of the British Foreign Secretary that the working group would go forward at once, and no agreement concerning membership. The Department expressed amazement, but in view of the British attitude the April 20 meeting was transformed into a general briefing for the nations comprising the allied side at the Geneva Conference. In a later explanation of the shift in British attitude, Foreign Secretary Eden said that in agreeing to informal working group talks he had overlooked the pending Colombo Conference and that he felt that it would have been most undesirable to give any public indication of membership in a program for united action before the end of the Colombo discussions. It is now clear that the British were restrained by India and by a fear that British attendance at the meeting would be construed as assent to "united action." Moreover, London could not have been reassured by a "trial balloon" speech of Vice President Nixon on April 17 in which he suggested that the U.S. might have to "take the risk by putting our boys in" in order to avoid "further Communist expansion in Asia and Indochina."

#### *8. Continued French Prodding for U.S. Intervention (April 21-25)*

In preparation for the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference, tripartite discussions (U.S., U.K., France) took place in Paris in mid-April. In these discussions, the French contended that a successful Geneva settlement was dependent on a favorable outcome of the battle at Dien Bien Phu and that their participation in a Southeast Asian coalition might not be possible if Dien Bien Phu fell. There could be no guarantee what position France would take in the event of a collapse at Dien Bien Phu. The French argued that only large-scale United States air and naval intervention could retrieve the situation in Indochina. They made no formal request for intervention in the tripartite discussions, but on several occasions suggested or implied to the Americans that such action was necessary.

On April 21, Marc Jacquet, French Secretary of State for the Associated States, told the American Ambassador to Indochina, Donald Heath, then in Paris, that no French military authority still believed a victory was possible in Indochina without United States air and naval intervention, and that such action should be indicated after the impending failure of the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference.

On April 22, Foreign Minister Bidault, with General Ely, suggested to Secretary Dulles that there should be emergency consultation between General Navarre and American military commanders in Indochina. The Foreign Minister indicated that, although he had been opposed to internationalizing the war, he would now favor it with United States participation if that would save Dien Bien Phu.

On April 23 the French Under Secretary of State, André Bougenot, in the presence of Premier Laniel, suggested to Douglas MacArthur II, Counselor of the Department of State, that the United States could commit its naval aircraft to the battle at Dien Bien Phu without risking American prestige or committing an act of belligerency by placing such aircraft, painted with French insignia and construed as part of the French Foreign Legion, under nominal French command for an isolated action consisting of air strikes lasting two or three days.

On the same day Foreign Minister Bidault showed the Secretary a message from General Navarre in which the French commander said that the situation at Dien Bien Phu was desperate and that he believed that the only alternatives were (1) Operation VAUTOUR, massive B-29 bombing (which Secretary Dulles understood would be a United States operation from bases outside Indochina), or (2) a French Union request for a cease-

fire (which the Secretary assumed would be at Dien Bien Phu only, but which General Navarre, as it turned out, meant should apply to all of Indochina).

#### D. FINAL U.S. POSITION BEFORE GENEVA

##### 1. Exchanges with the French

The American response to these various suggestions was to reiterate to the French the necessary preconditions for American intervention: (1) complete independence for the Associated States; (2) Congressional authorization; (3) a coalition that would include the United Kingdom. In relation to the need for a coalition, Secretary Dulles in Paris and Under Secretary W. Bedell Smith in Washington suggested to French officials that France, in the same way as it had asked for American air intervention in Indochina, should appeal for British intervention there.

Before leaving Paris for Geneva, Secretary Dulles gave Foreign Minister Bidault a letter replying to General Navarre's suggestion that United States air intervention at Dien Bien Phu was the sole alternative to a cease-fire. In this letter, the Secretary stated again the necessary preconditions for United States intervention, and contended that if Dien Bien Phu fell there was no reason that this should make it necessary to plead for a cease-fire. The French Foreign Minister, in a letter limited to the military consequences of United States intervention, replied that in the opinion of French military experts "a massive intervention of American aviation would still be able to save the garrison."

##### 2. Exchanges with the U.K.

In the discussions with the British, meanwhile, the United States had tried both to induce the United Kingdom to participate in a joint Anglo-American air and naval intervention at Dien Bien Phu and to persuade the United Kingdom that the prompt organization of a collective defense in Southeast Asia was necessary to bolster the French in Indochina.

But the British indicated that they would make no commitment to intervene militarily in Indochina and wished to postpone conversations on collective defense arrangements until after the Geneva Conference. Foreign Secretary Eden told Secretary Dulles on April 24 that the British did not want at this juncture to intervene in the Indochina War. Immediately afterward Eden returned to London for a special Cabinet meeting on the Indochina crisis which was held on April 25. Prime Minister Churchill reported to the House of Commons two days later that the British Government was "not prepared to give any undertakings about United Kingdom military action in Indochina in advance of the results of Geneva," and had "not entered into any new political or military commitments." Before addressing the Commons, Churchill had rejected a plea from French Ambassador René Massigli, made on behalf of Premier Laniel, for a statement that Great Britain would join the United States and France in defense of Dien Bien Phu.

The United Kingdom was willing, however, to participate in early military discussions to consider measures which might be taken in Southeast Asia if Indochina were lost. Along these lines, Foreign Secretary Eden and Secretary Dulles had discussed tentatively on April 22 the possibility of a secret military appraisal--by the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Thailand--of what could be done to bolster Thailand in the event of a French collapse in Indochina. The Foreign Secretary had returned to this proposition in another conversation with Secretary Dulles the next day.

On April 30, indicating that the British were prepared to defend the area outside Indochina, and possibly the free part of a partitioned Indochina, Eden proposed to Secretary Dulles "an immediate and secret joint

examination of the political and military problems in creating a collective defense for Southeast Asia, namely: (a) nature and purpose; (b) membership; (c) commitments." He added that this examination should also cover immediate measures to strengthen Thailand.

Secretary Dulles raised the question of early military talks that might strengthen the French position at the Geneva Conference at a meeting in Geneva on May 2 with the Foreign Ministers of Australia and New Zealand, partners of the United States in the ANZUS organization. The three agreed at this meeting that there should be five-power military talks in Washington among the ANZUS powers, the United Kingdom, and France, with the possible participation of Thailand.

### 3. *The Washington Viewpoint*

In Washington in the meantime, the President on April 26, the opening date of the Geneva Conference, told a group of Republican leaders that it would be a "tragic error" for the United States to intervene unilaterally as a partner of France in the Indochina struggle. Two days later, in a discussion with Under Secretary W. Bedell Smith, Presidential Assistant Robert Cutler, and Admiral Radford (who had just been to London and had talked with the British Chiefs of Staff and Prime Minister Churchill), the President expressed disappointment over the British attitude of refraining from active participation in discussions on a Southeast Asian collective security arrangement before the end of the Geneva Conference. President Eisenhower, in this discussion, reiterated his firm decision that there would be no United States military intervention in Indochina by executive action. He urged his aides to provide help to the French in repairing three airfields in Indochina but to avoid any undue risk of involving the United States in combat operations.

The feasibility of American intervention at Dien Bien Phu was finally removed with the fall of that fortress on May 7. President Eisenhower sent messages to the President of France, René Coty, and to the Chief of State of Vietnam, Bao Dai, praising the defenders of Dien Bien Phu and stressing the determination of the free world to remain "faithful to the causes for which they fought."

### *E. REAPPRAISAL OF DOMINO THEORY AFTER DIEN BIEN PHU*

The fall of Dien Bien Phu, and the failure to organize an intervention through "united action" prior to the opening of the Geneva Conference in late April, 1954, led to a reappraisal of the "domino theory" which had been at the center of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia since the late 1940's. The loss of Tonkin, or Vietnam, or perhaps even all of Indochina, was no longer considered to lead inexorably to the loss to Communism of all of Southeast Asia.

Accordingly, Secretary Dulles in a press conference on May 11 (four days after the French surrender at Dien Bien Phu) observed that "Southeast Asia could be secured even without perhaps Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia." He went on to note that although he would not want to underestimate the importance of these countries he would not want either to give the impression that "if events that we could not control, and which we do not anticipate, should lead to their being lost that we would consider the whole situation hopeless and we would give up in despair . . ." In a remark at the press conference that was later deleted from the official transcript, Dulles said that Laos and Cambodia were "important but by no means essential" because they were poor countries with meager populations.

Later, as the U.S. became reconciled to a political settlement at Geneva which would yield northern Vietnam to the Ho Chi Minh regime, the concept of "united action" was given a new twist. It now was transformed into an attempt to organize a long-range collective defense alliance which would offset the setback in Indochina and prevent further losses. That long-feared setback was now perceived to be less serious than had once been

envisaged. The loss of Tonkin was no longer seen as leading necessarily to a Communist take-over of other territory between China and the American shore. Eventually, in SEATO, the U.S. sought to create an alliance which would be strong enough to withstand the fall of one such domino.

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## Glossary of Acronyms and Terms

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*Go to Volume 1, Chapter 1 of the Pentagon Papers, "Background to the Conflict, 1940-1950." pp. 1-52*

*Go to Volume 1, Chapter 2 of the Pentagon Papers, "U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954," pp. 53-107*

*Go to Volume 1, Chapter 3 of the Pentagon Papers, "The Geneva Conference, May-July, 1954," pp. 108-178.*

*Go to Volume 1, Chapter 4 of the Pentagon Papers, "U.S. and France in Indochina, 1950-56," pp. 179-241*

*Go to Volume 1, Chapter 5 of the Pentagon Papers, "Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960," pp. 242-314*

*Go to Volume 2, Chapter 1 of the Pentagon Papers, "The Kennedy Commitments and Programs, 1961," pp. 1-127*

*Go to Volume 2, Chapter 2 of the Pentagon Papers, "The Strategic Hamlet Program, 1961-1963," pp. 128-159.*

*Go to Volume 2, Chapter 3, of the Pentagon Papers, "Phased Withdrawal of U.S. Forces, 1962-1964," pp. 160-200.*

*Go to Volume 2, Chapter 4, of the Pentagon Papers, "The Overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem, May-November, 1963," pp. 201-276.*

*Go to Volume 2, Chapter 5 of the Pentagon Papers, "US-GVN Relations, 1964-1967," pp. 277-407.*

*Go to Volume 2, Chapter 6 of the Pentagon Papers, "The Advisory Build-up, 1961-67," pp. 408-514*

*Go to Volume 2, Chapter 7 of the Pentagon Papers, "Re-Emphasis on Pacification: 1965-1967," pp. 515-623.*

*Go to Volume 3, Chapter 1 of the Pentagon Papers, "U.S. Programs in South Vietnam, Nov. 1963-Apr. 1965," pp. 1-105.*

*Go to Volume 3, Chapter 2 of the Pentagon Papers, "Military Pressures Against North Vietnam, February 1964-January 1965," pp. 106-268.*

*Go to Volume 3, Chapter 3, of the Pentagon Papers, "The Air War in North Vietnam: Rolling Thunder Begins, February-June, 1965," pp. 269-388*

- *Go to Volume 3, Chapter 4, of the Pentagon Papers, "American Troops Enter the Ground War, March-July 1965," pp. 389-485*

- *Go to Volume 4, Chapter 1, of the Pentagon Papers, "The Air War in North Vietnam, 1965-1968," pp. 1-276.*

- *Go to Volume 4, Chapter 2, of the Pentagon Papers, "U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments, 1965-1968," pp. 277-604.*

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- *Return to Vietnam War Page*

**Project CHECO Report  
'The Fall of Site 85'**

# The Project CHECO Report

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**REPORT**

**THE FALL OF SITE 85**

9 AUGUST 1968

HQ PACAF

Directorate, Tactical Evaluation  
CHECO Division

Prepared by:

CAPT EDWARD VALLENTINY

Project CHECO 7th AF, DOAC

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The counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare environment of Southeast Asia has resulted in the employment of USAF airpower to meet a multitude of spectrum of USAF aerospace vehicles, support equipment, and manpower. As a result, there has been an accumulation of operational data and experiences that, as a priority, must be collected, documented, and analyzed as to current and future impact upon USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine.

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MILTON B. ADAMS, Major General, USAF  
Chief of Staff

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**FOREWORD**

Site 85 was an important friendly guerrilla base in Northeast Laos. In mid-1967, steps were begun to establish a TSQ-81 facility near Site 85 atop a steep 5500-foot ridge called Phou Pha Thi, located only 25 kilometers from the North Vietnamese/Laotian border and 45 kilometers west of Sam Neua, Laos. A TACAN facility had already been established atop Phou Pha Thi and was operational in August 1966. This base and its facilities were commonly called Site 85.

In essence, the TSQ-81 was a modified version of the Strategic Air Command's (SAC) Radar Bomb Scoring (RBS) system. While the SAC system was designed to predict bomb impact points for simulated drops, the TSQ system was used to direct and control attacking jet fighters and bombers to their targets and also provide them with precise bomb release points, under radar control.

Similar systems had been established earlier in South Vietnam and one existed in Thailand. (These systems were grouped under a common nickname, Combat Skyspot.) The TSQ facility at Site 85 differed primarily in that the equipment was specially designed in small packages to be helilifted to remote locations. The nickname for operations under Site 85 direction was Commando Club.

However, Site 85 was much more unique than a specially designed radar bombing facility. Site 85 was the only facility of its kind in Laos. It was the only facility which could provide ground vectored radar bombing in the northern target areas of both North Vietnam and Laos, thereby enhancing USAF all-weather strike capabilities in these two areas. Finally, the site was established and operated by American technicians in a manner designed not to violate the 1962 Geneva Agreements and to "guarantee" the "neutrality" of Laos. However, the location of a site at Phou Pha Thi to direct bomb strikes against North Vietnam was ultra sensitive from both the political and military standpoint.

Meo guerrillas trained by CAS personnel provided the primary force for defense of the site on Phou Pha Thi. In the event these defenders came under heavy enemy attack and loss of the site appeared imminent, plans called for evacuating the American personnel manning the TSQ/TACAN facility and destroying the equipment to keep it from falling into enemy hands. However, early on the morning of 11 March, a force of twenty heavily armed infiltrators launched a surprise attack on the facilities atop Phou Pha Thi before the evacuation plan could be implemented. Of the 16 American personnel manning the site, only six were successfully evacuated, with one being killed by enemy forces firing on the rescue helicopters. Four of the five remaining personnel had been wounded during the enemy attack on the site. This report relates the story of the fall of Site 85 and attempts to place events surrounding its loss in proper perspective.

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## THE FALL OF SITE 85

### Introduction

The war in Northeast Laos has been characterized by conditions which are generally the reverse of those existing in South Vietnam. The enemy, Pathet Lao (PL), with considerable North Vietnamese Army (NVA) support and participation, has usually operated as a more conventional military force. Here he controls many of the larger population centers and is bound for sustenance to the transportation system. 1]

Friendly forces in Northeast Laos, on the other hand, operate more as guerrillas with the restrictions in supply and manpower that are usually associated with that status. From a few "secure" islands within this sea of enemy control, the guerrillas, the Auto-Defense de Choc (ADC) forces of Meo General Vang Pao, conduct harassing activities against the enemy and gather important intelligence data. These data are needed to provide targeting information for friendly strike and interdiction programs against the enemy and his supply lines to Laos and South Vietnam. 2]

Therefore, bound to a more passive role by both necessity and capabilities, these guerrilla forces have not generally had the reason to "stand and fight" except at a few vital locations. Site 85 was listed as one of these vital locations. 3]

### Site 85 Operations Nov 67 - Mar 68

This study does not propose to offer a definitive inquiry into the tactics, use, or problems in operations on the TSQ and TACAN facilities at Site 85 during the period November 1967 to 11 March 1968 - the day it was captured by the enemy. However, some data on TSQ operations are offered to convey the value of this installation to the USAF mission against the enemy.

The TSQ-81 facility at Site 85 was established to help enhance USAF all weather strike capabilities against the northern route packages in North Vietnam and targets in Northeastern Laos. Since the weather over North Vietnam generally turns unfavorable for air operations in mid-October and does not begin to improve until April, it was imperative that the site be operational when the weather deteriorated. It became operational at the end of October. 4]

Excluding Route Package I, the following data indicate the use of the TSQ-81 facility in directing actual strikes against North Vietnam. 5]

	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar 1-10
Total Missions	153	94	125	49	6
Missions Under Commando Club {TSQ-81}	20	20	29	27	3
Percentage Under Commando Club	13.0	21.3	23.2	55.1	50.0

Throughout this period, 427 strike missions were flown over the northern portions of North Vietnam. The facility at Site 85 directed 99, slightly over 23% of the total.

Similar data for actual strikes in the Barrill Roll area of Northeast Laos disclosed the following: 6]

	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar 1-10
Total Missions	268	327	320	375	182
Missions Under Commando Club {TSQ-81}	1	67	33	142	165
Percentage Under Commando Club	0.	20.4	10.3	37.8	90.6

The reason for the major differences in data for the month of February and the first 10 days of March as contrasted to earlier figures was that USAF sortie allocations shifted sharply to Barrel Roll to help disrupt the enemy buildup against Site 85. Site 85 was located just West of the B sector of Barrel Roll. Throughout this period, 1,472 strike missions were flown into Barrel Roll; 408 or 27.7% were directed by Site 85. 7]

Combining the stories into North Vietnam and Barrel Roll, it can be seen that the site at Phou Pha Thi directed nearly 27% of all strike missions flown in the two areas from 1 November 1967 until the site fell on 11 March 1968. 8]

### The Physical Site and Defensive Concepts

In addition to housing the TSQ-81 and TACAN (Channel 97), Site 85 was a major supply point for guerrilla operations in Northeastern Laos. The older site consisted of a closed 600-foot runway with associated buildings near coordinates UH6860. The TSQ and TACAN locations were northwest of this point on higher ground at coordinates UH66276106 (20 26'42" N 103 43' 05" E). 9]

The TACAN and TSQ facilities were situated on the western rim of a steep ridge that looked down on a nearby heliport, only 300 yards away and on the same ridge. The ridge ran in a north-northwesterly direction, fitfully rising to the highest point, Phou Pha Thi, at an elevation of 1686 meters, about 2 1/2 kilometers (KM) from the TSQ location. The TSQ/TACAN elevation was about 1700 meters, or about 5580 feet; the heliport elevation was about 5300 feet. This ridge, generally called Phou Pha Thi in its entirety, dominated the local area. 10]

For the defense of Site 85, Meo guerrillas were to provide the primary force. Although greatly outnumbered by the potential forces which the enemy could draw upon, the concept for the defense of

Site 85 depended on exploiting the unique geography of the area, an intelligence net to warn of approaching enemy forces, and the impact of properly placed airstrikes. At worst, it was envisioned that the necessary technical personnel could be evacuated and the equipment destroyed if the site was in danger of being overrun. 11]

Due to the sensitivity of the site, evacuation could be required for either political or military reasons. The fact remained that, although Site 85 was deemed to be defensively strong, if the enemy was "judged to be fully intent on capturing it and withstanding the accompanying losses, the political rules necessitated that the TSQ and TACAN be destroyed and American technicians be evacuated, so that neither these personnel nor the equipment would fall into enemy hands. Sensibly, there could be no pre-established "time" at which to relinquish this increasingly valuable asset; that decision rested on judgment and circumstances. Also, if the enemy posed such a threat to the site that the site was to be destroyed and the personnel evacuated, then there was little sense in "fighting to the last man" to defend what had become only "real estate", bereft of its primary importance. These factors made up the dilemma of the defense of Site 85. 12]

One of the advantages of the TSQ installation at Site 85 was that the system possessed the capability to provide direction of airstrikes in its own defense. Although the U.S. Ambassador in Vientiane had withdrawn blanket approval on 8 December 1967 for Commando Club directed strikes in the Barrel Roll area, he continued to give approval for strikes on an individual basis. 13] In line with this policy, on 23 December he authorized strikes against six enemy "strong points" approximately 20 kilometers east and southeast of Site 85. These targets were only the first to be stipulated as "part of the planned defense at Site 85." 14]

Four days later a formal plan, in coordination some weeks, was distributed which defined procedures for the self-defense of Site 85.

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The key role in the plan was played by the Local Area Defense Commander (LADC), the local Meo commander. In essence, the plan rested on three assumptions: 15]

The LADC would have from 1-24 hours notice of enemy concentration or buildup which would indicate an imminent attack.

The LADC would know the local terrain and potential locations where an enemy buildup might be expected.

The LADC would have communications contact with the U.S. Embassy at Vientiane as well as the TSQ-81 facility at the Site.

The concept was that if the enemy threatened the site, the LADC would coordinate with the Embassy in Vientiane and get authorization to call for airstrikes. With authority given, the Embassy would then notify 7AF that execution authority had been given to the LADC. When the enemy attack was imminent, the LADC would contact the Embassy and receive final execution authority. Thereupon, the LADC was authorized to notify the TSQ-81 commander of the requirement for the strike and supply him with the target coordinates (hopefully pre-computed, otherwise a 10-minute delay ensued). 16]

At this point, the TSQ commander was to contact 7AF via secure voice and request the strike force. Seventh Air Force was then to provide the strike forces as circumstances and time allowed, even calling upon the Airborne Command and Control Center (ABCCC) to divert airborne missions if necessary.

Aircraft were to be vectored to TSQ control and the strikes would be carried out. Strikes conducted under emergency conditions were authorized within a 600-foot proximity to friendly forces; otherwise 1000 meters was the limit. Authority for requesting additional strikes rested with LADC who would coordinate the need with available air or ground observers. 17]

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### Estimated Enemy Objectives

In a December 1967 briefing for CINCPACAF, a CAS representative discussed estimates of upcoming enemy objectives in Northeastern Laos: 18]

"Because of his complete dependence on surface transportation, the enemy must mount all his major offensive actions during the dry season. The dry season generally starts in mid-October and continues until June. The major advantage which the enemy has is the stiffening of the PL force by first class NVA military personnel and the fact that the enemy can reinforce at will by bringing in additional NVA units from North Vietnam at any time during the dry season.

"All available intelligence which we believe to be reliable and relatively complete indicate that the enemy plans to capture the following objectives during the coming dry season: Site 220, Site 205, Site 36, Site 85, and Site 201.....during November the enemy trucks and troops entering Laos have increased at an alarming rate."

It was further estimated that the enemy would apply pressure to General Vang Pao's southern defensive line which protected Vientiane and Mekong River valley. Apparently the enemy hoped that pressure on General Vang Pao would prevent him from sending reinforcements to frustrate enemy plans in Sam Neua province near the Vietnamese-Laotian border. 19]

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### Enemy Clearing Operations

With the addition of 3 NVA battalions in November, the enemy began a concentrated effort to clear friendly forces away from their vital Routes 6, 68, 611 which ran from near the North Vietnamese-Laotian border northeast of Sam Neua towards the Plaine des Jarres. 20] All of the sites mentioned earlier as estimated enemy objectives were located within approximately 15-25 kilometers (km) of these routes.

One of the first clearing operations occurred on 19 November 1967, when an enemy force of 150 men attacked Site 179 (Ban Nhot Phat, 20 km west of Route 68 and 17 km south of Site 85, Phou Pha Thi). After a short, spirited defense, friendly troops withdrew to the north and by 24 November they were able to reoccupy Site 179 virtually unopposed. 21]

For the succeeding weeks, PL/NVA activity was concentrated mainly in areas east and southeast of Highway Routes 6, 68, 611 and many of the friendly outposts in this area were captured by the enemy. Along with the outposts, Site 220 fell on 6 December 1967. In addition, the enemy continued to build up supplies and manpower. 22]

Informants in the Sam Neua area had given information to friendly sources that enemy activity was not to be limited to areas east of the highway routes. Troops of two enemy battalions who had moved southwest from Sam Neua, on 5 December 1967, had boasted that Houei Kha Moun (Site 111, only 10km north of Site 85) and Phou Pha Thi (Site 85) were also to be captured in December. 23]

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### The First Attempt

On the evening of 15 December 1967, an estimated two enemy companies probed ADC defenses near Phou Den Din (UH7660) only 12 km east of Site 85. After dark, contact with the enemy was broken. Early the next morning, 30 enemy troops attacked and captured these same ADC positions, but ADC forces recaptured them later in the day. Repulsed, the enemy returned with mortars and by 1700L on 16 December began shelling Phou Den Din. The defenders held out and this initial move toward Phou Pha Thi degenerated into mere harassment. 24]

Two companies of PL were sighted two days later moving toward Phou Den Din. Although it was not established whether these were the same two companies which had attacked previously or were reinforcements, this force was struck hard by pro-government aircraft and, by 26 December, were reported returning to Sam Neua. 25] The enemy had been discouraged for the time being; subsequently, he would resume his efforts toward Site 85 with a new twist.

The security of the facilities at Site 85 was an issue of constant attention. As early as 20 October 1967, before the site was judged operational, two so-called "agents" with a camera had been apprehended upon reaching the summit of Phou Pha Thi. However, CAS interrogation, film evaluation, and investigation revealed that the suspects were in fact bona fide Buddhist monks. The CAS final report stated that no pictures of the site or approaches thereto had been taken and the interrogation had gained negative results. The monks were released to Laotian government and military authorities for further disposition at their discretion. 26]

The increased enemy activity in December continued to prompt responsive concern for Site 85's safety, 27] but the situation in the immediate vicinity remained unchanged. The overrun of Site 61, a TACAN station in Southern Laos, called attention in late December to the security of all TACAN sites in Laos. 28] The American Embassy at Vientiane reported: 29]

"Lima Site 85, Channel 97. CAS had done an analysis of this site....Briefly stated there are 200 troops in immediate vicinity of site; and additional 800 troops in the lower portion of the mountain...believe reasonable security exists and feel that adequate warning will be provided in case evacuation is determined necessary. An emergency plan for evacuation.....exists."

This same report described the situation at each of three TACAN sites in Laos, and remarked on the potential danger of these sites if the enemy decided on a major commitment of troops. The report concluded: 30]

"Also there is always the possibility that a small skilled commando/sabotage team could penetrate and damage/destroy any of the three. The enemy also has the capability of moving artillery or mortar within range of any of the sites. It is the consensus here that ....., all reasonable precautions are being taken to safeguard the sites."

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### Enemy Activity in January

Site 111 (UH 6868), some 8 km north of Site 85, recieved minor shelling on the last day of 1967. There followed 10 days of relative inactivity in the close proximity of Phou Pha Thi (Site 85), although scattered sightings were reported 15 km to the east. 31]

The enemy continued to clear out friendly pockets east of the highway routes and a CAS report of 8 January commented on the enemy's effectiveness in the endeavor: 32]

"The enemy has succeeded in driving most of the pro-government forces from the area east of Route 6. This will affect the road-watch coverage of this key enemy supply line into the area east of Kakhang and into Xieng Khouang Province. General Vang Pao will probably soon attempt to replace units again."

A minor jolt to the security of Site 85 was recieved on 10 January, when a five-man PL patrol was discovered only two km north of Site 85 and at the base of the ridge. 33] They were dispersed, withdrawing to the north. A major jolt came two days later.

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### Enemy Air Attack

The enemy's second attempt against Site 85 came in the form of a surprise attack. CAS reported 13 January 1968: 34]

"Four dark green aircraft flying in a northwesterly direction passed the vicinity of Muong Sang (UH 8350) at 1300 hours on 12 January. When the four reached Ban Housi Soui (UH 7852), two of the aircraft broke from formation and orbited in the Houei Souk area, while the second two aircraft, which were AN-2 Colts, continued to Phou Pha Thi (UH 6860) and commenced bombing runs while flying on an approximate heading of 304 degrees."

In three passes, the two Russian-built Colts rocketed, strafed, and bombed the summit of the mountain. Two women civilians and two guerrillas were killed, and two guerrillas were wounded. One of the attacking Colts was shot down and crashed and burned near UH 606865. 35] Apparently two crew members escaped and an ADC team reported nothing was salvagable at the crash site. 36] The other attacking aircraft was also hit and crashed some 25 km to the northwest while trying to clear a ridge at UH 570895. A ground team recovered numerous pieces of equipment from this second wreckage and found three dead crew members. The bodies were identified as Vietnamese. 37] The site suffered negligible damage; no ground attack materialized. 38]

Initial reports stated that the enemy had used 250-pound bombs. However, subsequent investigations at the site and of the aircraft wreckage by a 7AF Intelligence team revealed that 120 mm mortar rounds had been converted to "bombs". Dropped through tubes in the floor of the AN-2, the "bombs" became armed in the slip stream and detonated on impact. The rockets were 57 mm, and were carried in rocket pods under the wing of the AN-2.

The succeeding day, the Embassy at Vientiane commented on this attempt: 39]

"We can conclude that aerial attack represented enemy effort to get at navigation facility which could be reached on ground only at heavy cost. Theoretically, enemy could resort to this technique again, either at Site 85 or elsewhere. However, it should be noted that this attack was largely unsuccessful and two aircraft were lost.

"On basis of available information we regard aerial raid as highly unusual variation in normal pattern of enemy tactics and do not believe this one incident necessarily introduces new dimension to war in Laos....we are presently reviewing questions of air defense at Site 85...."

Apparently the enemy was also aware that the air attack had been "largely unsuccessful", for within a few days he began further troop movements toward what became the third and final attempt to take Phou Pha Thi (Site 85).

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### Preparation for the Final Attempt

Discounting the exception of a few probes, the flushing of the PL five man patrol, and the repulsed attempt at Phou Den Din (12 km east of Phou Pha Thi) in mid-December, the enemy had made no determined ground moves against Site 85 prior to mid-January.

Almost at once, following the unsuccessful Colt attack of 12 January, this trend was reversed. On 14 January, a force of about 300 PL and NVA troops equipped with mortars and one recoilless rifle (RR) were located only 15 km north-northeast of Site 85. By 17 January, 100 enemy troops had shifted to positions only 13 km north of Phou Pha Thi (Site 85) and enough concern was generated by these moves to include Lao refugees to begin fleeing the Site 111 area (8km north of Phou Pha Thi).

CAS commented on the 20th: 40]

"If the enemy could move in large numbers of troops into an area north of Phou Pha Thi, he would have the second jaw for a pincer movement. Probably the first indication of a serious enemy intent to take Phou Pha Thi would be the capture of Phou Den Din (UH 7661)...."

That indication was not long in coming. An informant had reported that on 19 January a five battalion group of PL and NVA had moved west from Sam Neua (VH 0158). These units separated into two task forces, one force of three battalions with one 105 mm howitzer moved allegedly to attack Phou Den Din, 12 km east of Site 85 (UH 7661); the other two battalions, also possessing a 105 mm howitzer, were to capture a location about 19 km southeast of Phou Pha Thi. 41]

Three days later these positions, as well as Site 179 (17 km south of Site 85), fell to the enemy. 42] A pattern of encirclement of Phou Pha Thi from the north clockwise to the south was beginning to take shape.

This pattern was not ignored by friendly forces at Phou Pha Thi. They fully realized that the enemy could mount a heavy assault against Site 85 if he was willing to accept the losses. They were also aware that a combined attack of artillery and mortar fire and a ground assault, with a repeat AN-2 Colt attack, was a possibility. But as January drew to a close, the primary concern of the defenders of Site 85 was the threat of the enemy moving near enough to direct artillery, mortar, and rocket fire against Phou Pha Thi. 43]

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### Defensive Reactions in January

Subsequent to the AN-2 Colt attack, the air defense of the site had been bolstered by the addition of two captured 12.7 mm aircraft guns, 44] and later a captured Russian 85 mm antiaircraft gun. 45] Reinforcement of the garrison at that time was not deemed necessary. 46] However, to counter the threat of enemy artillery firing from long ranges and the enemy concentrating supplies and men against the site, four measures were taken. First, the guerrillas planned to maintain a 12 km defensive perimeter around Phou Pha Thi. Second, a 105 mm howitzer was transported by helicopter from Site 98 to Site 85. 47] Third, the guerrilla defenders in the area stepped up their small patrol activity to identify and locate enemy positions for subsequent airstrikes. Finally, on 2 February General Vang Pao placed one of his two top field commanders in charge of the Phou Pha Thi area and gave him the mission of recapturing certain positions, among them Phou Den Din and Site 179. 48] However, these two positions were never retaken.

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### Airstrike Support for Site 85

The following information, for the period 1 December 1967 - 31 January 1968, indicates the total USAF air commitment in actual strike sorties in Barrel Roll and the generally increased attention devoted to the Site 85 area (primarily east of Site 85, from which direction the threat was developing): 49]

	Dec	Jan
Sorties in Barrel Roll	903	798
Sorties within 30 km of Site 85	128	165

The general, though certainly not exclusive, modus operandi was to launch A-1 aircraft to strike targets in the morning; these aircraft would then perform as FACs for later frugged and diverted jets. Similar strike activities were conducted in the afternoon, although by no means were all strikes FAC-directed. During hours of darkness A-26s were used to patrol the area on armed recce missions. In addition, beginning the end of November, the Site 85 facility began directing strikes in the Barrel Roll area. 50]

Procedures had already been established for Site 85 to direct airstrikes in its own defense. Although by the end of January, 92 strike missions in the Barrel Roll area had been directed by the site, 51] no test of self defense strike procedures had been conducted: On 25 January, such a "test exercise" was initiated by the Site. However, the test was not pre-announced and was not coordinated with higher headquarters beforehand. Furthermore, the proper procedures were not followed. Under such circumstances, and where there had been no prior indication of actual danger to the site, difficulties developed in trying to provide the requested support for a "test" when resources were vitally needed elsewhere for combat operations. 52]

At the site, this test was judged a failure, 53] but even with the unfavorable conditions under which the test was held; the exercise was anything but a total loss. Subsequently, additional procedures for conducting tests were worked out. 54] Other changes in actual procedures, described later in this study, greatly simplified operations as more experience was disseminated and the enemy threat mounted. When circumstances called for actual implementation, there was no repeat of the difficulties experienced in the test.

It has already been pointed out that during the month of January, 165 actual strike sorties were flown within 30 km of Site 85, mostly to the east where the threat was building. Over 64% of these were

launched after 22 January, and followed the enemy successes at Phou Den Din and to the south. The number of strikes rose to a peak on 30 January when 45 sorties, over one-quarter of the monthly total, hit within the 30 km area of Site 85. This increased effort was permitted by the fact that no ROLLING THUNDER mission flew on that day due to the Test truce. 55]

On the 31st, the same day as the outbreak of the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam, no strikes hit within 30 km of Phou Pha Thi. On 1 February, thirty strike sorties hit around Site 85. This was followed by twelve days of reduced air activity in close proximity to the site. Of the 473 strike sorties which USAF flew within 30 km of Site 85 in February, only 52 were flown from 1-13 February. 56]

Midway in this period of relative inactivity, on 7 February, 7 AF at Tan Son Nhut queried the office of the Air Attache in Vientiane about the dangers to Site 85. The message ended: 57]

"Do you have targets in area on which you desire strikes? 7 AF will attempt to provide whatever assistance deemed necessary to insure safety of LS-85."

The Attache Office responded the next day, 8 February, summarizing the defensive situation: 58]

"The approaches to the top of Phou Pha Thi are]...virtually a vertical climb and those avenues which can be traversed are heavily mined...The enemy is presently maneuvering up to, and occasionally inside a 12 km radius of Phou Pha Thi. He is probably trying to get into position to mount a combined 105 mm plus mortar assault to be followed by ground probes. CAS ADC troops are maintaining a 12 km perimeter around the site and as long as they are able to do this, do not believe Site 85 can be taken."

The message from the Attache Office went on to state that if the enemy concentrated a large enough force (four battalions) and was willing to accept the losses, Phou Pha Thi could be taken. This course was expected to be preceded by sufficient warning to permit site destruction and evacuation. Regarding airstrike requirements, the message concluded: 59]

"In order to prevent the enemy from concentrating the necessary force to assault this position, responsive air strikes are a vital ingredient. We now have in place on Phou Pha Thi a forward air guide capable of directing such strikes. In addition we have validated nine targets outside of the 12 km perimeter to the east for Commando Club strikes of enemy activity is noted...Appreciate your offer of assistance. We feel that daily and nightly strike sorties on a regular daily basis will do much to discourage troops and/or artillery from concentrating in the area and at the present we have no special target requiring special assistance."

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### Enemy Activity 22 Jan-16 Feb

After capturing Phou Den Din on the early morning of 22 January, the enemy lapsed into relative quiescence until the evening of 30 January. 60] It should be remembered that during this period, USAF strikes near Phou Pha Thi were reaching the peak for the month of January. Intelligence estimates remarked that the enemy was probably waiting until he could move 105 mm howitzers into positions from which to bombard the site. 61]

About 1930L, on 30 January, enemy troops exploded defensive mines off the southern end of Phou Pha Thi. This was followed by a thirty-minute enemy mortar attack around the southern outpost high on the ridge. After this, contact with the enemy was broken. 62] The TSQ commander quickly reported that while there had been an attack near the site, it amounted to no more than a probe. Furthermore, there had been no injuries to personnel at the site nor damage to the equipment. To be safe however, flare ships and A-26s were directed to the area but nothing more developed. 63] Later assessments confirmed that no enemy troops had reached the top of the ridge; only the bottom defenses had been tested. 64]

That same evening enemy pressure had caused ADC troops to pull out of a village, Muong Yut, only nine km southeast of Phou Pha Thi. Evidently, this enemy pressure had been exerted by only a small force and the position was later recaptured. 65]

From the period 31 January - 16 February, enemy contacts were few; however, enemy units encountered

were generally of near company or even battalion size. Perhaps significantly, one near battalion-sized force was contacted no more than six km west of Phou Pha Thi; another company sized unit was discovered only 11 km to the southwest. Both of these encounters were the initial contacts to the west of Site 85. The threat remained primarily to the east. On 14 February, Muong Yut, nine km southeast of Phou Pha Thi, changed twice again, with the position finally remaining under ADC control. 66]

In general, it appeared that the enemy force, while increasing, was respecting an approximate twelve km circle around Phou Pha Thi. The only exceptions were the contacts west and southwest of Site 85 and the exchange of the village, Muong Yut. 67]

It was during this period that there existed a definite lull in air attacks against enemy units in the Site 85 area. Apparently, there was no expressed urgent demand for strikes in support of Site 85. Although the Attache Office in Vientiane had informed 7AF on 8 February that "no special target requiring special assistance" existed and only regular daily support was needed, a CAS report of 6 February had described a road under construction from UH 853564 to UH 835572. This construction had been noted since 1 February. 68] On 9 February, CAS reported again concerning this road construction, which was an extension of Route 602 (Fig. 5) 69]

"If trafficable, Route 602 would provide the enemy with much easier access from Sam Neua to staging areas in the vicinity of Ban Hon Non (UH 812553) and Phou Chik Nou (UH 8157). It would afford the enemy the opportunity to roll in weapons for an attack on Phou Pha Thi. Interpretation of photography dated 31 January reveals intermittent road construction on Route 602 from UH 853563 northwest along the south slope of the ridgeline...The construction ends approximately one kilometer northeast of the enemy strong point at Phou Chik Nou (UH 817579)."

Trucks were reported rolling on Route 602 on 11 February. 70] Unsuccessful strikes had been conducted against enemy positions at Phou Chik Nou by 13 February. Apparently the enemy was well dug in. Although four F-105s, returning with ordnance unexpended against North Vietnam, were directed against Route 602 on 2 February, no other strikes have been identified as having been directed at Route 602 until 14 February. 72] By 16 February, Route 602 had been extended to approximately one km east of Phou Den Din; 73] this was only 13 km from Phou Pha Thi.

During this period, the enemy did not attempt to hide his intentions in the area. CAS reports abounded with references to Communist sponsored propaganda meetings in which spokesmen predicted the coming attack on Phou Pha Thi, cautioned villagers to stay clear of the objective, conscripted men to serve as soldiers and coolies, confiscated food supplies, and offered distorted promises of what was to come (a twenty aircraft MIG attack and even Communist Chinese participation if the PL/NVA attempt failed). 74]

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### Activity in Late February

Although airstrikes began increasing in the Phou Pha Thi area in mid-February, so too, did enemy activity. To the east of Site 85, the twelve km perimeter was penetrated on 20 February. Muong Yut, that often exchanged village nine km southeast of Site 85, fell again to the enemy. Within four days, the ADC was seeking to recapture it. 75]

On 21 February, four additional PL/NVA battalions arrived in Phou Den Din and moved out to positions just inside the twelve km perimeter. 76] However, the attackers of Phou Pha Thi were not able to proceed so easily with their moves against Site 85. Fortune had momentarily favored the defenders.

An ADC ambush some eight km southeast of Phou Pha Thi had killed a small party of North Vietnamese on 18 February. Apparently, one of the victims had been an NVA officer, and recovered from his body was a small notebook which contained detailed information concerning enemy plans and strong points for the coming attack on Phou Pha Thi. 77]

Information from the notebook yielded the following data in addition to enemy positions: 78]

Three NVA and one PL battalions were to make-up the attacking force.

Final battlefield reconnaissance was to be conducted on 22 February. (CAS estimated the attack would commence 23 February).

The enemy used the word "TACAN" as it appears in English and was aware of its exact location.

The main assault force was to be one NVA battalion attacking from the northeast: the other battalions were to attack the main trails to Phou Pha Thi.

Stocks of ammunition for all heavy weapons were low and re-supply was needed.

Friendly response to enemy activity and the new information was rapid and effective. Already on 17 February the Ambassador at Vientiane had authorized visual and armed reconnaissance missions along Route 602 eastward from Phou Den Din and more targets were authorized around Site 85. 79] Small patrols were dispatched by the ADC defenders to select targets in the local area for artillery fire and airstrikes. Special reconnaissance teams of General Vang Pao's irregulars were even ranging east of Sam Neua trying to identify depots supplying the enemy forces in the Phou Pha Thi region. In addition, two 4.2 inch mortars and another 105 mm howitzer were sent to Phou Pha Thi and the garrison was increased by fifty men. 80]

Effective at 1800 on 21 February, the U.S. Ambassador to Laos authorized the LADC at Site 85 to task the TSQ facility to strike any target within a twelve km radius of the peak at Phou Pha Thi. This authorization was limited in that strikes could be placed no closer than 500 meters from known villages and that Commando Club strikes were still to be conducted via secure voice channels through the Radio Relay Aircraft (RRA). A list of nineteen still active villages accompanied the authorization. 81]

Starting 20 February and extending to the fall of Site 85, early on the morning of 11 March, a determined air effort of constantly increasing intensity was directed in its defense. 82] On 23 February, a message from the JCS to CINCPAC denoted that increased air support was "urgently" needed. 83] From 20-29 February, 342 strike sorties hit within 30 km of Site 85, most much closer than 30 km. In addition, other sorties struck east of Sam Neua against depots and supply concentrations. The latter attacks hit outside of the 30 km area and were not included in totals listed above. 84]

Route 602 was among the targets attacked, but the enemy has already assigned over 400 road workers the task of keeping this vital line open. Later, bulldozers were also brought in. Except for intermittent closures due to road cuts, the enemy continued to use this artery. There was no doubt that airstrikes and artillery fire were retarding enemy activities, but they were not eliminating his presence or pressure within the twelve km defensive perimeter around Site 85. 85]

An unofficial estimate by an unnamed staff officer in one CAS report dated 25 February 1968 summed up the status as of that day and was extremely prophetic of coming events: 86]

"As a result of the enemy's penetrating the 12 kilometer radius around Phou Pha Thi in force and occupying key positions within the lower right hand quadrant of this perimeter as well as positions just outside the perimeter at Phou Den Din, he represents an imminent threat to the security of the TACAN site and other installations at Phou Pha Thi. It is clear that the enemy will continue to attempt to consolidate his gains in the Phou Pha Thi area during the next two weeks while making arrangements for his final assault by three or four battalions. If, however, ADC units continue to harass successfully the enemy on the ground and if aircraft continue to strike enemy concentrations in and around Phou Pha Thi and in the area east of Sam Neua, the TACAN and other sites at Phou Pha Thi will continue to be viable for the next two weeks. It is not possible to predict, however, the status of security at Phou Pha Thi beyond 10 March because of the enemy's willingness to continue to escalate his commitment in this area."

The American Ambassador in Laos was impressed with this estimate and commented on his feelings concerning Site 85 in a 26 February telegram to the Chief of Staff USAF: 87]

"...Enemy forward movement (toward Site 85) had been inexorable over the past months and neither air or ground resources which are available to us appear adequate to deter his intentions.

"...Although we are not...throwing in the towel, we believe you should be aware of our current estimate

that we may be able to assure security of this site for no more than the next two weeks.

"You will recall that, when we arranged this installation, I made clear that our principle defense effort would rest upon guerrilla units who operated with mobile tactics and that we could not...guarantee a static defense. Our irregular units in this area are already stretched thin and have many other significant obligations related to the defense of population centers which make it impossible for us to look with any great hope upon the chances for effective reinforcement. Therefore, the moment of truth may be approaching for this site.

"This TSQ is using its own inherent capabilities in the defense effort. Airstrike sorties are being provided in respectable numbers. But, in the final analysis, it seems doubtful that the site can be held in the face of consistent enemy determination.

"Therefore, we are in touch with USAF authorities on evacuation and destruction plans. We are fairly confident both should be able to be carried out in orderly fashion. Moreover, we are examining possibilities of finding another useful site in the same general area which will provide roughly the same coverage."

As conceived in evacuation plans, the decision to evacuate was reserved for the Ambassador, Vientiane. First priority of evacuees was allocated to the 13 TSQ/TACAN personnel; however, enough helicopters were to be provided to permit a total of 155 to be lifted out. The others, guerrillas, were to be extracted when the Local Area Defense Commander deemed appropriate. Five helicopters, three USAF and two Air America, were designated as the force required to accomplish the evacuation. 88]

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. 89] Subsequently, some USAF messages expressed the desire for Air America helicopters to RON Site 85, not 98. 90] However, this was not changed; it was feared helicopter presence at Site 85 would have provoked an enemy attempt to destroy these lucrative targets. If they had been destroyed, the planned emergency lift capability would have vanished. 91] But the point was well taken, for weather also might have disrupted the rescue flight from Site 98 to Site 85.

Following a decision to evacuate, the Ambassador was to notify 7/13 AF TACC at Udorn AB, Thailand who could in turn notify 7AF at Tan Son Nhut AB, Vietnam. Weather permitting, 7 AF was to scramble or divert four A-1 aircraft to provide cover for the evacuation, suppress enemy fire, and FAC or subsequent jet strikes. The LADC and an attache-provided FAC were to help direct the strikes. The plan allowed a limited night evacuation capability (the RON helicopters at Site 98), but pre-supposed a daylight effort. 92]

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### **Final Enemy Moves**

Enemy movements from 1-9 March are depicted in Fig. 6. Throughout the early days of March, enemy forces continued their advance, eliminating friendly pockets of resistance en route, until by 9 March, when the enemy deployed into what might be termed "jump off points", Phou Pha Thi was virtually surrounded, except for the northwest quadrant. The enemy positions also threatened Site 111, only eight km north of Site 85. Approximately four enemy battalions stood poised for the attack. 93]

On 2 March, a review of the USAF rules of engagement for airstrikes around Site 85 revealed the changes which had occurred as the enemy threat mounted: 94]

Any target in the twelve km defensive perimeter could be struck under FAC control.

The restriction against strikes within 500 meters of villages only applied to Commando Club (TSQ) directed strikes, unless the target was validated by the LADC.

Any Commando Club strikes could be diverted by the LADC to validated targets in the twelve km perimeter.

For a distance of ten km along Route 602 east of Phou Den Din, strikes were authorized under FAC or

Commando Club control (this included "Gravel" and CBUs).

Use of CBU and "Gravel" was authorized anywhere in the twelve km perimeter if validated by the LADC and if targets were at least 500 meters from friendly troops.

The restriction of using only secure voice contact with supporting aircraft could be waived with Vientiane Embassy approval when under threat to imminent attack.

"Gravel seeding" was accomplished on some confirmed supply routes east of Site 85 on 5 March. 95] CBUs were used in the area around Site 85 in February. The use of CBU under Commando Club control was an innovation. Bombing tables were not available to be used in conjunction with the TSQ, but experience and "know how" of the 7/13AF personnel at Udorn AF Base in Thailand allowed them to improvise effectively until precise tables became available.

To facilitate around the clock capability of the TSQ facility, five more technicians were sent to Site 85 (the total number of Americans was now 19). More targets and sorties were allocated for night operations. On 5 March a message from 7AF to DOCO PACAF indicated conditions for evacuation, relocation of the facility, and remarked on the value of the site: 96]

"...due to the desirability of maintaining air presence over NVA during present inclement weather period, Site 85 probably would not be evacuated until capture appeared imminent. The fact that complete security could not be assured in the original plan is noted...."

In another message, later on 5 March, from PACAF to the Deputy Commander 7/13AF, with the commanders of 7AF and 13AF as informational addressees, CINCPACAF commented: 97]

"Receiving daily reports concerning growing threat to Site 85. Difficult to evaluate situation from here. Request you consult CAS sources and provide me your estimate of threat, including anticipated time of attack, and friendly capabilities to defend.

"You are authorized to direct evacuation of site and destruction of equipment when in your judgement such action is necessary. Your plan, OPlan 439-68, is approved for this purpose. Keep 7th and 13th Air Forces and this headquarters informed of your intentions this regard. Insure that all preparations are made for emergency evacuation as required."

From 1-10 March, USAF carried out 314 strike sorties within 30 km of Site 85. Over 76% of these were directed by the TSQ facility at Site 85. Among the targets struck frequently was the vital Route 602. 98]

On 29 February, airstrikes had destroyed two bulldozers and killed the operating crews used to supplement road clearing operations. Until serviceable bulldozers could be brought in, work was suspended. 99] However, enemy resupply could not be halted; coolies, too, had been carrying supplies to enemy troops. One of their major routes, just north of Route 602, was subjected to a combined CBU/Gravel raid on 5 March. 100]

Even though the weather in the vicinity of the site had deteriorated, the air attacks continued. 101] But, it was becoming increasingly difficult to estimate enemy strengths and fix their locations because they had deployed into numerous small concentrations. 102]

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### **Evacuation Arrangements at the Site**

On 9 March, at Site 85, the senior CAS adviser briefed the senior Air Force representative on the fact that an attack could come at any time. The evacuation plan was reviewed at that time and it was agreed that if evacuation was ordered, the TACAN/TSQ personnel would, if possible, proceed to the Command Post area near the helicopter pad (at lower elevation and 1/4 mile from the TSQ facility) where they would be picked up by helicopters. If this movement was not possible, the technicians were to wait for the pickup at the TSQ site. It must be noted that a few feet from the entrance of the supply van (Fig. 7), there were webbed belts or slings hooked up to allow the technicians to descend to a lower ledge a short distance

down from the site level. Below this ledge, there existed a sheer drop of well over 1400 feet. The CAS adviser's comment was that: 103]

"The technique of personnel hanging over the cliff by straps was not discussed as a serious escape or evasion plan."

About 2000L on the evening of 9 March, Site 85 reported enemy contacts around the site. Additional sorties were requested throughout the night and a number of flights were diverted to support the defenders. However, the enemy apparently had not mounted a serious attack. To lend support for the next day, 13 missions loaded with CBU and 750-pound bombs were fraged into the area. 104]

On 10 March, friendly patrols continued to report enemy activities and the movements of villagers fleeing the general area. 105] To help restore guerrilla influence into certain areas west of Site 85, as well as to attempt to recapture some villages and outposts, General Vang Pao began making plans to introduce nearly two battalions of his Meos to the region west of Site 85. 106] Unfortunately, these forces were to be of no help to Site 85.

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### Final Enemy Attack

Although weather in the Site 85 area had been generally poor in early March, good weather prevailed throughout most of 10 and 11 March. The afternoon forecast for BARREL ROLL on 10 March called for 2000 foot scattered with occasional rain showers. Attache reports at 0138L and 0247L on 11 March termed the weather "workable" and that it "permits air defense." A survivor reported the weather on the morning of the 11th was clear. Later, on the day of the 11th, the weather deteriorated again somewhat.

Shortly after 1800L on the evening of 10 March, mortar, artillery and rocket rounds from Phou Den Din began falling on the defenders of Phou Pha Thi. 107] Early in the barrage, the 105mm Howitzer positions near the summit of Phou Pha Thi sustained a direct hit. The living quarters immediately next to the TACAN/TSQ facility had suffered some damage, and by 183L the technicians had sought shelter in a bunker just north of the living quarters. 108] Prior to retiring to the bunker, site personnel notified 7/13 TACC at Udorn AB, Thailand of the attack and reported they were abandoning the radio. 109] Contact via portable radio was maintained with the senior CAS representative in the command bunker near the helipad. 110]

At Udorn, plans were rapidly developing to divert sorties to Site 85. Flare ships had to be provided to allow visual strikes because with the TSQ personnel in their bunker, the site could not direct airstrikes. Airborne A-26s were already being diverted. Additional tanker support was required for eight flights of F-4s being sent from Ubon. 111]

When the barrage ceased at 1845L, the technicians left the bunker and returned to operating the TSQ/TACAN equipment. Only minor shrapnel damage to the TACAN antenna was sustained and no American casualties had been suffered. 112] By 1950L, many of the flights which had been in the process of being diverted were returned to their fraged missions, and until midnight, two A-26s and five F-4s hit targets in the Site 85 area. All of these were under TSQ direction. In addition, six A-1s were readied to support the site and the pilots were placed in crew rest. From 0001L to 0700L, 11 March, three A-26s and five F-4s supported Site 85; the last time on target was 0320L. 113]

By 2020L the Ambassador at Vientiane had judged circumstances to be serious enough to authorize the site to conduct the direction of sorties via clear voice transmissions. 114] However, the lull in activity at the site continued. At 2100L, heavy fighting was reported at Ban Pha Thi, a village at lower elevations on the Phou Pha Thi ridge, only 1 1/2 km south of Site 85. Allegedly, the enemy was using flashlights to facilitate his climb to the village, By 2117L, fighting was going on only 1/2 hour wald from the site atop Phou Pha Thi. 115]

An entry in the 7/13 AF TACC log noted that at 2105L the Ambassador in Vientiane was already considering evacuating the personnel from Site 85 at first light. However, this decision was not made at that time. At 2150L the Deputy Commander, 7/13 AF contacted the Attache's Office in Vientiane

concerning the possible evacuation of the site. It was indicated that evacuation should only be effected as a last resort if the situation became untenable; furthermore, the situation should be followed on an hour to hour basis. These views were to be expressed to the Ambassador. Any decision to evacuate was to be relayed to the Deputy Commander at once. 116]

At 2121L, intermittent mortaring and shelling of positions around Site 85 was begun again, 117] but the TSQ facility continued to operate and direct missions. Shortly after this resumption of shelling, the Ambassador decided to conduct a partial evacuation of American personnel. Nine personnel were to be evacuated at 0815L on the 11th. 118]

The situation remained static at the site until about 0300L. On the lower slopes of the ridge, sporadic but violent firefights broke out; however, the enemy had not succeeded in overrunning any of the major outposts. As a matter of fact, the senior CAS representative later commented: 119]

"Commo was maintained from the CP with all the defending outposts at Site 85 throughout the attack on Site 85 during the period 10 to 11 March... (the) ... defenders gave a good account of themselves and they held fast under heavy incoming fire."

At the TSQ/TACAN location, it has already been related that, with the lull in the barrage after 1945L, the technicians had left the bunker and returned to operating the facilities. While one crew operated the TSQ facility, some of the other men tried to get some sleep. Apparently, since the living quarters had been damaged, and sometime later the technicians' bunker was also hit, some of the American personnel took sleeping bags and descended the slings to seek rest and shelter among the rocks down the steep slope only a few feet from one of the entrances to the TSQ/Supply/Communications structure. 120]

Shortly after 0300L, on 11 March, either automatic weapons fire, shelling, or both once more caused the crew to abandon the facility in haste. At this point all radio contact with the TSQ location and personnel was severed, even that via portable radio with the command bunker near the helipad. 121]

As the technicians came running out of the operations structure, they were met with a hail of small arms automatic weapons fire from close range. These men scrambled for safety down the slings which were only a few feet away. But apparently three Americans were killed at once--among them the TSQ senior officer and commander. 122]

The crucial fact concerning the equipment at the site was that it was not destroyed. The detonation devices had not been triggered and the TSQ personnel never again entered the command building. In an interview with survivors, some questions concerning the detonation devices were raised when it was revealed that explosives for demolition of the site had earlier been thrown over the side of the cliff to prevent them from being hit by incoming shells. However, the charges which were to destroy the classified equipment were pre-mounted and could not have been easily or swiftly removed. Extra charges were available to destroy other equipment and facilities at the site, and apparently it had been these extra charges which were thrown away. 123]

Evidently a small force of approximately twenty enemy troops (most likely North Vietnamese as judged by the unfamiliar language) had somehow infiltrated to the summit. No mine detonations, shouts, or other warnings preceded the volley which hit the Americans exiting the operations structure. It has been only guessed that either the enemy infiltrated the more gradual but still treacherous northeastern side of Phou Pha Thi or that this small force scaled the almost sheer northwestern face. None of the outposts was aware of this enemy force atop the summit. 124]

Seemingly familiar with the layout of the site, the camouflaged fatigue-clad invaders methodically threw grenades into most of the buildings. but it was not clear if the TSQ facility was also blown up. 125]

At about 0315L, the senior CAS representative in the command bunker near the helipad observed the TACAN beacon "go up in smoke", but it was thought at the time that a mortar round had done the damage. Meanwhile the helipad area was under particularly heavy shelling and small arms fire. 126]

Subsequently, enemy troops at the site discovered the escape slings leading down the slope and directed automatic weapons fire in that direction. Some of the Americans down the slope returned the fire and it

was estimated that five or six of the enemy were killed. After pulling back from the American line of fire from below, the attackers responded by lobbing some fifteen to twenty grenades onto the slope and then intermittently spraying the area with automatic weapons' fire. It was deduced that most of the American casualties were suffered at this time. 127]

In Vientiane, meanwhile, the situation was being closely monitored. Plans for the partial evacuation had been finalized at 0015L for implementation at 0815L the next morning. Incoming reports indicated that air support was sufficient, weather was good, and the situation remained static. 128] Although unaware of the fate of the TSQ facility, American officials at Vientiane were to become cognizant later that increased enemy fire was being directed at the site. Hence, at 0515L on 11 March, the Ambassador decided to evacuate all Americans from Site 85 at 0715L. 129]

An attache report summed up the situation at Site 85 as it was known in Vientiane at 0540L: 130]

"As of 10/2240Z: Heavy mortar and small arms fire on top of Phou Pha Thi (Site 85). Embassy ordered evacuation of all repeat all U.S. personnel.

"CAS estimates their outer positions will hold but place untenable as operating radar site.

"TACAN unit reported burning and damage to other TSQ equipment. Steps being taken to destroy all remaining equipment prior to evacuation."

Shortly before 0700L, incoming fire ceased; at 0620L smoke had been observed rising from the TACAN site. (Fig. 9) About 0700L, the helicopters were standing by, ready to come in, but were drawing enemy fire from the top of the summit. The senior CAS advisor with the Meo guerrillas proceeded to the TSQ/TACAN site to ascertain the status there and determine from where the fire directed at the helicopters originated. 131]

Upon arrival at the TACAN location, the CAS representative found the living quarters locked and the TACAN severely damaged. The senior CAS representative then called out to any Americans who might have been hiding nearby, but he received no response. Coming around the west side of the complex, shots were exchanged with one enemy soldier dressed in "typical North Vietnamese/Pathet Lao uniform." After circling further south and west, two more of the enemy were encountered, one manning a machine gun behind sandbags. Fire was exchanged and one of the enemy was hit, but the friendly force beat a hasty retreat down the hill toward the command bunker. En route, the CAS representative was wounded slightly in the leg. 132]

Back at the bunker, the CAS representative estimated that either the TSQ-81 was in enemy hands or they were conducting a raid, hence friendly heavy weapons fire was directed at the TSQ site and some hits were scored. A-1Es in the area apparently noted that the defenders were firing at the site and also delivered their ordnance on the TSQ location. The CAS representative was of the opinion that the TSQ gear was demolished. However, this was incorrect. Unfortunately, as one survivor reported later, the A-1E attack forced one enemy soldier to scurry for safety down the slope and en route, he engaged in a firefight with another American survivor, killing him. 133]

The helicopters were then able to come in and perform the rescue attempts. Of the 19 Americans at the site, only five technicians and two CAS people were extracted. One of the CAS people was wounded; five of the six technicians were wounded, one of them being hit while in the helicopter---this man died en route to Site 36 and Udorn AB, Thailand. The remaining eleven Americans were presumed dead. 134]

Return flights by helicopters were able to recover a few American and Laotian bodies, plus some wounded defenders from the summit, but they continued to draw occasional fire. 135]

Apparently the defenders around the site still held the trail systems to the summit as late as 0730L. 136] Soom thereafter, the guerrilla defenders melted away to regroup at other locations for airlift to safer areas. It was not expected that the enemy offensive would halt with the fall of Site 85. 137] In fact, Site 111 fell on 12 March; to the east, enemy pressure mounted at Site 184; Site 239 and Site 107 were abandoned due to enemy activity; on 13 March Site 204 was subjected to heavy but sporadic enemy fire. 138] By 12 March, 129 of 203 defenders of Site 85 had definitely been evacuated.

As early as 0940L on 11 March the Deputy Commander 7/13AF at Udorn AB, Thailand had begun coordination to utilize some of the available helicopters to airlift a force of approximately 200 Laotian military personnel to Site 85 in order to recapture the site, but this design was delayed indefinitely so that a maximum effort could be exerted to try to recover the remaining U.S. personnel and friendly forces. 139]

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### Denouement

After the evacuation of Americans and friendly forces was completed on the morning of 11 March, only three tasks remained to be performed:

Missing Americans had to be accounted for, either by recovering them as they still evaded capture or by recovering their bodies and establishing their death.

Site 85 had to be destroyed so that the equipment would not fall into enemy hands for subsequent analysis. In addition, any politically embarrassing evidence had to be eliminated.

The Prime Minister of Laos, Souvanna Phouma, had to be informed of the situation to permit him to prepare a position against potential communist charges of American involvement at Site 85.

As more details of casualties were obtained from survivors and a concentrated search and rescue effort was conducted at the site, American losses became somewhat clearer. 140] Of the nineteen Americans at the site, sixteen had been site technicians, two were CAS representatives, and there had been one Attache Office FAC. The CAS representatives and the FAC were rescued. The senior CAS representative had been slightly wounded. Of the sixteen American technicians, five were extracted (one died en route), eight were known to be dead, and three others were unaccounted for, but presumed dead. There was the possibility that the bodies of the missing three men might have fallen from the ledge where the Americans hid. Off the ledge, there was a sheer drop of almost 2,000 feet. 141]

Presuming those who were not evacuated on the morning of 11 March were dead, a fairly concentrated air effort was launched on that same day to destroy the technical and personal equipment left behind on Site 85. 142] The major phase of this activity ended on 15 March but further examination revealed one strike each at Site 85 on 19, 22, and 28 March. The 22 March strike included a Bull-Pup missile. 143]

On the morning of 13 March, the American Ambassador met with Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma of Laos. The Ambassador related that the facilities at Site 85 had not been destroyed prior to evacuation, but that USAF napalm strikes were being delivered against the site. He also told of the American losses and that some of the bodies had not been found. The Ambassador reported Phouma's reaction: 144]

"Souvanna winced at these two items of information and said they increased the risks that enemy could be able, if he chose, to make some pretty damaging disclosures."

Both the Ambassador and the Prime Minister noted that no mention of incriminating evidence had yet been made by either the Laotian Communist or North Vietnamese Rascals. They agreed that the best thing to do was to "sit tight" and see what evidence the enemy had accumulated and what he planned to do with it. The Ambassador's report of the meeting concluded with the following comment: 145]

"Souvanna obviously does...not wish to make decision on posture he will take towards potential Communist exploitation of this incident until he knows how damaging their evidence is. He urged me to destroy as much evidence as we can rapidly. Since his position is understandable, I did not repeat not to press him one way or another on contingency statements."

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### Epilogue

It is difficult to firmly establish the enemy intentions without access to enemy documents and plans. Of course these were not available for this study. However, after analyzing the data which were available, a

number of observations are offered. 146]

Apparently Site 85 was not the single target of enemy aims in the dry season offensive which began November 1967. Indeed, Site 85 appeared to have been only one of the friendly strong points which the enemy seemed determined to reduce in this area.

It is generally assumed that the enemy mounted his activities against Site 85 in order to destroy the Top Secret TSQ facilities at Phou Pha Thi. However, no documentary evidence of this fact has been found in the research for this study, although the existence of such a specific objective can be neither confirmed nor denied. Certainly the enemy was aware of this guerrilla base near his vital supply routes; he also knew that there was a TACAN at Site 85. These two factors, alone, would have provided sufficient incentive.

Guerrilla forces do not normally stand and fight it out; generally this is not their function, unless they are called upon to defend a very vital interest. Realizing this, the enemy first attempted to eliminate friendly forces at this site with as small a commitment on his part as possible.

However, to supplement a small commitment, the enemy used a full barrage of propaganda. CAS reports for the entire period contained numerous references to Communist-held meetings and soldiers' statements which indicated enemy determination to capture Site 85. He used this tactic to enlist the active and passive support of the local populace; he may, also, have counted on these statements reaching the guerrilla defenders, thereby, undermining their will to resist and making them think it was senseless to stand and fight.

The first two attempts to take Phou Pha Thi, the small force advance which stalled at Phou Den Din in mid-December and the AN-2 Colt attack, were certainly not large commitments. After these failures, the enemy was forced to concentrate more troops and develop elaborate plans and support for them.

Although airpower was to be a major factor in the defense of Site 85, it could not be applied without limitations and restrictions. Defense of Site 85 was not the sole task of limited air resources in the Southeast Asian conflict. For example, during this same period, the 1968 Tet Offensive was underway in South Vietnam, the Marine outpost, Khe Sanh, was under siege, and there existed an unprecedented flow of enemy logistic traffic which had to be interdicted.

In addition, airpower could not be applied without major restrictions. As early as 8 December 1967, the U.S. Ambassador to Vientiane had withdrawn blanket approval for Commando Club strikes in BARREL ROLL, and instead, approved them on an individual basis. By 8 February 1968, only nine targets around Site 85 and outside the 12 km circle had been approved for Commando Club operations. With Commando Club strikes outside the 12 km circle limited to only approved targets, visual means had to be utilized if newly discovered targets, not on the authorized list, were also to be attacked. Visual strikes were limited by bad weather, which was particularly poor in early March. Hence, the defense of the site hinged considerably on the capability to visually acquire targets to be struck.

Within the 12 km circle, similar restrictions applied. It was not until 12 February that authorization was extended to the Local Area Defense Commander (LADC) to task the TSQ facility to conduct strikes against any target within the 12 km circle.

The application of airpower around Site 85 was intended to be responsive. Therefore, if the demand lessened or if targets could not be definitely fixed, the air effort proportionally contracted, for, there were other requirements elsewhere which had to be met. This was demonstrated by the lull in early February.

Airpower was the vital ingredient in halting what most probably was an enemy plan to take Site 85 in late February. But at that stage of events, as the accurate unofficial estimate of 25 February pointed out, even with successful ground harassment and continued airstrikes, the security of the site was doubtful after 10 March, because the attackers appeared willing to mount the necessary effort and accept the accompanying losses.

On the night of 10-11 March, the Attache Office in Vientiane reported at 0138L on the situation at Site 85 and stated that "sufficient resources" were available. At 0247L, the terms used were "sufficient air support". Unknown to anyone not at the TSQ location, the facilities were lost to the enemy no more than

one hour later.

Site 85 had provided direction to about 1/4 of the USAF missions over North Vietnam and BARREL ROLL from November 1967 to 11 March 1968. No other facility existed to provide a similar coverage over these areas. While this loss was a serious blow to the USAF air effort, it was not crippling.

The possibility that evacuation might have to be carried out was fully realized. Plans to accomplish the evacuation existed. However, a set of circumstances developed which negated their timely execution. Had personnel at either Vientiane or the command post at Site 85 been aware of the situation at the TSQ/TACAN location atop Phou Pha Tie, steps might have been taken to eliminate the infiltrators, safely evacuate the technicians, and destroy the classified facilities. But the loss of intersite communications between the personnel at the facility and the command post prevented this action. Subsequent decisions were based on incomplete and erroneous information.

One question, basic to the relation of events in the fall of Site 85, has not been fully answered by available documentation and information: how did a twenty man team, armed with automatic weapons reach the top of Phou Pha Thi unnoticed?

Messages already quoted in this study described the defensive arrangements at the site. The northwestern side of the mountain was a sheer cliff of nearly 2,000 feet. Other approaches were heavily mined. In addition, by early January there were "200 troops in immediate vicinity of site: and additional 800 troops in the lower portions of the mountain."

It has been surmised that the enemy infiltrators scaled the 2,000 foot cliff. This theory might appear to account for the lack of any kind of warning before the enemy force hit the American technicians and captured the summit. However, this does not explain how twenty heavily armed soldiers climbed a 2,000 foot cliff at night, unnoticed by 200 defenders. Nor does it relate why these twenty infiltrators were not eliminated by the defenders atop Phou Pha Thi. Apparently the friendly troops at lower elevations held fast against the enemy attacks.

On 14 March 1968, the Commander, 7AF, sent a message to the American Ambassador in Vientiane: 147]

"I am concerned about the need for a postmortem analysis on the loss of Site 85. In terms of assessing whether future sites should be established believe it important to determine how a relatively small force was able to take such an allegedly well defended installation. No indications have been recieved here as to what efforts if any were made by local defense forces on site to defend installation, especially in view of clear indications of impending attack. Your views on how future sites might be defended in view of experience with Site 85 would be appreciated."

The Ambassador replied on 16 March. He concurred that a post mortem on the loss of Site 85 was in order, and suggested that procedures for such an analysis be jointly developed by 7AF and Embassy representatives. Regarding the size of the enemy forces, the Ambassador explained: 148]

"Believe you should understand, however, that enemy force was not...'relatively small.' Our intelligence indicates their numbers between five and seven battalions, with artillery and rocket support, considerably outnumbering local defense forces, which never numbered more than 1,000 men in 12 kilometer defensive perimeter which drawn around Site 85."

It was also emphasized by the Ambassador that his office had "made clear from the beginning" that the site could not be defended against a determined and superior enemy force. He also stated that the Embassy had given regular and accurate estimates of the Site's progressive deterioration, and as early as 26 February, had advised that the site would probably not be held beyond 10 March. "Therefore its fall should have come as not surprise to anyone," he said. The Ambassador made the following additional observations: 149]

"The manner in which enemy accomplished its fall is, however, instructive, and should, I think be carefully studied with view to future operations. Artillery fire, at relatively long range, was suprisingly accurate. According fragmentary reports of survivors, direct hits were scored, very early in the barrage, upon

personnel quarters, operations structure, and bunkers. It seems possible that installations were rendered effectively inoperable even before destruction order was given. There may be some lessons in this which should be studied with respect to length of time technical personnel should be required stay at their posts after installation falls within artillery range. In hindsight, it seems to me we should have pulled all technicians out morning March 10 even if this means losing the last several hours of the installation's capabilities.

"What concerns me most is not the defensive action, but the disruption of preplanned evacuation procedure. It is still not clear why technical personnel went over cliff to a narrow ledge rather than down trail to chopper pad. CAS and local personnel subsequently went up same trail to installation searching for technicians, so we know trail was traversable, even if under artillery fire. It is also not clear to me how small Vietnamese suicide squad got to installation site, although it seems they must have scaled the cliff which all of us considered impassable."

Within a few weeks of the fall of Site 85, the President ordered the cessation of bombing over the northern two-thirds of North Vietnam. As of the publication of this study, bombing in this area has not been resumed. No replacement facility for the TSQ-81 has been built. During a farewell visit with the American Ambassador in Vientiane on 2 July, the 7AF Commander discussed with him the requirement for additional navigational aids in North Laos and agreed to reexamine requirements. The Ambassador reported on the discussion: 150]

"We both feel that, in current circumstances, there is no justifiable requirement for MSQ installation in Laos. Therefore, our site selection in country of in neighboring Thailand ought, for the time being, concern itself with TACAN sites. In this connection General Momyer agreed to review prospects for TACAN at Site 36 and one on prominent hill in Thailand. I agreed reexamine MSQ problem again in event bombing operations resume north of 20th parallel."

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1. Laos situation Briefing, CAS to CINCPACAF, Sep. 67.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.
  4. (TS) Interview with Maj Arlie R. Conner, Commando Club Project Officer, DOSO, 7/13AF, Udorn AB, Thailand, 25 March 68. (Hereafter cited: Oprep-4 extracts.); (TS) discussions with Capt Thomas E. Penick, DOCAW, 7AF, Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN.
  5. (S) Oprep-4 extracts, 1 Nov 67 - 10 Mar 68, Hq 7/13AF, Udorn AB, Thailand, and Hq 7AF, Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN. (Hereafter cited: Oprep-4 extracts.); (TS) discussions with Capt Thomas E. Penick, DOCAW, 7AF, Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN.
  6. Ibid.
  7. Ibid.
  8. Ibid.
  9. (TS) Interview with Conner, 25 Mar 68.
  10. Ibid.
  11. Ibid.
  12. Ibid.
  13. (TS) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to Hq 7AF, Subj: Site 85, 8 Dec 67.
  14. (S) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, to Hq 7AF, Subj: Site 85, 23 Dec 67.
  15. (TS) Hq 7AF Opord 439-68, Supplement II to Annex B, Appendix III, effective 27 Dec 67.
  16. Ibid.
  17. Ibid.
  18. (S) North Laos briefing, CAS to CINCPACAF, Dec 67.>
  19. Ibid.
  20. (C) CAS Report, Field Office, Vientiane, (FOV) 12520, 27 Nov 67.
  21. Ibid.
  22. (CNF) CAS Report, FOV 12780, 24 Dec 67.
  23. Ibid.
  24. (CNF) CAS Report, FOV 12705, 18 Dec 67.
  25. (CNF) CAS Report, FOV 12842, 31 Dec 67.
  26. (SNF) Report, AFSSO, 7/13AF to AFSSO, PACAF, Subj: Interrogation of Monks, 3 Nov 67.
  27. (S) Msg, CSAF to USDAO, Vientiane, Laos, 7 Dec 67.

28. (S) Msg, DIA to JANAF, Vientiane, Laos, 27 Dec 67.
29. (S) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to CINCPAC, 3 Jan 68.
30. Ibid.
31. (C) CAS Report, FOV 12923, 8 Jan 68.
32. Ibid.
33. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13021, 15 Jan 68.
34. (CNF) CAS Report, FOV 12971, Subj: Aircraft Involved in the Attack on Phou Pha Thi, 13 Jan 68. Doc. 1.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid; (S/NF) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Secretary of State, 12 Jan 68.
37. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 12986, Subj: Conditions at Phou Pha Thi after Air Attack, 15 Jan 68. Doc 2.
38. (CNF) CAS Report, FOV 12964, Subj: Enemy Air Attack on Site 85, 12 Jan 68. Doc 3.
39. (S) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Secretary of State, Subj: Air Attack on Site 85, 13 Jan 68. Doc 4.
40. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13057, 20 Jan 68.
41. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13098, 25 Jan 68.
42. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13068, 22 Jan 68.
43. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 13100, Subj: Security Appraisal of Site 85, late Jan 68. Doc 5.
44. (SNF) Report, Subj: AA Installations at Site 85, DI, 7/13AF, Udorn AB, Thailand to AFSSO, 13 AF, Clark AB, Philippines, 17 Jan 68.
45. (SNF) Msg, Dep Comdr 7/13AF to Hq 7AF, Subj: AAA Defenses TACAN Channel 97, 1 Feb 68. Doc. 6.
46. (SNF) Report, AA Installations at Site 85, DI, 7/13AF to AFSSO, Hq 13AF, 17 Jan 68.
47. (S) Msg, JUSMAGT to Dep Comdr 7/13AF, 26 Jan 68.
48. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 13100, late Jan 68; and (S/LIMDIS) Memo on Changes at Site 85, 4802 JLD to DI, 7/13AF, 1 Feb 68.
49. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. (TS/NF) Rpt, DO, 7/13AF to Dep Comdr, 7/13AF and DO, 7AF, 25 Jan 68.
53. Ibid.
54. (S) Msg, 7AF to 7/13AF, DOSO, 5 Feb 68.
55. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
56. Ibid.
57. (SNF) Msg, 7AF to AIRA, Vientiane, Laos, 7 Feb 68.
58. (S) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to Hq 7AF, 8 Feb 68. Doc. 7.
59. Ibid.
60. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13141, 30 Jan 68.
61. Ibid.
62. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13153, 31 Jan 68.
63. (S) 1330Z 30 Jan 68 entry, 7/13AF TACC Log. (Hereafter cited: Entry in 7/13AF TACC Log.)
64. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13153, 31 Jan 68.
65. Ibid.
66. (C) CAS FOV Reports, 31 Jan 68-16 Feb 68.
67. Ibid.
68. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13220, 6 Feb 68.
69. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13249, 9 Feb 68.
70. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13347, 19 Feb 68.
71. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13288, 13 Feb 68.
72. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
73. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13347, 19 Feb 68.
74. (C) CAS FOV Report, 23 Feb 68, no FOV number.
75. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 13429, 25 Feb 68, Doc. 8;
- (C) CAS Reports FOV 13415, 24 Feb 68 and FOV 13375, 20 Feb 68, Doc. 9.
76. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 13429, 25 Feb 68.
77. (CNF) CAS Report, FOV unknown, 23 Feb 68; and CAS Report, FOV 13468, 28 Feb 68. Doc. 10.
78. Ibid.
79. (TSNF) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to Hq 7AF, 17 Feb 68.
80. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 13429, 25 Feb 68.
81. (TS) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to Hq 7AF, 21 Feb 68.

82. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
83. (S) Msg, JCS to CINPAC, 23 Feb 68. Doc. 11.
84. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
85. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 13429, 25 Feb 68.
86. Ibid.
87. (S) Msg, American Ambassador, Vientiane, Laos to CSAF, 26 Feb 68.
88. (S) Memo on Emergency Evacuation Plan for Site 85, CAS to DO, 7/13AF 24 Feb 68.
89. Ibid.
90. (TSNF) Memo on Helicopter RON at Site 98, Dep Comdr 7/13AF to American Ambassador, Vientiane, Laos, 2 Mar 68.
91. (TSNF) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to 7/13AF, 4 Mar 68.
92. (S) Memo on Emergency Evacuation Plan for Site 85, CAS to DO, 7/13AF, 24 Feb 68.
93. (S) Movements plotted from data and locations contained in CAS FOV Reports.
94. (TS) Msg, 7AF to USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos, 2 Mar 68.
95. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
96. (TS.LIMDIS) Msg, 7AF, Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN to CINCPACAF, DOCO, 051215Z Mar 68.
97. (S) Msg, CINCPACAF to 7/13AF, 5 Mar 68.
98. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
99. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13613, 10 Mar 68.
100. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
101. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13596, 9 Mar 68.
102. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13599, 9 Mar 68.
103. (SNF) Undated debriefing of unnamed senior CAS representative at Site 85. (Hereafter cited: Debriefing Report.) Doc. 12.
104. (S) Entries in 7/13AF TACC Log, 9 Mar 68.
105. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13612, 10 Mar 68.
106. (C) Memo Subj: Projected Meo Moves, CAS to 7/13AF, 10 Mar 68.
107. (S) Interview with two wounded survivors of Site 85, 11 Mar 68 at Udorn AB, Thailand. (Hereafter cited: Interview with Survivors)
108. (SNF) Msg, AFSSO, Udorn AB, Thailand to AFSSO, 7AF, 11 Mar 68. Doc. 13.
109. (S) Entry in 7/13AF TACC Log, 10 Mar 68.
110. (SNF) Debriefing Report. Doc.12.
111. (S) Entry in 7/13AF TACC Log, 10 Mar 68.
112. (S) Interview with Survivors.
113. (S) Oprep-4 extracts; (S) Entry in 7/13AF TACC Log, 10 Mar 68.
114. (S) Msg, JANAF, Vientiane, Laos to JCS, 10 Mar 68.
115. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13619, 10 Mar 68.
116. (S) Entry in 7/13AF TACC Log, 10 Mar 68.
117. (SNF) Msg, AFSSO, Udorn AB, Thailand to AFSSO, 7AF, 11 Mar 68.
118. (S) Msg, JANAF, Vientiane, Laos to JCS, 10 Mar 68.
119. (SNF) Debriefing Report. Doc. 12.
120. (S) Interview with survivors.
121. Ibid.
122. Ibid.
123. Ibid.
124. Ibid.
125. Ibid.
126. (SNF) Debriefing Report. Doc. 12.
127. (S) Interview with survivors.
128. (S) Msg, JANAF, Vientiane, Laos to JCS, 10-11 Mar 68.
129. (SNF) Debriefing Report.
130. (S) Msg, JANAF, Vientiane, Laos to JCS, 10 Mar 68.
131. (SNF) Debriefing Report.
132. Ibid.
133. Ibid.
134. (S) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to DIA, 11 Mar 68. DOC. 14.
135. (S) Msg, 432TRW, DOCP, Udorn Ab, Thailand to AIG 913, 11 Mar 68.
136. (S) CAS Report, FOV 13620, 11 Mar 68. Doc. 15.
137. (S) CAS Report, FOV 13640, 12 Mar 68; (S) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Secretary of State, 12 Mar 68. Doc. 16.

- UE138. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13680, 14 Mar 68.
- 139. (S) Entry in 7/13AF TACC Log, 11 Mar 68.
- 140. (TS) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to 7AF, 12 Mar 68. Doc 17.
- 141. (S) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Secretary of State, 12 Mar 68.
- 142. Ibid.
- 143. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
- 144. (TS) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Secretary of State, 13 Mar 68. Doc 18.
- 145. Ibid.
- 146. (S) Discussions with Brig Gen G. J. Keegan, Jr. DCS/ Intelligence, Hq 7AF, 10 Jun 68.
- 147. (S) Msg, 7AF to American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos, 14 Mar 68.
- 148. (S) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Hq 7AF, Vientiane 5181, personal for Gen Momyer fm Amb. Sullivan, 16 Mar 68.
- 149. Ibid.
- 150. (S) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Sec State, Vientiane 7592, 3 Jul 68.

**GLOSSARY ABCCC.....Airborne Command and Control Center**

- ADC.....Auto Defense de Choc
- CBU.....Cluster Bomb Unit
- CINPAC.....Commander-in-Chief, Pacific
  
- FAC.....Forward Air Controller
  
- JCS.....Joint Chiefs of Staff
  
- km.....kilometer
  
- LADC.....Local Area Defense Commander
  
- mm.....millimeter
  
- NVA.....North Vietnamese Army
  
- PL.....Pathet Lao
  
- RBS.....Radar Bomb Scoring
- RON.....Remain Over Night
- RR.....Recoilles Rifle
- RRA.....Radio Relay Aircraft
- SAC.....Strategic Air Command
- TACAN.....Tactical Air Control and Navigation
- TACC.....Tactical Air Control Center
- USAF.....United States Air Force

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**The opinions expressed on this site are those of  
Advocacy and Intelligence Index for Prisoners of War - Missing in Action.**

**CAT/AAM Combat Losses in China and  
Southeast Asia, prepared by Dudley Foster**

**CIVIL AIR TRANSPORT (CAT) and AIR AMERICA FATALITIES**  
**COMBAT LOSSES IN CHINA and SOUTH EAST ASIA**

29 July 1948-TARBET, Clyde T.(C) C-46 Tsingtao, China. CAT's first  
 Chan, W.K. (R/O) casualty. Transporting troops to the battle of  
 Har, Y.S. (F/O) Mukden, Manchuria. (FS)

19 July 1949-NORWICH,Edward (C) Cessna 195 Near Lanchow, China

08 Nov. 1949-JONES, Norman R.(C) C-46 Yunan Province, China. Engine fire  
 Chen, K.V. (LCH)

09 Dec. 1950-HEISING, Robert (C) C-46 Korean airlift. Crashed on Mt. Fuji  
 Chang, W.H."Jimmy" due to extreme weather (FS)  
 Wen, T.W.

03 Dec. 1952-SCHWARTZ, Norman A.(C) C-47 Shot down in Manchuria on a  
 SNOODY, Robert C. mission to pick up an agent that they had  
 infiltrated earlier. Schwartz & Snooddy were killed.  
 Jack DOWNEY & Dick FECTEAU were  
 captured and imprisoned. Not recovered.

14 Jan. 1953 BATAVIA, Gabriel J. Killed, per roster, no details

06 May 1954-McGOVERN,James B.(C)C-119 Shot down resupplying Dien Bien  
 BUFORD, Wallace A.(F/O)Phu. Crashed near Ban Sot, Laos. CILH has  
 excavated the site twice in '02. one set of  
 remains recovered. ID Pending. Return to  
 site pending (05/03)

26 May 1954-BUOL Lawrence R. Died as a result of five years spent in Chinese  
 Communist prison. Captured in Mengtsh, China

20 Oct. 1954-Kan, Y.C. (F/O) C-47 (B-811) A/C crashed in Gulf of Siam returning to  
 Chen, Yao-Ziang BKK from a night parachute training mission. Pilot  
 Harry Kaffenberger survived.. WEI employee  
 JAMES McCARTHY, Jr. and three Thai border-  
 policemen died. (PM, page 199)

26 Nov.1960-Tong,S.L. "Eddie"(C) C-46 B-130 Laos. Lost power on T/O, PDJ.  
 Wong, K.S. son of the Chinese Ambassador to the U.S., Dr.  
 Hollington Tong (WL)

1 Jan. 1961 - Nabung, Caferino B. Captured by Pathet Lao on 16 Dec. 1960 (CR)(WM)

30 May 1961- MATEER, Charles H. (C) H-34 Pa Dong, Laos. Resupplying the  
 WIZBOWSKI, Walter L. besieged Hmong in bad weather 19 06' N 103  
 08' E(AA Log, Vol. 17, No. 3, pg 11)

13 Aug. 1961-BEVAN, David W.(AFS) C-46 EUBANKS, Darrel A.(AFS) FORTE, Norwood N. (C) LEWIS, John S. (AFS) SARNO, Roger J. (F/O)	B-136 LS-14. Pha Kuao, Laos during aerial delivery 19 55' N 103 09' E
04 Feb. 1962-HEINRICH, Howard F.(F/O)C-46 STROUSS, Herbert S. (C) Lee, H.C. "Perry"	B-916 Shot down over Plain of Jars, Laos 19 21' N, 103 22' E 3 AFD's jumped & survived(WL)
18 Feb. 1962-RASMUSSEN, James A.(C) B-26	Tainan, Taiwan. Training flight. Flew into side of a mountain. (WL)
06 Apr. 1962-BEALE, William H. (C) Beaver VARNEY, George R. (F/O)	LS-26 A/C crashed into trees at end of runway at Zieng Dat. T/O in hot weather 22 18' N, 101 48' E
22 July 1962-DIEFFENBACH, Charles T. (C) Helio	North of Phu Bai Fire caused by small arms fire. 19 03' N, 105 01' E
27 Nov. 1962-HERITAGE, Donald C (F/O).C-123 RILEY, Frederick J. (C)	NX 5004X. Shot down by Neutralists while trying to land at Xieng Khoung. (WL) 19 27' N, 103 09' E.
17 July 1963-PRUDHOMME, Gerald I.(C)C-46 VERDON, George A. (F/O) NEWTON, Gideon A. (AFS) WOOTEN Aubrey A. (AFS) Milndre, Charuk (AFS) Tantilohakui, Narong (AFS)	B-148 Hit side of mountain in dense fog during rice drop at Pak Tha. (WL) 19 32.5' N. 100 50.5' E.
05 Sep. 1963-CHENEY, Joseph C.(C) C-46 DeBRUIN, Eugene H. (AFS) HERRICK, Charles G.(F/O) To, Yik Chu Promsuwan, Prasit (AFS) Thanee, Praskhni (Prasit) (AFS)	B-150 Seno, Laos This site has been excavated by CILHI 7/01.Cheney & Herrick ID'd & returned 164245N / 1061021. The kickers bail out, were captuered, escaped and are still being hunted. Indradt, Pisdh survived (CILHI)
27 Dec. 1963-LIU, Herbert (C) C-47 Hsien, Tsuan-Ho Yu, L.S.	B-815 Crashed making aerial delivery for the Thai Police
18 Aug. 1964-Pascual, Cornelio N.(FM) UH-34D	(H-19) Killed by gunfire at Moong Phang (WL)
24 Aug. 1964-SANDOVAL, Albert A. Helio Courier	B-849 Crashed on T/O, Pakse, Laos. (WL) Pilot apparently incapacitated prior to crash.
12 Sep. 1964-BAKER, Howland D.(AFS)C-123	LS-20A Floated out of A/C during airdrop, was not wearing parachute Ban Na, Laos (WL)
03 Mar. 1965-JONES, Charles D. (C) H-34	L-54 (H-26)

05 July 1965-SCANDALIS, Alexander (C)	C-45	Saigon, SVN. Hit by a missile after T/O from Tan Son Nhut (WL)
27 Sep. 1965-MAHONEY, Justin G. (F/O)	C-45	Shot down while landing at Bao Tri, SVN (WL)
03 Oct. 1965-MUSCAL, Frank (F/O)	C-123	LS-20A Long Tieng, Laos Hit Bulldozer on runway. (WL)
12 Oct. 1965-LIEBERTH, Richard H. (C)	H-34	Saravane, Laos L-34 (H-39) (AC)
SMITH, Franklin D. (FM)		Agency employees Mike Deuel and Mike Maloney also killed
13 Nov. 1965- Alamares, Rizel S.J. (AFD)	C123B	Fell from A/C while taxing. Udon N5007X (WL)
14 Jan. 1966-PRUNER, William R. (C)	C-47 B-929	Shot down landing at Vi Thanh, Thal, Nguyen Van Chang, Y.H. "Johnny"
06 Mar. 1966-ENSMINGER, Wayne W.	Helio	Laos, Stabilizer cable broke on T/O
09 Apr. 1966-Crisologo, Romeo B. (FM)	UH-34D (H-14)	Killed by ground fire near Ban Pak (WL)
19 May 1966-WILMOT, John W., Jr.	UH-34D	A/C (H-34) hit by gunfire while landing FAR forces NE of LS-32 (WL)
11 Jan. 1967-FARTHING, Frank	Porter	Hit mountain in bad weather SVN (WL)
23 March 1967 MASSEY, Bruce C. (C)	Volpar	(N91284) Hit mountain in bad weather 15 miles NNW of Danang, SVN (AC), (WL)
03 Aug. 1967-PIRKLE, Lowell Z. (FM)	UH-34D	A/C (H-38) hit by rifle grenade near Luang Prabang, Laos (WL)
08 Aug. 1967-BRUCE, Earl E. Jr. (FM)	UH-34D LS-54	(XC 435 045) A/C hit mountain in bad weather, enroute Pakse - Ban Thateng (WL)
COONEY, John J. (F/O)		
17 Nov. 1967-BIJL, Roelf (C)	Domier	Crashed on T/O from My Tho, SVN Someone had placed a heavy object inside the after inspection door without telling anyone. This threw the CG off, causing a hammerhead stall (FS)(AC)
24 Dec. 1967-Chan-Aium, Ampol Phochan, Phanomphom Ratanakosoom, Kosoom Tongkorn, Nit		Killed by PAVN troops when they overran an AAM radio station in the Phalane District, Laos Juan Solita was captured, then released in April 1968

05 May 1968-LEE, Robert E. (FM)		Saigon
18 Jun. 1968-CAMPBELL, James C. Tovira, Vichit	Bell 204	Crashed on training flight Long Thahn, SVN (WL) (AC)
25 Nov. 1968-HODGKINS, Emmons B.Jr.(F/O) MURRAY, Jon Charles (F/O) Yuphaphin, Chaveng	C-46 (86N)	L-39 (AA Log, Vol 15, No 3 pg.4)
25 Nov. 1968-PORTER, Lester M. Reyes, Baltazar	C-46	Engine failed on T/O, Savannakhet, Laos. 21 pax died (WL)
07 Dec. 1968-FRASER, William J.(C) McCARTHY, Patrick F.(FM) Dychitan, Bernardo L	Bell-205	Pin pulled on grenade while off-loading cargo of grenades. LS-107 (WL)
16 Jan. 1969-KELLY, Howard W. (C) MATHESON, Milton N.(F/O) Hanh, Nguyen Van	C-47	(B-949) Hit side of mountain in bad weather N. of Danang, SVN (AC),(WL)
12 Feb. 1969-CRONE, Robert O'Neal	CASI Porter	N. of Luang Prabang, Laos
13 May 1969-GIBBS, William J.	UH-34D	Laos LS-54 (H-68) Killed by sniper round through window.(WL)
17 July 1969-BOOTH, Gerald A.(C) Centeno, Montano (FM)	UH-34D	LS-20 (H-50) Landing accident (WL)
14 Aug. 1969-GRAMMER, Norman A.(C) WOODS, Glenn R. (FM)	Bell-204	A/C shot down on approach to Long Tieng (WL)
19 Aug. 1969-DAVIS, Ralph S.	Porter	LS-20A A/C hit by gunfire from Meo soldier. Carrying pax from Long Tieng to Sam Thong. Vang Pao identified & executed the Meo rifleman (WL)(AQ)
18 Feb. 1970-MERKEL, Jon Christian (C)	H-34	Killed by round through cockpit window near Tha Lin Noi (WL)
02 Mar. 1970-POTTER, Harvey B. (C)	H-34	Near L-54. Died of burns recieved in crash 02/25/70
10 Mar. 1970-BEARDSLEY, John W. (F/O)	H-34	Near L-54. Died of burns received in crash 02/25/70
10 Apr. 1970-COCHRANE, Kevin N.(C) DeLONG,, Gerald L. (AFS) HESTER, Billy K. (AFS) McKEAN, Robert B. (F/O) ROGERS, Huey D. (F/O) SMART, Milton E. (F/E)	C130	Hit side of mountain during approach to Long Tieng ( Bad weather)(WL)
28 Dec. 1970 Vongachak, Boumy (AFS)	C-7A	LS-2, killed by gunfire over DZ (WL)

1 Jan. 1971	Cruz, Ernesto M. (FM)	UH-34D	4 kms. south of San Thong Explosion during offloading of cargo (WL)(AC)
17 Mar. 1971	HOUPE, Kenneth A. (C)	Porter	Midair collision with Army Cobra on approach to Can Tho (WL)
21 Mar. 1971	FRANKLIN, Benjamin A. (C)	Porter	Stalled on climb & crashed into mountain near LS-72 (WL)
29 Apr. 1971	MULHOLLAND, Harry E. (C)	Porter	Struck by FAC U-17, LS-63 (WL)
02 June 1971	CLARK, Herbert W. Thuttanon, Trikit	C-46	A/C hit by ground fire over DZ near Bouan Long. 3 AFS bailed out (WL)
27 Dec. 1971	RITTER, George L. (C) TOWNLEY, Roy F. (F/O) WEISSENBACH, Edward J. (AFS) Saysongkham, Khamphanh	C-123	Enroute to LS-69A CILHI will do excavation. It will be 3-5 years out. (193357N 1012225E)(CILHI (DF)(AC) Shot down by Chinese
2 Feb. 1972	Sousadalay, Khamouh (AFS)	C-7A	Pha Khao A/C crashed attempting to go around (WL)
08 Apr. 1972	WIEHRDT, Leonard (C)	Porter	East of LS-69 A/C flew into the ground while flying cover for AAM plane that had been shot down (WL)
24 Apr. 1972	RANDELL, Lloyd K. (C)	Porter	Hit mountain in bad weather. Enroute Long Tieng to LS-113 (WL)
19 May 1972	Alor, Alfredo J. (FM)	UH-34D	Gear collapsed on landing after receiving small arms fire. Hit by main rotor as he exited A/C (WL)(AC) AA Log, Vol15, No.3, pg1
12 June 1972	RAUSCH, James E. (C)	UH-34D	One round through cockpit while landing near Ban Houei (AC)(WL)
16 Jul. 1972	Manalo, Felciano C. (FM)	UH-34D	Killed by gunfire while attempting Medevac near Pakse (WL) AA log, Vol16, No.1, pg.8
25 July 1972	COLEMAN, Benjamine F. (C) GROVER, John T. (F/O) Khanthaphengxay, Thanom (AFS)	DHC-6	LS-72 area (Tha Tam Bleung) Hit mountain in bad weather attempting to drop arms to troops in contact. (WL)
28 Aug. 1972	GUDAHL, Joel M. (F/O) REEVES, William E. (C) Satarakia, Praves (AFS) Khammanephet, Thongkham (AFS) Tu, Van (listed on plaque as T.U. Van)	C-123K	Laos (Ban Namm Eui) Hit mountain in bad weather. Enroute Vang Vieng to Long Tieng with 12,000 pounds of ordinance & 5 pax (WL)

- 23 Nov. 1972-BANNERMAN, John M. (C) C-7A Hit by 37mm near Saravane (WL)  
 McCARTHY, Charles J. (F/O) (L-44)  
 Somchai, B.  
 Chipaibul, Suthi (AFS)
- 10 Feb. 1973-BOYLES, Howard H., Jr (C) C-123 A/C hit by missile near Thakhet This  
 CAVILL, Jack W. (F/O) site has been excavated by CILHI.  
 Chaichana, Prasit (AFS) Remains recovered & Identified.  
 (171600N 1045500E) AFS Sourinch  
 parachuted and survived. (WL)
- 07 Mar. 1973-ACKLEY, James H. (C) C-123K NW Laos This site has been  
 DRIVER, Clarence N. (F/O) excavated by CILHI. Remains  
 Chiewchemgsuk, Chudchai (AFS) recovered. Identification pending. (WL)  
 Narissak, Kenekao (AFS)
- 07 Apr. 1973-CLARK, Terry D. (F/O) UH-1H Hit by Strella near Huong Hoa, SVN  
 OSTERMAN, Charles (C) ICCS mission (WL)  
 Rosales, Valeriano P. (FM)
- 31 July 1973-THORSEN, Frank G. (C) Volpar One round through cockpit. 13 kms north  
 of Pa Doung (WL)(AC)
- 8 Apr. 1974 Latloi, Manoon (FM) UH-34D Long Tieng, Overshot Tango Pad; rolled  
 over; Latloi thrown from A/C (WL)

Capitalized surname = U.S. Citizen  
 (C) = Captain  
 (F/O) = First Officer  
 (RO) = Radio Operator  
 (FM) = Flight Mechanic  
 (AFS) = Air Freight Specialist (Kicker)

AA Log = Air America Log  
 (WL) = Dr. William Leary  
 (AC) = Allen Cates  
 (FS) = Felix Smith  
 (WL) = Dr. William Leary  
 (WM) = William Merrigan

16 May 2003

27 June 2003

To: C.I.A. Center for the Study of Intelligence  
C.I.A. Executive Director  
C.I.A. Museum  
U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory (CILHI)  
Air America Association, Jack Knotts  
CAT Association, Joe Rosbert  
Dr. Erik D. Carlson, Univ. of Texas/Dallas  
Texas Tech University  
Felix Smith  
Dr. William Leary Jr.,  
Sue Buol Hacker  
Leigh Coleman Hotujec  
Judy Porter  
Jerry Fink  
Allen Cates  
Bill Merrigan

Enclosed you will find three lists relating to casualties, (deaths and personnel that are still classified as missing) sustained by Civil Air Transport, Air America, Air Asia and Southern Air Transport. The starting point was the Memorial Plaque list. As I attempted to ascertain the cause of death of each of these persons to come up with a list of combat losses, I found some names that possibly should be added to the plaque and perhaps one that should not be on it. These decisions will have to be made by the Air America and CAT Boards.

I would like to thank all of you that shared so much information and knowledge over the last two and a half years. Without access to "real" company records it is difficult to feel assured that the lists are completely accurate. I am sure that there other additions and maybe deletions that should be made, but I don't have the records or the recall. I hope that these lists have some value and will help researchers in the future.

Bill Gadoury and Bob Maves of CILHI deserve a special vote of thanks for verifying a great deal of the information and for reviewing Mortuary records that were pertinent.

You will note that there are still a number of those listed that I was unable to establish the cause of death. If any of you can add any information it would be appreciated.

*Wadley*  
*Allen,*  
*Your information letter has been*  
*sent to UTD, ITU & the Agency as requested*  
*IF*

UTD/C4/BISF 4

COMPANY  
Version  
(Restricted)

AIR AMERICA, INC.  
PRELIMINARY REPORT OF AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT  
C-123K, 57-6293  
NEAR BAN HONG SA (LS-62), LAOS  
27 DECEMBER 1971

18 February 1972

A. SYNOPSIS

On 27 December 1971, Air America, Inc. C-123K, 57-6293 crewed by PIC G. L. Ritter, F/O R. F. Townley, AFS E. J. Weissenback, [REDACTED] disappeared while on a cargo flight to Ban Xieng Lom (LS-69), Laos. No reliable information has been received since of either aircrew or aircraft and it must be presumed both are lost.

B. INVESTIGATION

1.1 History of Flight

Between 0615<sup>1/</sup> and 0630 on 27 December 1971 the flight crew for C-123K, 57-6293, consisting of PIC G. L. Ritter, F/O. R. F. Townley, AFS E. J. Weissenback, [REDACTED] reported to the Air America, Inc. Flight Operations Section at Udorn RTAFB for briefing. The early briefing was required since 293 needed a Functional Check Flight (FCF) prior to release for operations. The right propeller had been changed on 26 December 1971 and the aircraft required an FCF.

The crew was briefed that they would work out of Peppergrinder (PPG) after the FCF. PPG work primarily consists of loading and dispatching mixed ordnance for up-country sites.

The Senior Operations Specialist, Mr. E. J. Wilson, in the Flight Information Center (FIC/UCH) was able to ascertain that he personally

1/ All times herein, unless otherwise noted, are local based on the 24-hour clock.

CTD/C-130 4

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had briefed the aircrew and believes the briefing was actually given to the PIC, Captain Ritter. The briefing was general and covered the normal PPG missions. It included the current tactical situation at 4 to 5 major airfields and some 2 to 3 commonly used Drop Zones (DZs). The situation in the LS-69 area was included since this was a frequent destination for PPG flights. Captain Ritter should have been familiar with the tactical situation near LS-69 since he had flown the same route on 25 December 1971, some two days prior to the mishap. A general briefing was necessitated since the actual destination would not be known until assigned by PPG. The aircrew acknowledged the briefing and was duly signed off on the daily flight schedule (a normal procedure of the PIC briefer).

The aircrew signed for the aircraft/mission and departed to the aircraft. It may be presumed the aircrew reviewed the posted weather, including that of LS-69, prior to departure. Evidently, the ground run was satisfactory and 293 departed T-C8 at 0658 for a short FCF, landing at 0722. The aircraft checked normally and the PIC radioed its "OK" condition to the Senior Operations Manager (SOM). He dispatched 293 directly to the PPG. The FCF forms were taken with the aircraft to the PPG - a not infrequent minor discrepancy which probably did not influence the subsequent mishap.

At PPG, the aircraft was loaded with 12,892 pounds of mixed ordnance including 75mm shells, 81mm rounds, 222 caliber small arms ammunition and white phosphorous smoke rounds. This, plus whatever fuel remained from the original 1250 gallon load brought the aircraft close to its maximum allowable weight of 60,000 pounds (see Weight and Balance Section).

1.4 Airfield Information

LS-69 and LS-69A have been combined to one site now called LS-69. It is basically 3,100' x 100' clay/laterite strip with an on-call non-directional beacon. Evidently this beacon was not functioning at 0900 on 27 December 1971. The surrounding terrain, both north and south, is heavily populated with enemy forces.

1.5 Search and Rescue

The Search and Rescue (SAR) effort was conducted out of the VTE station and consisted largely of Air America, Inc. aircraft. A detailed log of search efforts is available at AAM, Inc. VTE if required. For various reasons, the USAF could only offer limited assistance. O-1 and A-1 aircraft did search late the first day but the bulk of their assistance was through radio relay from control aircraft.

With a few breaks due to weather and one false lead from a native claiming to have seen an aircraft, the SAR continued through 5 January 1972. All efforts to find traces of 293 were unsuccessful.

✓ Due to the extreme hostility of the area, several AAM, Inc. aircraft received battle damage while on the SAR. Due to the proximity of the hostile Route 46, the SAR was rather constricted in nature. The final effort consisted of dropping leaflets offering rewards for information and/or the aircrew. The SAR, although late in starting, was as thorough as terrain, the weather and the enemy would permit. Further air search was deemed fruitless after 5 January 1972.

C. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

2.1 Analysis

Very little of a positive nature can be said of the final flight of 57-6293 since its location is still undetermined. However, from statements of the pilots of other C-123K aircraft, an analysis of weather, the cargo, and the current tactical situation in and around the LS-62/LS-69 area, a reasonable conclusion can be reached.

Based on the computed crosswinds at 8,500 feet, 293's reported altitude, it was likely that 293 was to the right of his desired track enroute out of L-08 and at a higher than normal ground speed. The pilot, Captain Ritter, although supposedly well familiar with the route, was likely flying an inadequate crosswind correction heading in and out of cloud bases. This could have placed him to the right of L-23 and, later, well to the right and beyond LS-62 since no navigational aids were available. A valley, similar to that of LS-62, is present just to the northeast of LS-62 and close to Route 46. An off-track course to the right could have explained Captain Ritter's apparent concern over the weather although both of the other two Captains were flying at the same reported altitude but in relatively good weather conditions. Had Captain Ritter been to the northeast of his reported position at LS-62 and initiated a descending left turn towards LS-69, the enemy reaction over Route 46 would be immediate and violent. Large anti-aircraft guns are only 15 miles north of LS-62. With some 12,892 pounds of ordnance aboard the aircraft, it could well be imagined that no time for radio calls was available. The SAR effort could not be extended into the Route 46 area.

Several other possibilities in the causal areas include maintenance malfunctions, lost, hijack, etc., but all are even more unlikely than enemy action and would probably have precipitated some radio call(s). The likelihood of 293 merely crashing in the weather is a remote possibility if he were well off-track to the right - say with an in-operative heading indicator but, again, some radio calls should have been made. A possibility that 293 blew up from an internal explosion is present but was not considered likely. Flight in and out of clouds while on a visual clearance is an operational requirement and was not, by itself, considered a factor in this mishap.

In summary, although the cause of the disappearance of 293 must be listed as undetermined, the aircraft probably strayed from course and, over exceedingly hostile country, was hit by enemy fire and rapidly destroyed.

2.2 Conclusions

a. Findings

- (1) The crew was properly certificated.
- (2) The aircraft was generally properly maintained in accordance with Company/Customer procedures and standards.
- (3) The aircraft was probably correctly loaded and dispatched from PPG.
- (4) At the time of the flight towards LS-69 the winds were relatively strong and from the southwest.
- (5) C-12X, 57-6293 became overdue at about 0900 on 27 December 1971.
- (6) An erroneous report of the aircraft landing at LS-69 misled the Flight Watches into non/late notification of an overdue aircraft.

Vientiane (L-08) on 30 July 69, Long Tieng (LS-20A) - Udon (T-08) on 14 November 69, and Udon (T-08) - Luang Prabang (L-54) on 29 June 70 (Log book of D. Keele, in: UTD/Keele/B1F6); USAF records note: administratively transferred from XMTG, that is from Udon, to 315TAW, Phan Rang, on 70154, that is on 1 June 70; to maintenance by 315TAW on 70162, that is on 9 June 70; landed at Pakse (L-11), Laos, on 5 May 70 with the landing gear retracted, damaging 85 % of the belly skin (Accident report, in: UTD/Dreifus/B1F11); repaired and returned to service on 21 May 70 (Minutes ExCom-AACL/AAM of 12 May 70, in: UTD/CIA/B8F4); current on 1 July 70 (Leary, *The aircraft of Air America*, p. 20); based at Vientiane 1-31 July 71, still assigned to contract AID-439-342 (F.O.C. of 1 July 71, 15 July 71, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B); in use out of Vientiane at least between 6 November 71 and 13 November 71 (Log book of R. L. Wofford, in: UTD/Wofford [Sm.C. 6]); in use out of Udon at least between 23 October 72 and 7 February 73 (Crew member duty report of H. F. Miller, in: UTD/Miller/B4F6); at Udon on 24 January 73 (Udon daily flight schedule of 24 January 73, in: UTD/Dexter/F1); at Udon on 18 April 73 for local training out of Vientiane (Udon daily flight schedule of 18 April 73, in: UTD/Dexter/F1); used out of Vientiane 1-30 November 73 for Royal Lao Air Force training (F.O.C. of 1 November 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

**Fate:** probably given to the R.Lao Air Force in 73; but possibly came to the R. Thai AF in 75 (?), as it was used 1990 in the movie "Air America" for the crash at "Tango 7".

**4) C-123s received in 1966:**

Fairchild C-123B	"293"	20303	24 March 66	ex USAF 57-6293; Bien Hoa (BY 16) to 2AD, Da-nang, on 63182 (1 July 63); was to go to AAITTVL04 (Air Asia, Tainan) for maintenance on 63251, but did not; instead to Hong Kong for WK-maintenance the same day; back to 2AD, Bien Hoa, on 63278; AAI TTF WQPC (maintenance at Tainan) to 2AD, Tan Son Nhut on 64366; 2AD to AAI TTF WQPC on 65328
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**Service history:** transferred from AAITT WQPC, that is from overhaul by Air Asia, Tainan, to TL (= Air America) on 66083 = 24 March 66; in use out of Vientiane at least between 9 May 66 and 3 March 68, when still a C-123B (Log book of D. D. Wharton, in: UTD/Wharton/B1F2); used out of Vientiane on 8 April 66, 1 May 66, and 1 May 68 under contract AID-439-342 (Aircraft status as of 8 April 66, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1, of 1 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2, and of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); made a gear-up touch-down at Nam Bac (LS-203), Laos, on 12 August 67, damaging the bottom of the fuselage, but subsequently landed correctly; repaired and returned to service on 6 September 67; still a C-123B at this time (Accident report, in: UTD/Hickler/B24F3; Minutes ExCom-AACL/AAM of 22 August 67, in: UTD/CIA/B8F2); photo in *Airliners*, summer 93, p. 18; second Air

America C-123B to be converted by Fairchild to C-123K, departed Vientiane to Clark AFB on 27 March 68 (Aircraft status as of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); returned to Air America in late August 68 (F.O.C. of 15 Aug. 68, in: UTD/LaShomb/B14); in use out of Vientiane at least between 6 September 68 and 20 April 69, when already a C-123K (Log book of D. D. Wharton, in: UTD/Wharton/B1F2); in use out of Udorn at least between 3 May 69 to 27 February 71 (F.O.C. of 15 June 69, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B; Crew member duty report of H. F. Miller, in: UTD/Miller/B4F6, Log book of D. Keele, in: UTD/Keele/B1F6); was already a C-123K on 15 June 69; used out of Udorn under contract AID-439-713 at least between 16 June and 31 August 69 (F.O.C.s of 15 June 69, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B and of 15 Aug. 69, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F1); USAF C-123K 57-6293 was administratively reserialled as 57006293 in 1969; administratively transferred from Tainan to 315TAW, Phan Rang, on 70146, that is on 24 May 70; passed on to Air America (GD) on 70155, that is on 2 June 70; current with Air America on 1 July 70 (Leary, *The aircraft of Air America*, p. 20); at Nam Tan (LS-268), Laos, in 70 (photo in *Air America Log*, 1970/1); based at Vientiane at least between 1 July 71 and 31 July 71, still assigned to contract AID-439-342 (F.O.C. of 1 July 71 and 15 July 71, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B); hit by ground fire in Laos on 29 November 71, damaging the cylinder and sheet metal; repaired and returned to service on 30 November 71 (Minutes ExCom-AAAC/AAM of 11 January 72, in: UTD/CIA/B9F7).

**Fate:** believed destroyed en route to Ban Xieng Lom (LS-69), Northern Laos, on 27 November 71, while on a "PPG", i.e. *Peppergrinder* flight, carrying a full load of ammo and white phosphorus; believed shot down (by Chinese building a road in Laos?) and possibly disappeared in a midair explosion, as no wreckage was ever spotted; it is unknown what happened to pilot George L. Ritter, co-pilot Roy F. Townley and kickers Edward J. Weissenback and Khamphanh Saysongkham (Accident report, in: UTD/CIA/B15F4; Board of Review report, in: UTD/CIA/B29F2; List "Aircraft destroyed or lost", in: UTD/CIA/B49F2; Memorial; Memorial file, in: UTD/LaShomb/B16F3; XOXO dated 25 April 72, in: UTD/Luckett/B1F3; UTD/Leary/B1 for 27 November 71; see also Robbins, *Air America*, pp. 206-12).

Fairchild C-123B "613" 20062 24 March 66 ex USAF 54-0613

**Service history:** transferred from 2AD, Tan Son Nhut, to TL (= Air America) on 24 March 66; ferried to Tainan on 7 April 66; test flown at Tainan on 15 April 66; ferried Tainan-Hong Kong-Danang-Vientiane on 16 April 66; used out of Vientiane at least between 19 April 66 and 12 May 69 (Log book of D. D. Wharton, in: UTD/Wharton/B1F2); based at Vientiane; used out of Vientiane on 8 April 66, 1 May 66, 1 May 68, and 15 August 69 under contract AID-439-342 (Aircraft status as of 8 April 66, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1, of 1 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2, of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2, and of 15 Aug. 69, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F1); USAF records note: C-123B 54-613 GI (= returned from outside USAF) CNA (= Air America) to LOG HQ, Wright Patterson, on 67120; GF / Reconciliation on 67151; that is: C-123B 54-613 was administratively transferred to the Logistic Air Command Headquarters, Wright Patterson AFB, on 28 April 67, but administratively, the decision was made on 29 May 67 to let the aircraft with the same user; USAF records note: to CADTT, Tainan, on 67304, that is on 29 October 67; "613" had IRAN at Tainan in November 67 (Aircraft status as of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); made a nose gear up landing at Udorn (T-08), Thailand, on 21 September 68 (Accident report, in: UTD/Hickler/B24F7); repaired; converted to C-123K in 68/69; USAF records note: reserialled as 54000613 in 1969; used out of Vientiane on 4 April 69, when already a C-123K (Log book of D. D.



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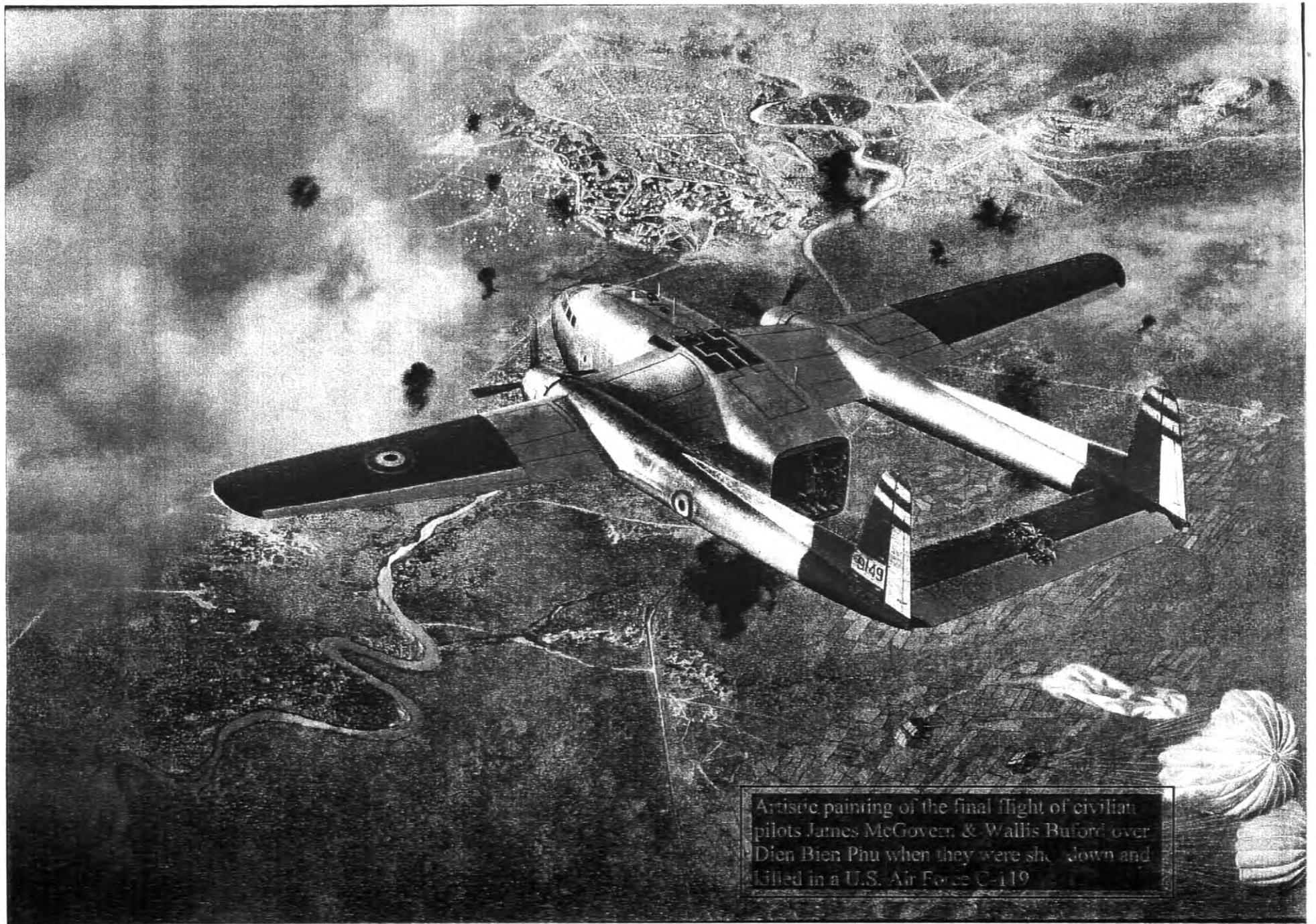
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## Enlarged Photo



Air America pilots Howard Kelly & Milton Matheson were killed in this U.S. Air Force C-47. This accident might not have happened had the navigation equipment not been removed.



Artistic painting of the final flight of civilian pilots James McGovern & Wallis Buford over Dien Bien Phu when they were shot down and killed in a U.S. Air Force C-119

**THE AIRCRAFT  
OF**

**AIR AMERICA**

by

**Dr. Joe F. Leeker**

The following database is the result of many years of research, especially done at the Air America Archives at McDermott Library, University of Texas at Dallas. All information contained in the sections entitled "Types of missions flown," "Statistics," and "Service history" as well as the photos are exclusively based on archival material, mostly preserved at the Air America Archives. Additional information came from the USAF Aircraft Assignment Records preserved at the USAF Historical Research Agency at Maxwell AFB, the records of the Director General of Civil Aviation of the Republic of China at Taipei, and other archives. The section entitled "fate" is mostly based on material published in various booklets and magazines whose information may be based on observation. This section is not considered to be complete. The references given in the section "Service history" indicate the exact location of the document within the Air America Archives, e.g. UTD/CIA/B51F12 meaning: UTD, McDermott Library, Air America Archives / CIA Corporate Records / Box 51, Folder 12. Abbreviations like ACA-22 or AVH-6 indicate the no. of the microfilm reel preserved at the AFHRA. Other abbreviations used may be looked up in the file "Abbreviations."

## AIR AMERICA: SIKORSKY UH-34Ds (2nd series)

### The types of missions flown by Air America's UH-34Ds:

The Sikorsky UH-34D was one of Air America's work horses in Laos. With the exception of "803", which was always operated in Thailand and so had a white color scheme similar to that of Royal Thai military aircraft, all Air America UH-34Ds were olive drab and did not carry any titles. They looked like Royal Laotian Air Force UH-34Ds, except for the fact that RLAf UH-34Ds carried an Erawan and a four digit serial painted in yellow, while the Air America serial was white. Officially all Air America UH-34Ds were based at Udorn Royal Thai AFB where they were maintained periodically, but normally, all of them operated in up-country Laos for several weeks. Other Air America or CASI planes flew the crews as "dead heads" to the location from where they had to work for a period of several days. During that period the crews either slept in or next to their helicopter or were the guests of the local villages where they were temporarily stationed. At several "hubs" like Sam Thong there were even hostels where to get a shower. There were several types of missions flown by the UH-34Ds: to transport all sorts of supplies (food, ammunition, fuel) to gun positions and other outposts; to fly medical evacuation missions from the villages or from battle areas, to transport indigenous; especially Hmong troops from one point to another during the battle ("leap frog" technique), to evacuate villages and outposts under fire, to rescue downed aircrews, and even to transport back to Udorn small aircraft like Helio Couriers or Pilatus Porters which had had an accident in Laos. In this case, the fuselage of an ill-fated aircraft was tied to one side of the UH-34D and its wings on the other side. Normally an Air America UH-34D could carry 12 or 13 passengers or cargo. All of them had armor plates and a hoist; inertia reels and a sling could be installed to carry outside cargo (Aircraft and avionics information as of 1 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14). In 1972 and 1973, Air America's Udorn facility also reconstructed 14 former US Marines UH-34Ds for use by the TNI-AU or Indonesian Air Force - this was called "Project Peace rotor".

### Statistics according to official Air America documents:

- 1962:** 20 (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 23 January 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1)
- Oct. 1962:** helicopter operations were confined to Thailand (Minutes ExCom AAACL of 30 October 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1)
- 1963:** +3 in August 63 (= H-16/7/8 ?), making a **total** of 7, minus 1 destroyed on 27 October 63 (= H-16), making a **total** of 6 on 29 October 63 (Minutes ExCom-AAACL/AAM of 29 October 63; in: UTD/CIA/B7F2)
- 1964:** + 4, making a **total** of 9 (Minutes BoD-AAM 21 July 64, in: UTD/CIA/B3F5)
- 1965:** + 4, in March 65 (Minutes ExCom-AAACL/AAM of 25 February 65, in: UTD/CIA/B7F4), making a **total** of 19, in July 65 (Minutes ExCom-AAACL/AAM of 27 July 65, in: UTD/CIA/B7F4)
- 1966:** + 3 in January 66 (Minutes ExCom-AAACL/AAM of 12 January 66, in: UTD/CIA/B8F1)
- 1967:** Inventory of 1 February 66 (in: UTD/Herd/B2): 23 + 3 > 26  
+ 5 in May 67 + 4 about 1 June 67 > a **total** of 31; some of these aircraft were turned over to Laos (that is to the RLAf) (Minutes ExCom-AAACL/AAM of 23 May 67, in: UTD/CIA/B8F2)
- Feb. 69:** 23 assigned to Air America + 10 assigned to Laos (R.Lao A.F. ?), that is a total of 33 UH-34Ds were operated on 28 January 69 under the Madriver contract (Minutes ExCom-AAACL/AAM of 28 January 69, in: UTD/CIA/B8F3)
- April 1970:** 24L (Minutes ExCom-AAACL/AAM of 12 May 70, in: UTD/CIA/B8F4)



## AIR AMERICA: BEECH / VOLPAR TURBO BEECH 18:

### I) The types of missions flown by Air America's Beech 18s, Beech Ten-Twos, and Volpar Turbo Beech aircraft:

In the sixties and the early seventies, Air America was probably one of the world's largest operators of Twin Beeches. There were three different types of aircraft used. The first aircraft bought were Beech C-45Gs, two of which (N7950C and N7951C) were introduced in Laos in 1960 where they were used to transport MAAG and CIA personnel and supplies to small airstrips. Both aircraft left Laos in 1963/64 and moved to South Vietnam where Air America started to build up a huge fleet of more than 30 Beech 18s since 1963. While those original Beech C-45s and most of the aircraft acquired later had a maximum take-off weight of 8,750 lb., including a useful load of 2,150 lb., which allowed them to fly 900 s. m. at 175 mph., some 12 of the C-45s were converted to "Ten-Two" in 1963 and 1964. Although the engine remained the same, a P & W R-985 with 450 b.h.p., the new aircraft had a maximum take-off weight of 10,200 lb. (hence its name "Ten-Two"), including a useful load of 3,350 lb., which allowed it a range of 915 s. m. This increased performance was achieved by a power plant modification, a stabilizer incidence increase, new gear doors, and aerodynamically improved wing tips. Finally, since 1966 a total of 14 Air America Beech C-45s was converted by Air Asia, Tainan, to Volpar Turbo Beech, whose two Garrett TPE-331-47 turbo-prop engines gave it a maximum take-off weight of 10,286 lb., including a useful load of 3,886 lb., a true air speed of 245 mph. and a range of 1,040 s. m. (*Air America Log*, vol. II, no. 5, 1968, p. 1). In their new role in South Vietnam, all three versions flew for USAID and for the US military, transporting people like CIA or *Phoenix* personnel and a variety of goods which ranged from pastries or typewriters to life animals or hand grenades. It seems, however, that the Volpars were mainly used for passengers, including courier services for the US Embassy, while the older C-45s and Ten-Twos were used for cargo. Although USAID was officially the main contractor to Air America in South Vietnam, all CIA missions in that country were flown as part of the USAID contracts, and within those contracts, all CIA requirements were handled with priority (Harnage, *A thousand faces*, pp. 12-15 and 81/2). Other Beech 18s were operated outside South Vietnam in the mid-sixties, in part adopting special color schemes: N343T was operated by *Scheduled Air Services Ryukyus* out of Naha, Okinawa, between 1964 and 1967; this aircraft had airline style titles. N5454V was operated in Thailand as a sprayer aircraft for experiments with defoliants; this aircraft was "disguised" as a private agricultural plane. And N5269V was also operated in Thailand under the provisions of the contract with the Royal Thai Border Patrol Police and used for communications and parachute training; this aircraft had a red belly. In late 1966, two Volpars were transferred to Udon and equipped for high sensitive photo reconnaissance, and these two aircraft (N9542Z and N9671C) were used on reconnaissance missions from Udon until March 74. In late 1967, a number of Volpars were transferred to Savannakhet in Southern Laos and used on an Aerial Survey Project, which collected and relayed signals received from road watcher teams hidden close to the Ho Chi Minh Trail. When this project was terminated by the end of 1968, the Volpars returned to South Vietnam, but later, another Volpar (N3728G) was equipped for special photo missions, while all regular Volpars were equipped to carry 10 passengers and had even air conditioning, although they could also be used for air drops (Aircraft and avionics information as of 1 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14). During the late sixties, most C-45s and Ten-Twos were inactivated, so that only the Volpars remained active until the end, four of which (N9838Z, N7695C, N9157Z, and N91295) even flew for *ICCS Air Services* in 1973.



## AIR AMERICA: SIKORSKY S-58Ts

### The types of missions flown by Air America's S-58Ts:

In addition to the UH-34Ds flown by Air America since 1961, 5 UH-34Ds were converted to S-58Ts at Udorn in 1971, the first being completed in March 71 and the last in July 71 (Morrison / Conboy, *Shadow war*, p. 379). A 6th UH-34D was converted for CIA contingencies and based at Taiwan, where it was flown by pilots of the 34th Squadron of the Republic of China Air Force (Morrison / Conboy, *Shadow war*, p. 386, note 14). In late 1971, this 6th S-58T was painted in the colors of the Republic of China Air Force (see the photos in: Conboy / Morrison, *The quiet one*, pp. 44/5) and used to train 6 Taiwanese 34th Squadron crewmen at Tainan to rescue a downed Hughes 500P, as a Hughes 500P was to be used on a covert wiretap mission into Vinh, North Vietnam. In the spring of 1972, training was continued at PS-44, a secret location located 26 kilometers north of Pakse in southern Laos (Conboy / Andradé, *Spies and commandos*, p. 255). All of these 6 helicopters were bailed from the US Marine Corps, only the 6 S-58T conversion kits belonged to Air America (Inventory list made up by R. Dixon Speas Associates Inc and dated 10 and 11 November 1975, p. 3, in: UTD/CIA/B18F6).

### Statistics according to official Air America documents:

- Inventories of 31 March 72 > 30 November 72 (UTD/CIA/B1F10): 6 > 6 conversion kits

### The individual aircraft histories:

Type	registration / serial	c/n (msn)	date acquired	origin
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S-58T XW-PHA, probably taken in March 71 (UTD/Hitner/B1F3)

Sikorsky S-58T	XW-PHA	58.1398	March 71	converted from USMC UH-34D BuA 148811
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**Service history:** arrived at Udorn on 13 December 70 as a UH-34D (Minutes ExCom-AAAC/AAM of 22 December 70, in: UTD/CIA/B8F4); the first flight as a S-58R was on 17 March 71; a photo (probably of its first flight) is preserved in: UTD/Hitner/B1F3; project manager for the conversion of 5 UH-34Ds into S-58Ts was Captain R. D. Davis (UTD/Leary/B1 for 17 March 71); made its first operational heavy lift, when it transported the engine of UH-34D H-73 from Nong Khai (T-22), Thailand, back to Udorn in 71 (photos are published in: *Air America Log*, vo. V, no. 4, 1971, p. 6, and in: Lundh, *Sikorsky H-34*, p. 127); assigned to contract AID-439-713 for use out of Udorn at least 1-31 July 71 (F.O.C.s of 1 and 15 July 71, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B); on 9 November 71, XW-PHA made a precautionary landing at



## AIR AMERICA: DOUGLAS B-26s / ON MARK RB-26Ks

### The types of missions flown by Air America's B-26s and On Marks:

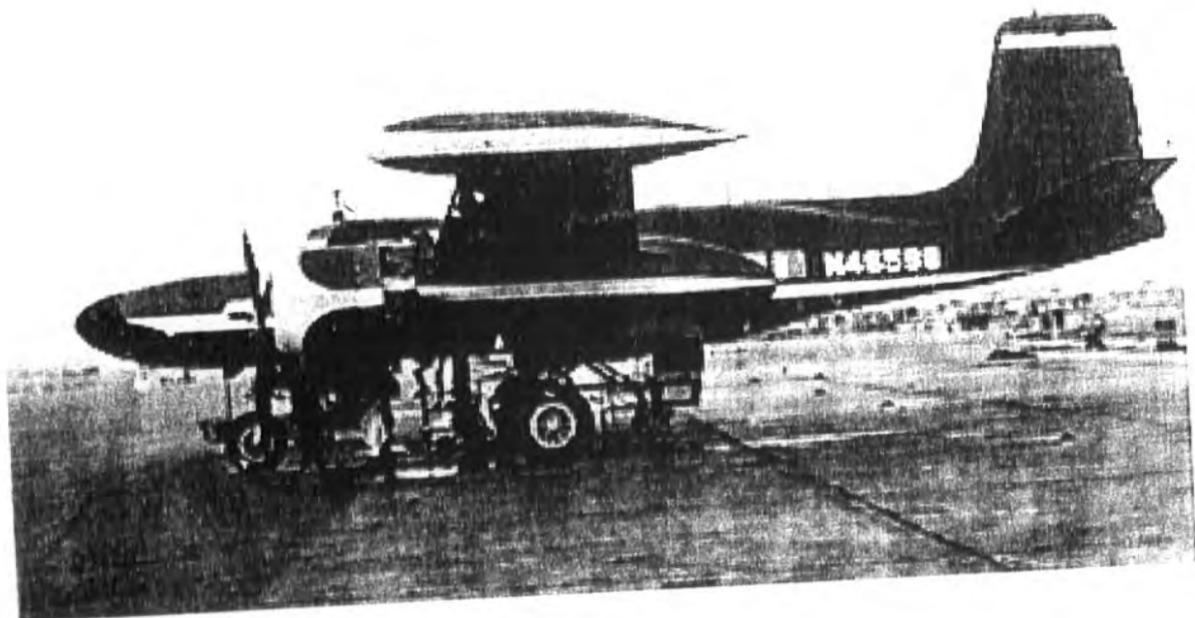
About 25 Douglas B-26s, all owned by CIA/Air Asia, were stored at Tainan, Taiwan, at various times from June 58 to about 1965. Some were used for CIA or USAF strike missions. The following 18 aircraft are believed to have been used by Air America pilots on various missions during the sixties. These aircraft are believed to be identical with the CEECO B-26s that were to be maintained and modified by Air Asia in 1962 (Minutes ExCom-AAAL of 25 September 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1). The question was still open in October 62 (Minutes ExCom AAAL of 9 October 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1). CEECO stands for the "Consolidated Electric Equipment Company" (Summary of revenue contracts, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F4). On 11 February 1964, all B-26s in South Vietnam were grounded after a wing had failed on an aircraft in the US (Dorr / Bishop, *Vietnam air war debrief*, p. 30). The best source of information about the B-26s and On Marks used by Air America still is the book *Foreign Invaders* by Hagedorn / Hellström, to which Trest (*Air Commando One*, p. 110) adds the note that 4 black B-26s were flown from Tainan to Takhli in December 60 for air strikes at Vang Vieng; they were to be flown by Air America pilots during the abortive operation *Mill Pond*. Most of the information given below is based on the excellent book by Hagedorn / Hellström, *Foreign Invaders*, especially, pp. 132-36 and 169-74, to which some details have been added that can be found in documents preserved at the Air America Archives.

### Statistics according to official Air America documents:

- Inventory of 1 February 66, in: UTD/Herd/B2: 0
- Inventories of 31 March 72 > 30 November 72 (in: UTD/CIA/B1F10): 1 A-26A owned > 0

### The individual aircraft histories:

Type	registration / serial	c/n (msn)	date acquired	origin
Douglas B-26C	"844"	?	March 59?	?
<b>Service history:</b> possibly used by Air America.				
<b>Fate:</b> probably scrapped in 64 or 65.				
Douglas B-26C	"862"	?	March 59?	?
<b>Service history:</b> possibly used by Air America.				
<b>Fate:</b> probably scrapped in 64 or 65.				
Douglas B-26B	(unmarked)	27547	April 61	ex USAF 44-34268
<b>Service history:</b> possibly participated in the aborted project <i>Mill Pond</i> in Laos, April 61, with Air America crews.				
<b>Fate:</b> fate unknown; probably returned to Tainan with Air Asia; possibly scrapped in 64 or 65.				
Douglas B-26B	(unmarked)	28969	April 61	ex USAF 44-34690
<b>Service history:</b> possibly participated in the aborted project <i>Mill Pond</i> in Laos, April 61, with Air America crews.				
<b>Fate:</b> fate unknown; probably returned to Tainan with Air Asia; possibly scrapped in 64 or 65.				



## AIR AMERICA: BOEING-VERTOL CH-47C CHINOOK



An Air America Chinook airlifts a C-46 fuselage at Udorn in 1973  
(*Air America Log*, vol. VII, no. 8, 1973, p. 3)

### **The types of missions flown by Air America's CH-47C CHINOOKs:**

All Air America Chinooks had armor plates and IFR capability. Essentially, there were four types of missions flown by the Chinooks: First, they were used as troop carriers within Laos, and in this configuration, they could carry 32 passengers (Aircraft and avionics information as of 1 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14); to quote one example: On 20 January 73, two Air America Chinooks were used to transport troops to re-open the Vientiane-Luang Prabang highway (Bowers, *The USAF in South-East Asia. Tactical Airlift*, p. 462). In another configuration, they could carry wounded out of a battle area, then they could be equipped with 24 litters, while 2 attendants could take care of the wounded. In still another configuration, they could carry cargo and even small vehicles, and so they had roller conveyer tracks and inertia reels. They could also rescue besieged people and lift heavy equipment with its hoist winch, and they could transport large outside cargo in a sling (Aircraft and avionics information as of 1 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14), including downed aircraft like a Twin Otter or even a C-46 fuselage estimated to weigh about 13,000 pounds. But the primary mission of the Chinook was probably transporting large external sling loads from Udorn, Thailand to isolated exact positions in Laos. An Air America Chinook could move a 155MM gun with ammunition and crew from one position to another in one trip; the crew and ammunition were loaded inside and the gun outside to a cargo hook. Sometimes, even four cargo hooks were used in order to transport four different loads to four different places (Hutchison, *Chinooks*, p. 4).



## AIR AMERICA: DE HAVILLAND CANADA DHC-6 TWIN OTTERS

### The types of missions flown by Air America's Twin Otters:

Air America's Twin Otters were the special project aircraft of the early seventies. This explains why the official blue and black stripes of its color scheme were quickly replaced by a black night color scheme, which makes the registration very difficult to be seen. Some of them had special electronic equipment, including terrain following radar. Of course, the aircraft could make deliveries of all sorts of supplies, and sometimes did so in order to hide their real activities. These included nightly supply drops to road watcher teams and relay missions for electronic signals. N389EX acted as an airborne command post during the wiretap mission to Vinh, North Vietnam, and during that period it was operated out of the secret base at PS-44 in Southern Laos.

### Statistics according to official Air America documents:

Inventories of 31 March 72 > 30 November 72 (UTD/CIA/B1F10): 3 > 3

### The individual aircraft histories:

Type	registration / serial	c/n (msn)	date acquired	origin
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DHC-6 N774M at Udorn in 1973  
(with kind permission from Judy Porter)

DHC-6-300	N774M	236	25 Feb. 71	leased from Aviation and Inland Marine Rentals Inc; had been with Inter-mountain Aviation, then Rocky Mountain Airways (leased)
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**Service history:** leased from Aviation and Inland Marine Rentals Inc on 25 February 71 (Status as of 12 August 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F4); assigned to contract AID-439-713 for use out of Vientiane at least 1-31 July 71 (F.O.Circulars of 1 July 71 and 15 July 71, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B); probably operated out of PS 44, a secret base 26 kms north of Pakse, where Taiwanese crews were living and trained to fly the Twin Otter on daylight supply drops (Conboy/Morrison, *The quiet one*, p. 44; used as an airborne relay link during a dusk raider insert near Dien Bien Phu on 25 July 71 (Conboy/Morrison, *The quiet one*, p. 44); on 20 October 71, a person walked into the left propeller of N774M at Wat Phu (L-107) and was instantly killed (XOXO of 20 Oct. 71, in: UTD/Hickler/B25F11); hit by ground fire at Ban Nongkin near Toong Set

## AIR AMERICA: DOUGLAS C-47 GOONEY BIRDS

### The types of missions flown by Air America's C-47s:

The C-47 was one of the aircraft Air America inherited from CAT Inc. in March 59. They were immediately used in a number of theaters: One C-47 was operated on Taiwan for the NACC, a front for the CIA (B-809, later "6110"); up to two of them were based at Bangkok for use by USAID - including a plane for parachute training by the Royal Thai Border Police and one that ensured the Embassy run from Bangkok to Vientiane via Udon. But in the early sixties at least four C-47s were based at Vientiane for use in Laos (B-817, B-829, "147", "994"), two of which had been bailed from the USAF especially for that use. Those C-47s were also responsible for what was called the "Milk Run North" and the "Milk Run South," scheduled flights for customer ASB-036 following the route Vientiane > Luang Prabang > Sayaboury > Luang Prabang > Vientiane to the north and back and Vientiane > Savannakhet > Pakse > Attopeu > Pakse > Savannakhet > Vientiane to the south and back. On 8 September 64, for example, the "Milk Run North" was flown by C-47 "994", and the "Milk Run South" by C-47 B-817 (Vientiane daily flight schedule of 8 Sept. 64, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F8), and on 20 May 66 the "Milk Run North" was ensured by C-47 "994" and the "Milk Run South," which followed a slightly different pattern at that time (Vientiane > Paksane > Thakhet > Savannakhet > Pakse > Savannakhet > Thakhet > Paksane > Vientiane) by C-47 "147" (Vientiane daily flight schedule of 20 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B). At that time, the other C-47s which had been used to drop supplies and arms to locations in Laos had already been replaced by bigger aircraft. In South Vietnam C-47s were used at a very early date, including B-829, B-879, and B-929, which were joined by the former Laos-flyers B-817 B-829, "147", and "994" in the mid-sixties when Air America Saigon also received five newly bailed C-47s from the USAF. From the second half of the sixties to the very end in 1975 the bulk of Air America's C-47 operations was at Saigon where nearly everything was transported under both USAID and military contracts: passengers like CIA and *Phoenix* personnel or even troops and cargo ranging from medicine or life animals to arms. On one occasion an Air America C-47 even transported a Volkswagen from Danang to Saigon. But although USAID was officially the main contractor to Air America in South Vietnam, all CIA missions in South Vietnam were flown as part of the USAID contracts, and within those contracts all CIA requirements were handled with priority (Harnage, *A thousand faces*, pp. 42-45 and 81/2). But two particularities should be mentioned: Between 1964 and 1969, Air America even operated a C-47 that was painted in full USAF colors ("0-50883") and which was operated under various contracts out of Bangkok. And there was a special C-47 (B-879) that was used out of Udon for nightly drops to road watcher teams in the late sixties and then, in the early seventies, was used as a VIP aircraft out of Bangkok, having 8 plush seats (Aircraft and avionics information as of 1 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14). At the very end, when they had to leave the country, many of Air America's remaining C-47s had been inactivated, thus creating those technical problems that Robbins (*Air America*, pp. 292-98) describes in a fascinating story.

### Statistics according to official Air America documents:

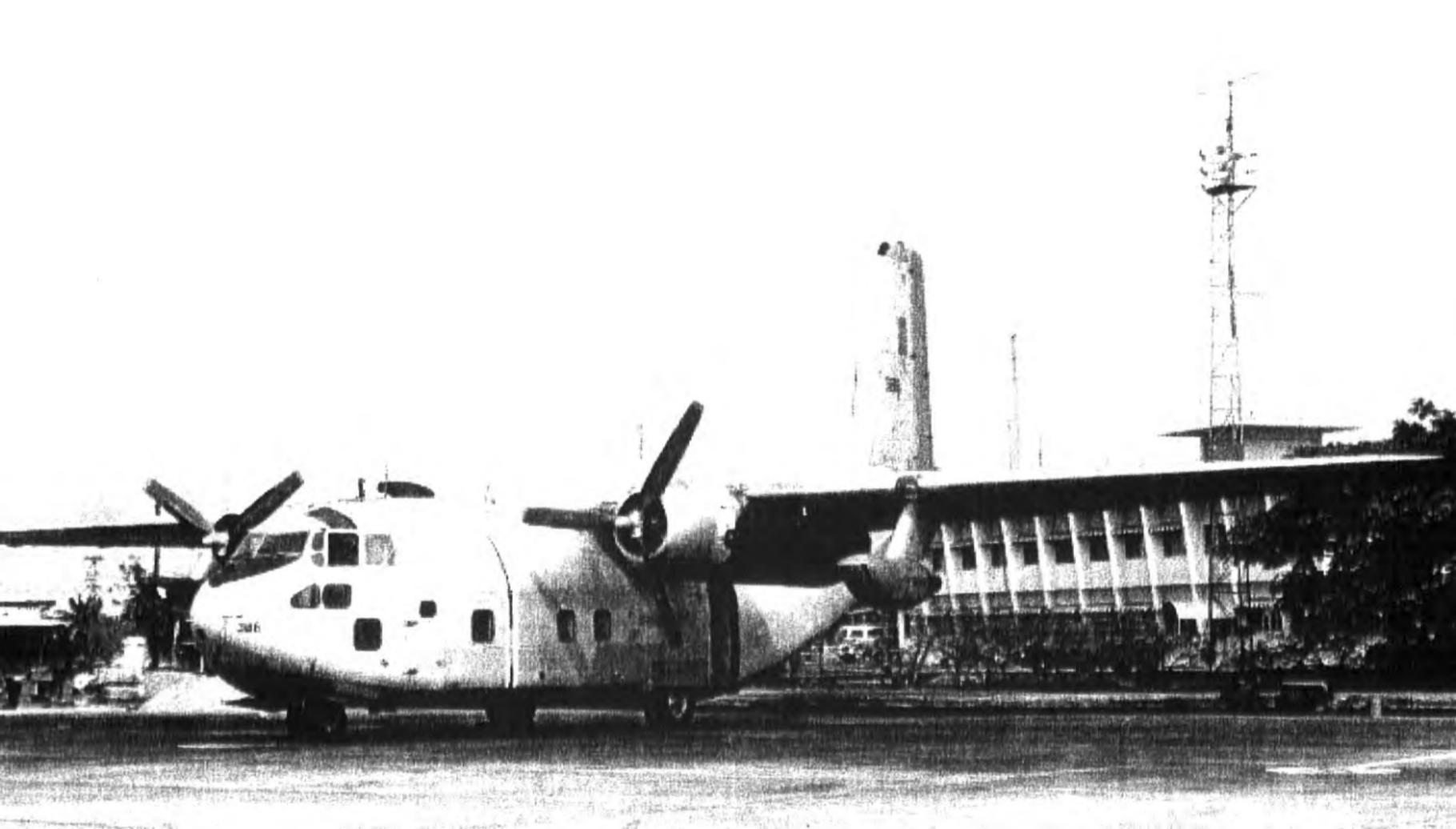
- 1964:** 1 C-47 was acquired in August 64 (Minutes ExCom-AAAL/AAM of 15 September 64, in: UTD/CIA/B7F3), that is B-879
- 1965:** it was approved that USAID Vietnam will receive 4 C-47s for contract AID-430-1092 (Minutes ExCom-AAAL/AAM of 24 November 65, in: UTD/CIA/B7F4)
- 1966:** Inventory of 1 Feb. 66, in: UTD/Herd/B2: 8 plus 6 planned
- Oct. 70:** 1 C-47 was sold (Minutes ExCom-AAAL/AAM of 13 October 70, in: UTD/CIA/B8F4), that is B-829



## AIR AMERICA: FAIRCHILD C-123 PROVIDERS

### The types of missions flown by Air America's C-123s:

The C-123 was another one of Air America's work horses, but except for a short period in the early seventies, they were only used in Laos. They were essential because of their short take-off and landing capabilities. The first C-123s received in March 62 were B-models, which carried US civil aircraft registrations. But this method was not practicable for aircraft bailed from the USAF for a short period only like the 3 aircraft received in 1964, and since 1965, all bailed C-123s used the last three digits of their USAF serial as Air America serial. In mid-1966 even the remaining three of the original C-123s adopted those special Air America serials. At that time Company C-123Bs also received small Air America titles which they did not have while under N-registry. In 1968/69 all of Air America's C-123Bs were converted to C-123Ks receiving an auxiliary jet engine under each wing to improve their STOL capabilities. Officially most of Air America's C-123s were always based at Vientiane and assigned to a USAID contract. And one of them was officially based at Udom - at least until 1969 - and was used on missions for the Hmong guerilla army. But in reality, this distinction was not that clear: C-123s assigned to both contracts could fly all sorts of missions, and many of them out of Udom. Since 1971 all of the C-123s were officially based at Vientiane and assigned to the same contract which was a USAID contract in 1971 and an Air Force contract in 1973. Most of the time, however, they picked up their cargo at Udom. Perhaps the most important missions flown by Air America's C-123s were fuel runs: Fuel drums were put onto pallets and parachuted over the drop zone. But C-123s were also used to fly weapons and ammunition. Even the rockets and bombs used by the RLAF were mostly brought to the T-28s by Air America C-123s. Former Air America kicker John Kirkley (*Air America: a daily adventure on Friday, May 2, 1969*) describes the role of Udom as follows: "Here we worked out of AB-1 or *Pepper Grinder*. AB-1 was where we loaded humanitarian supplies i.e., live pigs, chickens, water buffaloes, white rice and passengers. *Pepper Grinder* was where we loaded 'hard rice' e.g. ammunition, howitzer shells, rockets and bombs, as well as 55-gallon drums of aviation gas going to up country Laos. Today's 10,000 pound load of 250 lb. bombs and 50 caliber ammunition would be re-supplying the T-28s flying out of Long Tieng, Laos, aka, Lima Site 20 Alternate (LS-20A)." And C-123s were used as troop carriers: While in their normal configuration, Air America C-123s could carry up to 20 or 21 passengers plus cargo, an additional 38 centerline seats could be installed when necessary (Aircraft and avionics information as of 1 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14). Those flights could involve troop movements within Laos as well as movements between locations in Laos and training camps in Thailand. Those extra seats were also needed when Air America C-123s were used on evacuation flights. This happened for example in early 1970 when 3 Air America C-123s equipped with 50 seats each and 3 Caribous evacuated 5,627 refugees from Moug Soui to Ban Xon (*Air America Log*, vol. IV, no. 2, 1970, pp. 4-5). Finally, in 1973, all remaining C-123Ks were given to the Royal Laotian Air Force and painted in RLAF colors, but during the first half of that year, a number of them was used out of Udom in a flight training program for Laotian pilots. A last category of C-123s flown for Air America should not be forgotten: Since 1965, China Air Lines operated certain flights for Air America in South Vietnam, using, among others, 2 C-123s at the same time. Initially, these aircraft, which were bailed from the USAF, carried Air America-style three digit serials, but in 1968, the system was changed to ST-serials of no obvious meaning. They were under operational and contractual control of the CIA (Harnage, *A thousand faces*, p. 82). In part, they were used on USAID missions like rice drops to Cambodia, and those support missions to Cambodia were even an essential part of their tasks. But their camouflage and their strange serials make believe that they were also operated for military purposes. It is known, for example, that those China Air C-123s also



## AIR AMERICA: CURTISS C-46s

### **The types of missions flown by Air America's C-46s:**

Like the C-47, the C-46 was one of the types of aircraft Air America had inherited from CAT Inc. in March 59, but in larger numbers. At that time, much of Air America's operations was still concentrated in Japan and in the Republic of China. All that changed in 1960: Already in the fall of that year, a number of Air America C-46s had been transferred to Central America to fly arms and supplies to anti-Castro guerillas in Cuba, but most of them returned the following year. At about the same time it became evident that Communist support to Neutralist and Pathet Lao forces in Laos made it necessary to strengthen the pro-Western forces in that country. So in the fall of 1960, an endless stream of Air America C-46s moved thousands of tons of arms and supplies from the secret base at Takhli (T-05) in Thailand to General Phoumi Nosavan at Savannakhet. In January 61 Vang Pao was added to the CIA's list of receivers, and since that time, some of the supplies flown out of Takhli were delivered to a drop zone near Vang Pao's headquarters at Pa Doung in Laos (Trest, *Air Commando One*, pp. 109 and 116). Such numerous air drops were possible because Air America had inherited from CAT an agreement with the Civil Aviation Administration of Taiwan which went back to the early fifties. No less than 7 CAA-owned C-46Fs were leased to Air America to supplement their own aircraft. When CAA-owned C-46 B-130 was lost in November 1960, it was even replaced by another CAA-owned C-46: B-156.

Although Air America C-46s continued to fly in other theaters as well - two of them were used out of Japan to deliver the *Stars and Stripes* to Korea in the early sixties; two of them were used by *Scheduled Air Services Ryukyus* out of Naha, Okinawa between 1964 and 1967; one to two of them were used on CAT domestic flights until 1968; and two of them were apparently destined for another use against Cuba, but eventually flew for the *Aviation Research Center* of India (Conboy/Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, p. 191) -, South East Asia became the center of Air America's C-46 activities. In Laos C-46s were used for all types of air drops, especially to drop palletized rice and salt, but also other types of supplies and even arms and ammunition were flown in by C-46s. C-46s could also be used to transport troops and refugees, as the 39 standard seats of nearly all of Air America's C-46s could be upgraded to 68 high density and centerline seats (Aircraft and avionics information as of 1 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14). Two C-46s should particularly be mentioned: XW-PBV and XW-PBW. They were former Air America aircraft which had been sold to USAID-Laos in 1963 and then to the Royal Lao Government in 1964, who leased them first to Bird & Sons and their successor Continental Air Services and then in 1969 to Air America, who transferred them to Royal Air Lao in December 73. Because of their Laotian ownership, they always carried an Erawan on the fuselage that is the symbol of the Kingdom of Laos consisting of three white elephants in a red circle. In South Vietnam Air America's C-46s flew the usual mix of passengers and supplies for both USAID and military customers, except for some scheduled services like the one linking Saigon and Danang. Although USAID was officially the main contractor to Air America in South Vietnam, all CIA missions in South Vietnam were flown as part of the USAID contracts, and within those contracts, all CIA requirements were handled with priority. Since 1965, Air America's services in South Vietnam were also supplemented by some C-46s owned and operated by China Airlines, whose aircraft adopted strange serials like CA-1 or EM-2 when they flew for Air America: The reason is evident: They were under operational and contractual control of the CIA (Harnage, *A thousand faces*, pp. 81/2), and they were also used on secret missions for the *Studies and Observations Group* (see the photo in: Plaster, *SOG*, p. 72). Already in the early sixties, Air America was involved in secret flying in South Vietnam - not as a transport company, however, but with maintenance, as they supported the C-46s of VIAT, the front



## AIR AMERICA: LOCKHEED C-130 HERCULES

### Air America crews flew the following types of C-130 operations:

#### I) The Tibetan airlift:

Since October 57, Tibetan guerillas were supported by CAT aircraft. At first by a B-17, then by a "sanitized" C-118A bailed from the USAF. From July 1959<sup>1</sup> to May 1960, "sanitized" USAF C-130As belonging to the 483rd Troop Carrier Wing of Naha Air Base, Okinawa, which was part of the 315th Air Division, and flown by "quarantined" Air America crews, continued these airdrops into Tibet from Takhli, Thailand. For each mission, one to three USAF C-130A were flown from Naha to Kadena, Okinawa. There they were loaded by CIA people and then flown to Takhli by Air America crews, where they were "sanitized", i.e. stripped of all military markings to make them non-attributable. Then they were flown from Takhli across Burma to Tibet by "quarantined" Air America crews, using letters like "Able flight" or "Baker flight" as call-signs, made their drops (cargo and guerillas), returned to Takhli, and were then given back to the USAF at Naha. Such drops were flown on 18 September 59 (1 C-130A), in the second week of November 59 (1 C-130A), mid-December 59 (1 C-130A), mid-January 60 (1 C-130A), mid-February 60 (1 C-130A), mid-March 60 (2 C-130As), mid-April 60 (2 C-130As), and on two consecutive nights at the end of April 60 (2 times 3 C-130As)<sup>2</sup>. These airdrops ceased in May 60, after the CIA pilot Francis Gary Powers had been shot down on 1 May 60. Reportedly, between November 1959 and May 1960, some 35 to 40 missions had delivered almost 400 tons of cargo to resistance fighters of Tibet<sup>3</sup>. The airdrops were resumed on 31 March 1961 under the Kennedy administration, with known missions on 31 March 61 (1 C-130A), 2 April 61 to Mustang in Nepal (2 C-130As), and mid-December 61 to Mustang (2 C-130As)<sup>4</sup>, but the airdrop missions probably continued to about mid-1962<sup>5</sup>. The C-130As used on the Tibetan airlift belonged to the 21st Troop Carrier Squadron<sup>6</sup>, possibly including those of the E-Flight detachment, which were also based at Naha and temporarily at Takhli. Since 1962 the Tibetan program was slowly reorganized as to include the cooperation of India, so that Air Ventures Inc., the CIA's outfit which had been set up in Nepal in the fall of 1963, did not have to be used for covert supply drops. For since that time the C-46s and Helio Couriers of the Indian ARC or Aviation Research Center of Charbatia Air Base, India, were responsible for supporting the Tibetan resistance. According to the information contained in the official USAF Assignment Records, preserved at the AFHRA at Maxwell AFB, AL, the following C-130As belonged to the 483TCW, Naha, between July 1959 and May 1960, and were probably all used in the Tibetan airlift at one time or another:

#### C-130As used for the Tibetan airlift between July 1959 and May 1960:

<sup>1</sup> Leary, *Secret mission to Tibet*, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Conboy/Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp. 110-33.

<sup>3</sup> Leary, *Secret mission to Tibet*, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> Conboy/Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp. 140/1, 158-64.

<sup>5</sup> Fax dated 29 May 2000, sent by Brigadier General Aderholt to the author.

<sup>6</sup> Trest, *Air Commando One*, p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> Robbins, *Air America*, pp. 90-98; Leary, *Secret mission to Tibet*, pp. 62-71; Trest, *Air Commando One*, pp. 75-98; Bowers, *The USAF in South-East Asia*, pp. 448/9; Conboy/Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp. 171-207.



## AIR AMERICA: HUGHES 500s:

### The types of missions flown by Air America's Hughes 500s:

Most official Air America papers like the Flight Operations Circulars speak of only two Air America Hughes 500s (N353X and N354X), and those aircraft were operated out of Udon on medivac and communications missions into Laos and could carry 3 passengers (Aircraft and avionics information as of 1 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14). But those two aircraft only served as cover for two others - the "Quiet Ones" - , which were used for a secret wiretap mission into North Vietnam and whose complete identities appear only in one Air America paper hidden among others preserved at the Air America Archives: in a letter dated 15 June 73, by which Air America's Senior Vice President Clyde S. Carter asked the FAA to note a change of ownership for those two Hughes 500Ps. As their conversion to Hughes 500Ps is not mentioned, they may have become regular Hughes 500s again at that time. Those documents also reveal that from the very beginning, the two regular Hughes 500s had only one purpose - to be used as cover for the Hughes 500Ps, as all four aircraft were registered on the same day in April 71, although the regular ones came to Laos only about one year later.

### Statistics according to official Air America documents:

- Inventories of 31 March 72 > 30 November 72 (in: UTD/CIA/B1F10): 2 > 2

### The individual aircraft histories:

Type	registration / serial	c/n (msn)	date acquired	origin
Hughes 369HS	N351X	900257S	July 71	bought new

**Service history:** regd. on 15 July 71 (Letter by Clyde S. Carter dated 15 June 73, in: UTD/CIA/B15F5); not listed in the Flight Operations Circular of 15 July 71 (in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B); not covered with Aircraft Public Liability, Property Damage Liability and Passenger Liability Insurance in July 71 (Air America Aircraft Insurances as of 15 July 71 / Memorandum dated 19 July 71, in: UTD/Herd/B2); believed converted to Hughes 500P ("The Quiet One") in the USA between July and October 71 for a communications-intercept project called "Main Street"; directly controlled by Washington in September 71 (Memorandum of 29 September 71, p. 6, in: UTD/CIA/B19F8); ferried to Air Asia's base at Tainan about October 71 and used there until the spring of 1972 to train 6 senior officers from the 34th Squadron of the Republic of China Air Force for a wiretap mission into North Vietnam (Conboy/Morrison, *The quiet one*, p. 46); the project "Main Street", employing Messrs. Smith and Lamothe as special pilots, ended on 31 December 71 (Memorandum of 30 September 71, p. 4, in: UTD/CIA/B19F8); not listed as maintained by Air America, Udon, on 1 April 72 (List of assigned / maintained aircraft as of 1 April 72, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2); loaded into an Air America C-130 and flown to Takhli (T-05) about June 72; flown to PS 44 in June 72 for a wiretap mission into North Vietnam; used by Taiwanese crewmen from the RoCAF's 34th Squadron to practice night missions near PS 44 until early September 72, when the Taiwanese were sent home; then, Air America crews were trained to fly to Vinh in North Vietnam and to tap the telephone line; after several failures, that mission was successfully completed in the night of 6 to 7 December 72 (Conboy / Morrison, *The quiet one*, pp. 46-49). The 2 Hughes 500Ps had been painted

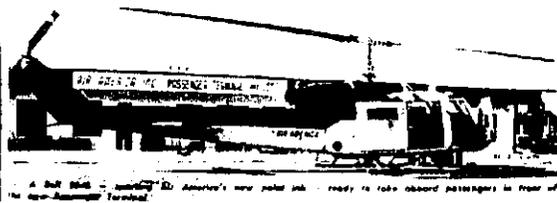
## AIR AMERICA: BELL 204B

### The types of missions flown by Air America's Bell 204Bs:

The main area of activity for Air America's Bell 204Bs was South Vietnam where they worked under the provisions of both military and USAID contracts. Although USAID was officially the main contractor to Air America in South Vietnam, all CIA missions in South Vietnam were flown as part of the USAID contracts. Within those contracts, all CIA requirements were handled with priority (Harnage, *A thousand faces*, pp. 81/2). This work included communication flights, especially to small mountain villages and islands, and the evacuation of wounded soldiers especially from the Mekong Delta zone, but also construction work, medical and veterinary services, and the transportation of live animals. Sometimes, Saigon's Air America Bell 204Bs supported US Navy SEALs in underwater demolition work, inserted agents into enemy-held territory, or helped evacuating the victims of monsoon floods (Harnage, *A thousand faces*, pp. 14/5, and 67/8). In April 1966, two additional Bell 204Bs were leased and later bought for operations out of Bangkok and Chiang Mai under USAID contracts. Only in 1969, a number of Bell 204Bs was transferred to Udon to be used especially on contract USAID-439-713, which also covered the CIA's Hmong program. But the glorious days of Air America's Bell 204Bs were, of course, the final days of April 1975, when they participated in the heroic evacuation of Saigon.



Bell 204B over South Vietnam in 1967  
displaying the old color scheme  
(*Air America Log*, vol. II, no. 2, 1968, p. 1)



Bell 204B N1307X at Saigon in March 68  
displaying the new color scheme  
(*Air America Log*, vol. II, no. 3, 1968, p. 1)

### Statistics according to official Air America documents:

**Feb. 1966:** Inventory of 1 Feb. 66, in: UTD/Herd/B2: 5 plus 7 planned

**Sept. 1967:** 10 Bell 204Bs operated out of Saigon, 1 operated out of Udon, 1 operated out of Chiang Mai (Minutes ExCom-AAAL/AAM of 3 October 67, in: UTD/CIA/B8F2)

- Inventories of 31 March 72 > 30 November 72 (UTD/CIA/B1F10): 10 > 10

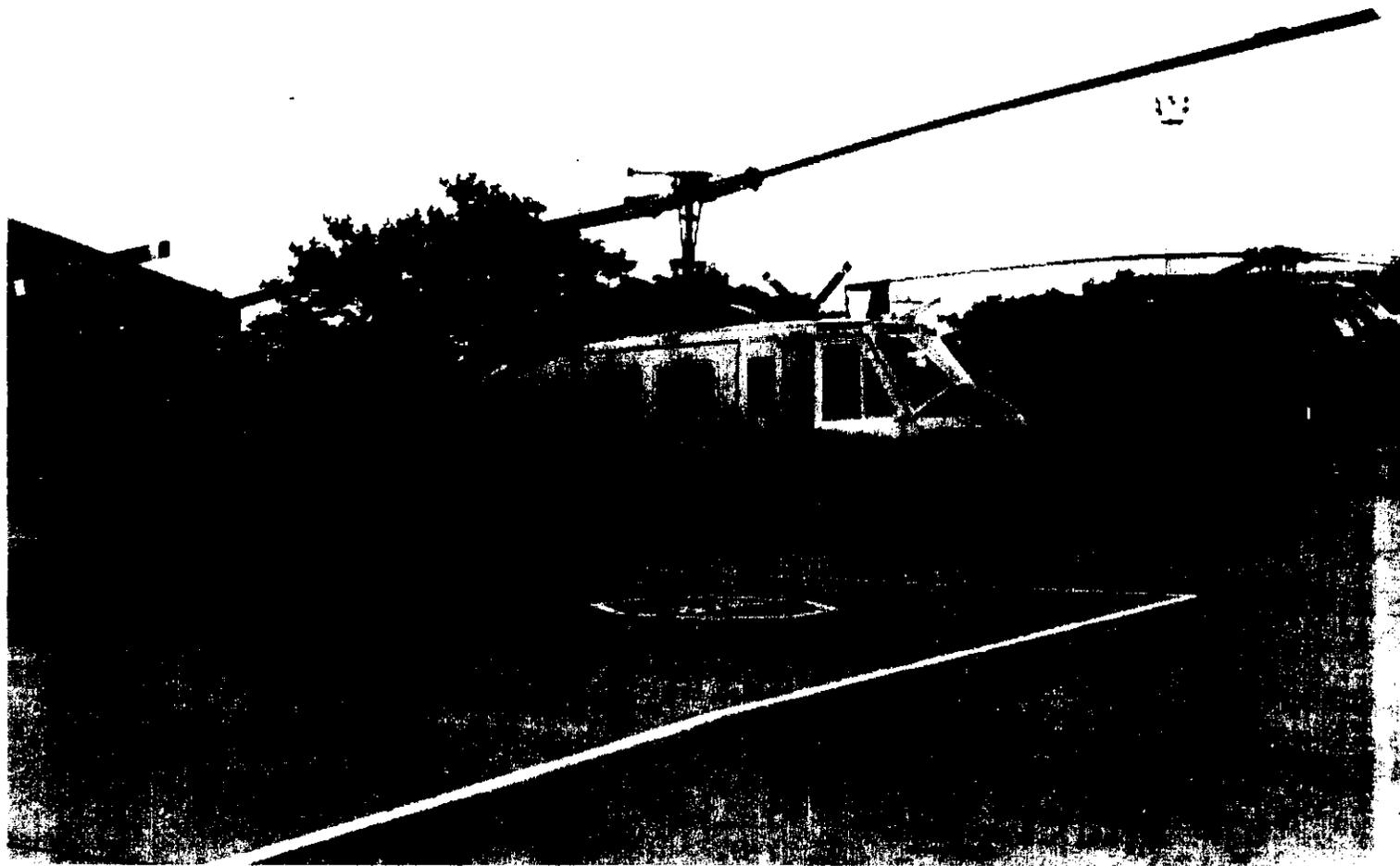
## AIR AMERICA: BELL 205 / UH-1D and UH-1H

### **The types of missions flown by Air America's Bell 205s and UH-1Hs:**

Air America's five Bell 205s were all flown in Laos and mostly for the AID-439-713 customer, that is for the CIA's Hmong program. They could carry 12 passengers or cargo, had seat armor, and a hoist and inertia reels could be installed (Aircraft and avionics information as of 1 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14). They were used to carry Hmong troops from one point to another within a battle ("leap frog" technique), but also to supply isolated outposts and gun positions with all types of goods including arms. They also flew some sort of postal service to isolated villages and participated in evacuations. After the remaining three aircraft had been flown to Saigon in the spring of 1974, they remained idle at Tan Son Nhut, until they received US registry in April 75 in order to be able to participate in the evacuation of Saigon. But only one of them made it to the US ships waiting to take the aircraft home. - Little is known about the 6 US Army UH-1Ds used by Air America in the spring of 1971, except that they seem to have been used in a similar way under contract F04606-71-C-0002. - The sole UH-1H operated in 1971 seems to have been used at Tainan in order to train Republic of China Air Force people and to prepare them for a wiretap mission to be flown into North Vietnam. - Finally, the more than 30 UH-1Hs delivered to Air America in 1973 were all able to transport 10 passengers or cargo, and were equipped with armor, inertia reels and a cargo hook (Aircraft and avionics information as of 1 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14). But they had two different missions: The smaller part of them was assigned to contract AID/VN-100, flying all sorts of supplies to isolated villages in South Vietnam, but also into besieged positions in Cambodia. Although USAID was officially an important contractor to Air America in South Vietnam, all CIA missions in South Vietnam were flown as part of the USAID contracts, and within those contracts, all CIA requirements were handled with priority (Harnage, *A thousand faces*, pp. 81/2). The greater number of those helicopters - 22 UH-1Hs in the beginning - was assigned to contract ICCS-73-008, that is to *ICCS Air Services*, as the air operations of the *International Commission of Control and Supervision* was called. These aircraft had to fly around members of the commission who had to supervise the observance paid by all sides to the Peace Agreement. The aircraft were painted in their normal Air America colors, but had three large yellow stripes around the fuselage, and instead of Air America titles, they carried a large ICCS sign. In the eyes of many Air America people, however, the inefficiency of that commission soon changed the meaning of the abbreviation. For them, ICCS became to mean: "I can't control shit". That inefficiency may have been the reason why since 1974, more and more UH-1Hs were returned to normal Air America service. And in the last days of April 75, it were those UH-1Hs that carried out most of Air America's evacuation work from 13 designated points in Saigon to the U. S. Embassy roof top in downtown Saigon and to the Defense Attaché Office at Tan Son Nhut airport and then to the 7th US fleet waiting in neutral waters outside South Vietnam. And the famous photo showing a helicopter on top of the Pittman Building at Saigon on 29 April 75, with CIA agent Oren B. Harnage helping people standing on a ladder to enter the evacuation helicopter, depicts one of Air America's Bell 205s formerly flown in Laos: N47004 (Letter by Robert Caron, in: *Air America Log*, vol. XVII, no. 2, April-June 2000, p. 14; Harnage, *A thousand faces*, pp. 145-60).

### **Statistics according to official Air America documents:**

- Inventories of 31 March 72 > 30 November 72 (UTD/CIA/B1F10): 3 > 3



## AIR AMERICA: HELIO H-395 SUPER COURIERS

### **The types of missions flown by Air America's Helio Couriers:**

The Helio Courier was an aircraft designed for undeveloped terrain. Air America's first Helio was introduced to Laos in January 59, but as pilots did not like the aircraft, it sat idle at Vientiane airport until February 1960. At that time, USAF Major Aderholt convinced Air America crews that the Helio could land at places where most other aircraft had difficulties to land, and after dozens of short and tricky mountaintop landing sites ("Lima Sites," at that time still called "Victor Sites") had been carved out of the terrain with primitive methods, the Helio became one of Air America's work horses in Laos. Over the next couple of years, the number of those small mountaintop airstrips grew to about 450, and with them grew the number of Helios used by Air America for a variety of missions. These missions ranged from communication to flying around CIA case officers or ARMA people, recruiting soldiers for the Hmong army, transporting medical doctors and medicine, dropping small supplies, inserting and picking up spies and agents in enemy territory, and so on. Nearly all of Air America's Helios were acquired by Air Asia and given Taiwanese (B-) registrations from B-833 onwards. But when Laos and Taiwan broke off diplomatic relations in mid-1962, the B-prefix was simply painted over so that the aircraft continued to fly with their old numbers which, without that B-prefix, looked like military serials. This solution proved to be very practical, as Chinese registered Helio H-395s were allowed to be operated at a special gross weight 350 lbs. above the US FAA-certified maximum of 3000 lbs. under special restrictions (Minutes ExCom-AAAL of 11 December 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1), and in 1963, the maximum gross take-off weight of all of Air America's Chinese-registered Helios was approved by the Civil Aviation Administration of Taiwan to be increased from 3000 pounds to 3350 pounds (Minutes of ExCom-AAAL/AAM of 27 August 63, in: UTD/CIA/B7/F2).

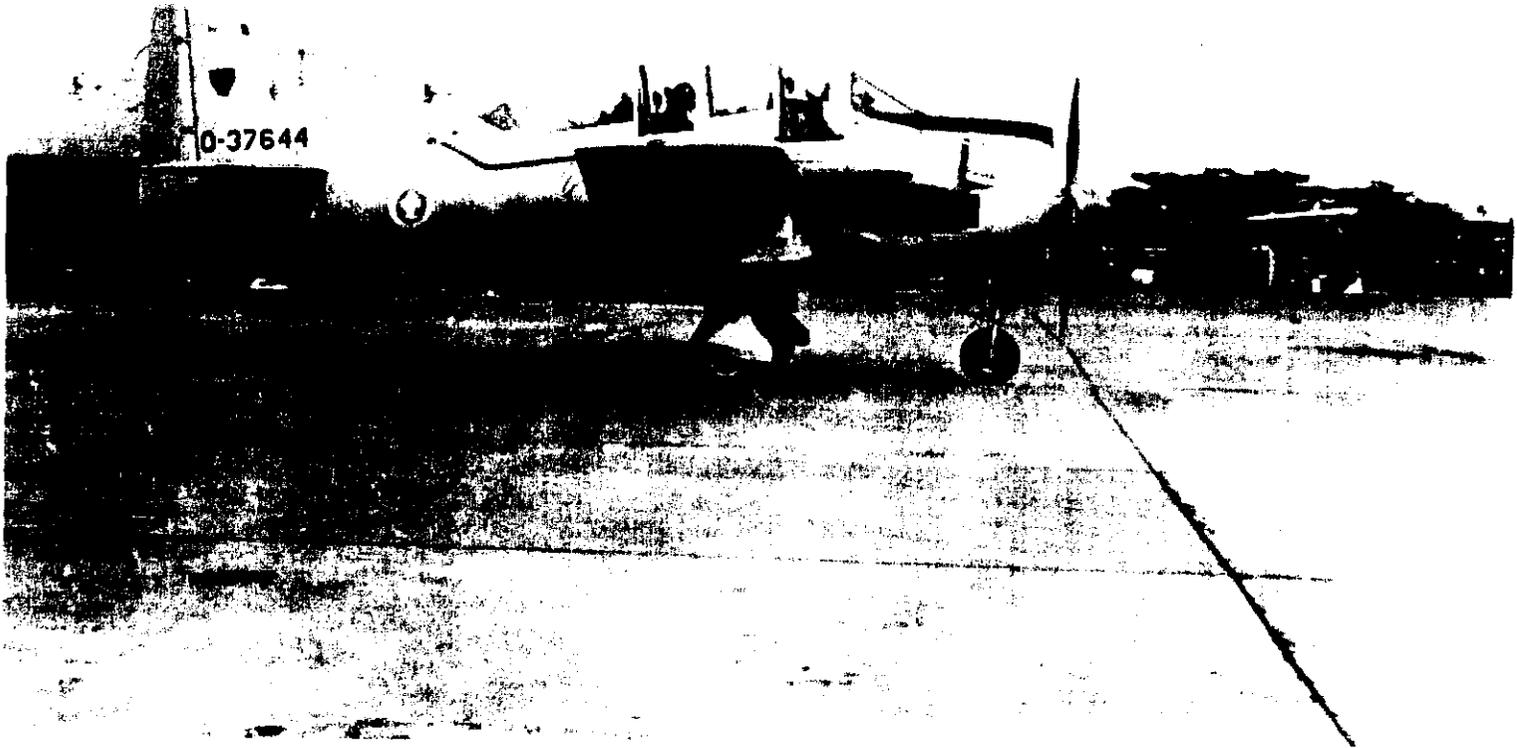
Already in 1962, the need for more Helios was so great that some aircraft were leased from VIAT (Vietnamese Air Transport), the CIA's outfit in South Vietnam (Conboy / Andradé, *Spies and commandos*, pp. 33-44), and those aircraft used their manufacturer's serial numbers as serials - like "531". At that time Air America also supported VIAT's other Helios - like XV-NAE - which were operated in South Vietnam on clandestine missions. The demand grew and grew until the mid-sixties, when Air America took over several Helios from VIAT, which had gone out of business in 1964. By that time Air America could operate openly in South Vietnam. One year later, the US Army loaned three Helios to Air America, and it seems that on several occasions, additional Helios from the USAF's 56th Air Commando Wing of Nakhon Phanom were used for special missions. Starting in 1964 many of Air America's Helios were given XW-registrations and some of them even received an Erawan painted on the fin, apparently to underline their Laotian nationality although, in reality, their ownership had only passed from Air Asia to Air America. Helios flown in South Vietnam, however, retained their B-prefix although some of Air America's Helios also used their XW-registrations in South Vietnam. The first two Air America Helios to be operated in South Vietnam were B-875 and B-877 acquired from VIAT in 1964 and 1965 and assigned to a USAF contract, but their career in South Vietnam was short-lived; only in late 1966 and early 1967 a total of 9 Helios was transferred to Saigon for use under USAID and military contracts, probably mainly for communications duties. By 1969 most of them had been put into storage. And on 12 March 74, all remaining Air America Helios were sold to Aviation Associates of Manila.



## AIR AMERICA: NORTH AMERICAN T-28s

### I) A little bit of History:

In August 63 the US Government gave the Royal Government of Laos 6 T-28s and provided a USAF Mobile Training Team (MMT) for initial instruction and maintenance at Wattay (Castle, *At war*, p. 65). In a message from the US State Dept to Ambassador Unger dated 26 October 63, the US allowed the T-28s to be used to attempt intercept and down any North Vietnamese illegal supply flights, but did not allow the T-28s to drop bombs for cratering Route 7, because it would have been a violation of the Geneva Agreements. Two versions were sent to Laos: the reconnaissance RT-28 and the attack T-28D (Castle, *At war*, p. 65, and p. 162, notes 12 and 13). But as there were not enough pilots, on 6 December 63 CINCPAC recommended a detachment of the 1st Air Commando Wing, Eglin AFB, FL, to be deployed to Udon to help the RLAF. On 13 March 64, 38 USAF officers and soldiers of Detachment 6, 1st Air Commando Wing - code-named *Water Pump*, commanded by Major Drexel B. Cochran, departed Hulbert, arriving at Saigon in mid-March. Half of them assembled 4 crated T-28s, the others flew to Udon, where the detachment established a T-28 maintenance facility using Air America equipment, and immediately began a T-28 ground-and-flight school for Thai and Lao pilots (Castle, *At war*, p. 66 / Trest, *Air Commando One*, p. 140). By mid-May 64, additional T-28s arrived from South Vietnam, former MACV aircraft which had been phased out. Now, more than a dozen graduates flew daily bombing and reconnaissance missions over Laos. The American flyers - mostly Air America pilots - were called the "A Team", the Thai flyers were the "B Team", and the Lao were the "C Team". To coordinate their activity, the State Dept. established a primary Air Operations Center (AOC) at Wattay and a secondary AOC at RLAF headquarters at Savannakhet (Castle, *At war*, p. 66). The original Air America pilots who joined the program in May 64 were: Rick Byrne, Ed Eckholdt, Joe Hazen, Tom Jenny, and John Wiren, and later Don Romes; all had prior experience in the T-28 and close air support training. "On acceptance, we were asked to resign from Air America Inc., our personal records were sanitized in the event we were shot down and captured. We would then be classified as mercenaries for the Royal Laotian Air Force to protect the US government from violating the Geneva Accord Agreement. The rationale for this program was that there was evidence of a big enemy build-up massing to come down highway 47 from North Vietnam to gain as much territory as possible before the monsoon season. The road needed to be cut and the bridges to be destroyed to halt the advance, but the Laotians just did not have the experience at that time to do the job." (Wiren, *Tango*, p. 5). "The aircraft we used were based and maintained at Udon, Thailand. The normal routine was to depart Udon and fly to Vientiane, where ordnance was put on the aircraft by US Air Force personnel dressed as civilians. We were given our mission assignment from the Embassy, that came through Air America Flight Information Control (FIC). At that time, General Ma kept a few T-28s there, but the main base was in Savannakhet" (John Wiren, e-mail dated 20 July 2001, sent to the author). Since June 64, B-Team and since August 64, A-Team T-28s were sent to fly cover to rescue downed American airmen (Castle, *At war*, pp. 70 and 76). This was the main activity of A-Team pilots, while B-Team and C-Team pilots primarily flew attack missions against trucks and other slow vehicles on the ground as well as strategic targets like enemy gun positions or bridges. More Air America pilots - like Allen W. Rich - were employed over the years, and more T-28s were acquired - already by the end of June 64, the RLAF had 33 T-28s (Leary, *Outline - Air America in Laos*, 1964, p. 7).



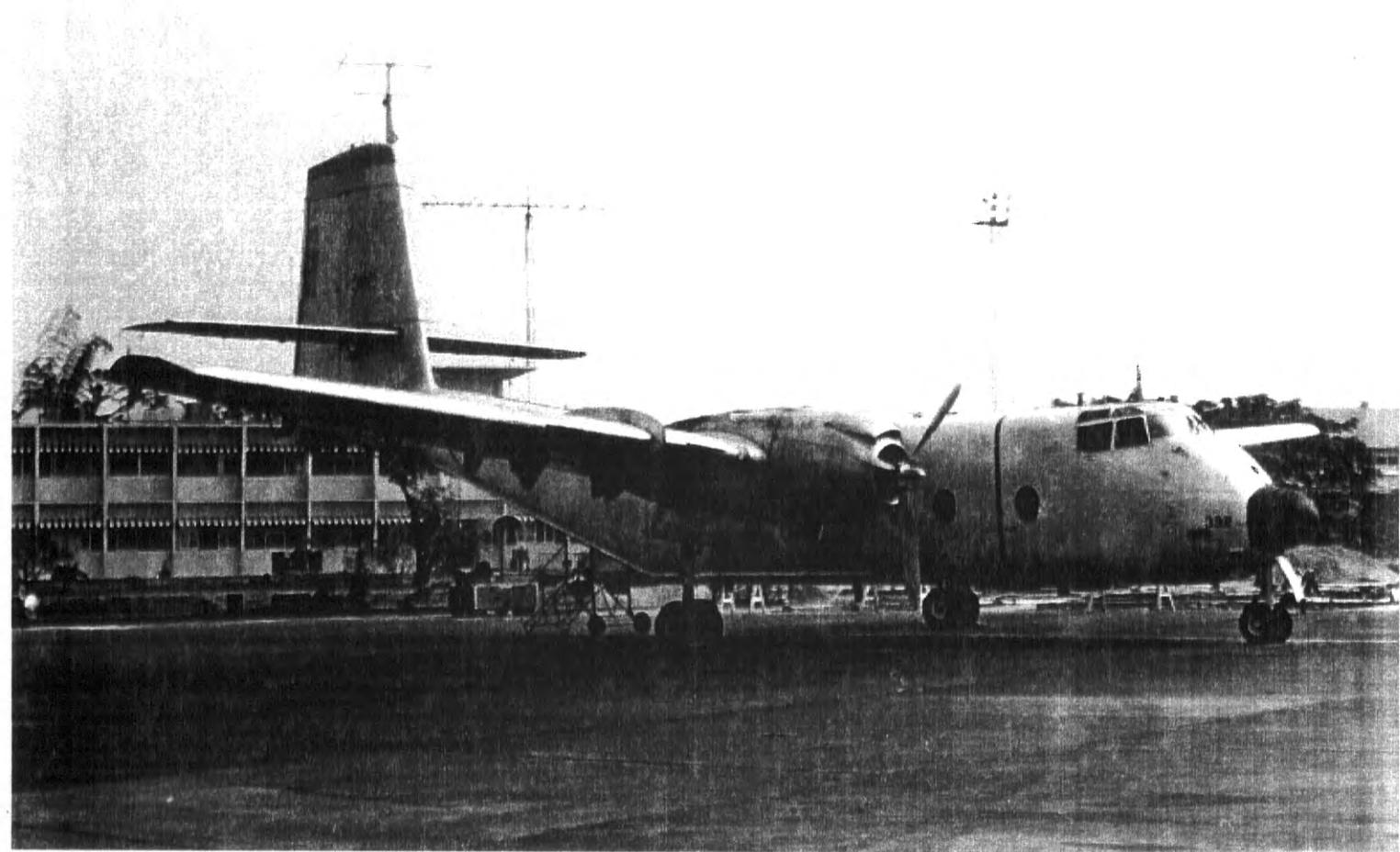
## **AIR AMERICA: DE HAVILLAND CANADA DHC-4 / C-7A CARIBOUs**

### **The types of missions flown by Air America's Caribous:**

The story of Air America's Caribous begins even before their own first two aircraft arrived in July 62, because already some months earlier, on 12 May 62, Air America pilot Fred Walker had successfully landed a bailed US Army Caribou ("333") on the newly constructed airfield of Long Tieng (Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic mountains*, p. 118). The first of Air America's own Caribous (B-851) served in Laos for many years. At least since 1965, however, it was actually based at Udorn as a special mission aircraft for rescue and exfiltration work, to which a Fulton Skyhook system could be attached. In the early years this aircraft was also used to transport small Air America aircraft like Helio Couriers which had had an accident: In such a case, the wings of the Helio were separated and then put into the Caribou together with the fuselage. Only in the early seventies B-851 was transferred to Saigon where it obtained the registration N11014 and was finally used in South Vietnam to supply Air America's own fleet of aircraft with fuel. Air America's second Caribou (B-853) was quickly considered to be inadequate for service in Laos, although reverse props had been installed in both aircraft by 1963. After some years of work with the Royal Thai Border Police out of Bangkok, it was leased to the USAF in August 68 until it was sold in 1973. The other two Caribous owned by Air America, N539Y and N544Y, were based at Saigon nearly all the time and used under a variety of military and USAID contracts, delivering all sorts of supplies as all Air America aircraft did in South Vietnam. Because of their STOL capabilities, however, those Caribous were often used on flights to the Montagnard population living in the hill country. Although USAID was officially the main contractor to Air America in South Vietnam, all CIA missions in South Vietnam were flown as part of the USAID contracts, and within those contracts, all CIA requirements were handled with priority (Harnage, *A thousand faces*, pp. 81/2). The majority of Caribous operated by Air America, however, were bailed aircraft, which used the last three digits of their military serial as Air America serial. Since 1964 Air America operated at least four of them in Laos which were bailed from the US Army. Although they delivered and dropped all sorts of supplies, they were specialized in landing fuel drums on small mountain airstrips in Laos. In the early years those Caribous were painted Army brown and did not have a radom. But when all US Army Caribous were transferred to the USAF in 1967, their colors equally changed. Since that time, all Caribous bailed from the USAF were all silver - except for "762", which was camouflaged. Later Air America titles and a radom were added. Those USAF Caribous on loan to Air America never left Laos, however, so that the last of them returned to the USAF in June 74. As to the Caribous remaining in South Vietnam at the end, N539Y even flew for *ICCS Air Services* in 1973, and N11014 did not make it home. It had to be abandoned at Con Son Island on 29 April 75. A final acquisition in exchange for other aircraft, Caribou N6080, never joined the theater in South East Asia.

### **Statistics according to Air America documents:**

- 1) **1964:** + 5 (= "149", "392", "393", "401" and "404") (Minutes BoD-AAM 21 July 64, in: UTD/CIA/B3F5) >
- 2) **1965:** the purchase of 2 "Skyhook" installations for Caribous was approved on 25 May 65; it takes about 30 days to install them (Minutes ExCom-AAAC/AAM of 25 May 65, in: UTD/CIA/B7F4)
- 3) **1966:** Inventory of 1 Feb. 66, in: UTD/Herd/B2: 4 owned + 5 bailed + 2 more planned



# PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Air America: The U. S. Government's Secret Air Force

**Tulsa, Oklahoma. January 19, 2006.** The United States government owned a secret air force for 25 years, according to a recent announcement by Judy Porter, General Secretary for the Air America Association, the unofficial voice for former employees. Porter stated in an interview today that a U.S. Air Force review board has given the green light to reconsideration of a request for veteran status.

According to Porter, the U.S. government needed a hidden air force that could conduct military operations in parts of Asia during the Cold War from 1950 to 1975. Because of trade and treaty considerations, public display by the U.S. military was not an option. So the administration secretly formed a corporation and made arrangements for U.S. military aircraft to be loaned to what they hoped the public would view as a commercial enterprise with civilians as employees. This organization began as CAT, Inc., and later became known as Air America. The CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) fronted the operation because some missions were required by circumstance to be clandestine in nature.

The Air America Association agreed to support a mission to gain veteran status. Porter, now widowed, was the wife of Jack Porter, who was a maintenance supervisor in Udorn, Thailand. She is also a professional photographer and her excellent work done in the late sixties was used extensively in the original application. She claims that Air America flight crews and personnel have been the victims of a negative image fostered by the government as part of a CIA cover. Porter believes it is time to set the record straight and that the public should be told the truth.

The Association asked the CIA for assistance with its application for veteran status, but was given the cold shoulder, according to Allen E. Cates, past president of the Air America Association. So he and his colleagues crafted the application on their own after two years of extensive research. The application was approved for review, but the Civilian/Military Service Review Board (C/MSRB) turned it down and reported their reasons in the October 18, 2005 issue of the **Federal Register**.

The Air America Association was urged by the C/MSRB to apply for reconsideration due to new evidence with potential support for their claim. The Board suggested that they review a biography of Brigadier General H. C. Aderholt, who worked with Air America in Laos during the 1960's, called **Air Commando One**, by Warren A. Trest, and **Search and Rescue Operations in Southeast Asia**, a U.S. Air Force report by Earl H. Tilford.

Cates said that after reviewing those sources plus other materials available through the Vietnam Project at Texas Tech University, and interviewing individuals present at the time, they realized that Air America came under a third layer of ownership and control. Telegrams exchanged in the 1960's between Department of State, Department of Defense, the Ambassador to Laos and the President of the United States indicate that the Executive Branch of the U.S. government created CAT/Air America. Additional resources used by Cates and his colleagues included the Johnson Library and Department of State Central Files.

Cates says the written record shows that CAT, Inc. and Air America employees were used by the United States government as part of its grand plan to stifle the flow of communism from 1950 to 1975. This plan was successful as attested by the fact that communist aggression came virtually to a standstill after 1975.

The publications by Trest and Tilford that were recommended by the board and other documentation discovered in the course of research indicate that Air America forces were instrumental in saving the lives of many downed airmen in Laos during the Vietnam War, and that their contributions in the early stages of the Vietnam conflict gave the military time to put rescue and support operations in place. Air America continued to assist the military throughout the war until the service was shut down in 1975.

Eventually the U. S. government revealed that the CIA owned the airline, but Air America Association research shows direct links to the Executive Branch that bypassed the CIA on many occasions. According to Cates, "It looks like we were soldiers more than most of us realized. The truth is, Air America employees were soldiers doing military work along side the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force."

Porter, Cates and members of Air America's board of directors, are encouraged by the Department of Defense C/MSRB decision to reconsider their application for veteran status. The DoD decision and a request for historical advisories appeared in the **Federal Register** on January 19, 2006, Volume 71, Number 12, pp. 3058-3059.

Contact: Martha Gregory, Tulsa, OK. 918-637-3699

###



**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE**  
**WASHINGTON, DC**

Office of the Assistant Secretary

September 29, 2005

DoD C/MSRB  
SAF Personnel Council  
1535 Command Dr., EE Wing, 3rd Fl.  
Andrews AFB, MD 20762-7002

Mr. Allen Cates  
501 Harwell Dr.  
Lafayette, LA 70503

Dear Mr. Cates

On September 26, 2005, the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force announced the decision concerning your application on behalf of the group known as the,

**“The U.S. and Foreign Civilian Employees of CAT, Inc., Who Were Flight Crew Personnel (U.S. Pilots, Co-Pilots, Navigators, Flight Mechanics, and Air Freight Specialists) and Aviation Ground Support Personnel (U.S. Maintenance Supervisors, Operations Managers, and Flight Information Center Personnel) and Conducted Paramilitary Operations in Korea, French Indochina, Tibet and Indonesia From 1950 Through 1959; and U.S. and Foreign Civilian Employees of Air America Who Were Flight Crew Personnel and Ground Support Personnel, as Described, and Conducted Paramilitary Operations in Laos from 1961 Through 1974, When the War in Laos Ended; and U.S. and Foreign Civilian Employees of Air America Who Were Flight Crew Personnel and Ground Support Personnel, as Described, and Conducted Paramilitary Operations in Vietnam From 1964 Through 1975, When Saigon Was Evacuated and Air America Flight Operations Ceased.”**

We regret to inform you that the Secretary determined the service of the group shall not be considered “active duty” for purposes of all laws administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

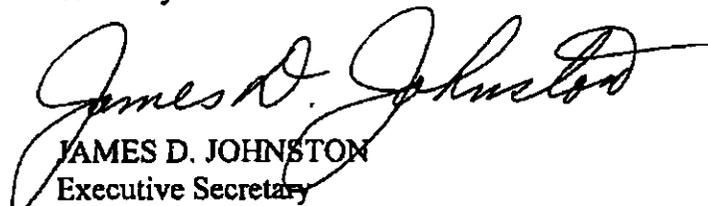
As Department of Defense (DoD) Directive 1000.20 states, the Secretary’s decision is final and cannot be appealed. Nonetheless, if you submit evidence that is new, relevant, and substantive, the DoD Civilian/Military Service Review Board may reconsider the decision.

During consideration of your application the Board and the Secretary were, and remain, fully cognizant of the national effort and sacrifices made by civilians during every period of armed conflict. Nonetheless, while civilian work is a vital element of the national war-fighting capability, civilian work during a period of armed conflict is not necessarily equivalent to active military service. Only those meeting the statutory criteria have been recognized.

The enclosed documents, the Secretarial Decision and the DoD Civilian/Military Service Review Board's recommendation, are for your records. If you have any further questions, you may contact me at (240) 857-5329. As discussed yesterday, call me when you have had time to read the Board's recommendation and the Decision.

As always, we trust this information is helpful.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James D. Johnston". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**JAMES D. JOHNSTON**  
Executive Secretary

**DoD Civilian/Military Service Review Board**  
**SAF Personnel Council**



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
WASHINGTON, DC

Office of the Assistant Secretary

26 SEP 2005

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, FORCE MANAGEMENT  
POLICY  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY (MANPOWER &  
RESERVE AFFAIRS)  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY (MANPOWER &  
RESERVE AFFAIRS)

FROM: SAF/MR  
1660 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20330-1660

SUBJECT: Active Duty Determination Under Public Law 95-202

Under the provisions of Public Law 95-202, and Department of Defense Directive 1000.20, *Active Duty Service Determination for Civilian or Contractual Groups*, the Secretary of the Air Force, acting in accordance with authority delegated by the Secretary of Defense, determined the service of the group known as:

"The U.S. and Foreign Civilian Employees of CAT, Inc., Who Were Flight Crew Personnel (U.S. Pilots, Co-Pilots, Navigators, Flight Mechanics, and Air Freight Specialists) and Aviation Ground Support Personnel (U.S. Maintenance Supervisors, Operations Managers, and Flight Information Center Personnel) and Conducted Paramilitary Operations in Korea, French Indochina, Tibet and Indonesia From 1950 Through 1959; and U.S. and Foreign Civilian Employees of Air America Who Were Flight Crew Personnel and Ground Support Personnel, as Described, and Conducted Paramilitary Operations in Laos from 1961 Through 1974, When the War in Laos Ended; and U.S. and Foreign Civilian Employees of Air America Who Were Flight Crew Personnel and Ground Support Personnel, as Described, and Conducted Paramilitary Operations in Vietnam From 1964 Through 1975, When Saigon Was Evacuated and Air America Flight Operations Ceased."

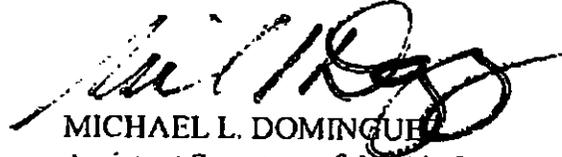
shall not be considered "active duty" for purposes of all laws administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We are enclosing for your information a copy of the Department of Defense Civilian/Military Service Review Board (C/MSRB) recommendation and the Secretary's instrument concerning the group.

**Departmental points of contact are:**

1. OSD--COL Denise Dailey, OASD (FMP) DACOWITS, (703) 697-2122;
2. Army--COL Robert L. House, Army Council of Review Boards, (703) 607-1769;
3. Navy--Capt Clarence (Earl) Carter, DCNO (M&P) (703) 695-1399; and

For additional information contact Mr. James D. Johnston, Executive Secretary, C/MSRB, Secretary of the Air Force Personnel Council, 1535 Command Dr., 3d Fl, EE-Wing, Andrews AFB, MD 20762-7002 or telephone (240) 857-5329 or DSN 857-5329.



**MICHAEL L. DOMINGUE**  
Assistant Secretary of the Air Force  
(Manpower & Reserve Affairs)

**Attachments:**

1. Secretarial instrument, CAT/Air America
2. C/MSRB recommendation, CAT/Air America



**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE**  
WASHINGTON DC

Office of the Assistant Secretary

26 SEP 2005

**ACTION**

of the

**SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE**

In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 95-202 and upon the recommendation of the Department of Defense Civilian/Military Service Review Board, the Secretary of the Air Force, acting as Executive Agent of the Secretary of Defense, determines that the service of the group known as

**"The U.S. and Foreign Civilian Employees of CAT, Inc., Who Were Flight Crew Personnel (U.S. Pilots, Co-Pilots, Navigators, Flight Mechanics, and Air Freight Specialists) and Aviation Ground Support Personnel (U.S. Maintenance Supervisors, Operations Managers, and Flight Information Center Personnel) and Conducted Paramilitary Operations in Korea, French Indochina, Tibet and Indonesia From 1950 Through 1959; and U.S. and Foreign Civilian Employees of Air America Who Were Flight Crew Personnel and Ground Support Personnel, as Described, and Conducted Paramilitary Operations in Laos from 1961 Through 1974, When the War in Laos Ended; and U.S. and Foreign Civilian Employees of Air America Who Were Flight Crew Personnel and Ground Support Personnel, as Described, and Conducted Paramilitary Operations in Vietnam From 1964 Through 1975, When Saigon Was Evacuated and Air America Flight Operations Ceased"**

shall not be considered active duty for purposes of all laws administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This action is taken under the authority delegated by Secretary of the Air Force Order 103.1.

**MICHAEL L. DOMINGUEZ**  
Assistant Secretary  
(Manpower & Reserve Affairs)



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
WASHINGTON, DC

Office of the Assistant Secretary

30 August 2005

MEMORANDUM FOR SAF/C *AMJ 31 Aug 05*  
SAF/MRB *Amelberg 9/21/05*  
SAF/MR *11/2/05 9/25/05*  
IN TURN

FROM: DoD C/MSRB

SUBJECT: Department of Defense Civilian/Military Service Review Board Recommendation  
Concerning an Application from the Employees of Civil Air Transport and Air  
America

This memorandum analyzes the subject application and provides a recommendation concerning whether a civilian group's service should be equated to active military duty for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits. The applicant group is, generally, the aircrews and ground support personnel of Air America and its predecessor, Civil Air Transport (CAT). In this memorandum, we refer to the whole group as "CAT/Air America."

This memorandum will first provide an overview of the statutory and regulatory guidance for making these determinations. Second, it will give an overview of the activities of CAT/Air America. Then, it will review this group's service in light of the criteria for and against equating civilian service with active military service. Finally, it will summarize why the C/MSRB concluded the applicant group did not provide service equivalent to active military service.

As a backdrop to this analysis and recommendation, we offer two regulatory principles for the review of this or any other application before the Department of Defense Civilian/Military Service Review Board (C/MSRB). First, determinations of active military service are "made on the extent to which the group was under the control of the U.S. Armed Forces in support of a military operation or mission during an armed conflict."<sup>1</sup> Second, the burden of proof is on the applicant.<sup>2</sup>

The group's formal title, as announced in the *Federal Register*, is:

"The U.S. and Foreign Civilian Employees of CAT, Inc., Who Were Flight Crew Personnel (U.S. Pilots, Co-Pilots, Navigators, Flight Mechanics, and Air Freight Specialists) and Aviation Ground Support Personnel (U.S. Maintenance Supervisors, Operations Managers, and Flight Information Center Personnel) and Conducted

<sup>1</sup> DoDD 1000.20, *Active Duty Service Determinations for Civilian or Contractual Groups*, September 11, 1989, Para. 4.2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Enclosure 3, Para. E3.1.4.

Paramilitary Operations in Korea, French Indochina, Tibet and Indonesia From 1950 Through 1959; and U.S. and Foreign Civilian Employees of Air America Who Were Flight Crew Personnel and Ground Support Personnel, as Described, and Conducted Paramilitary Operations in Laos from 1961 Through 1974, When the War in Laos Ended; and U.S. and Foreign Civilian Employees of Air America Who Were Flight Crew Personnel and Ground Support Personnel, as Described, and Conducted Paramilitary Operations in Vietnam From 1964 Through 1975, When Saigon Was Evacuated and Air America Flight Operations Ceased."

## I

### Statutory & Regulatory Overview

Public Law (PL) 95-202, "*GI Bill Improvements Act of 1977*," (38 USC 106 Note) and Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 1000.20, "*Active Duty Service Determinations for Civilian or Contractual Groups*" established the process and criteria for making these decisions. The law charged the Secretary of Defense with deciding whether a civilian group's service to the U.S. Armed Forces was equivalent to active military service. The DoD directive, in turn, made the Secretary of the Air Force the Executive Agent of the Secretary of Defense for making these decisions. SAF/OS delegated these determinations to SAF/MR.

DoDD 1000.20 also created a process for the Secretary to make these decisions. Specifically, the directive established the C/MSRB to review and make recommendations concerning applications for "veteran's status." The C/MSRB consisted of representatives from the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Each C/MSRB member received and reviewed a copy of the very extensive case file, involving thousands of pages. The C/MSRB thoroughly considered the case file, discussing it and the issues arising from it for several hours. This memorandum summarizes the case file and the Board's deliberations.

The C/MSRB reviewed the case file using the criteria set out in the statute and the DoD directive. The primary points of reference for the review are the "incidents" of service set out in DoDD 1000.20. The directive segregates the incidents into those favoring and those not favoring recognition. Those favoring recognition are uniqueness of service; military organizational authority over the group; the group's integration into the military organization; the group's subjection to military discipline and to military justice; a prohibition against members of the group joining the U.S. Armed Forces; and the group's receipt of military training and/or achievement of military capability. The incidents of service not favoring recognition are the group's submission to the U.S. Armed Forces for protection; the members of the group being permitted to resign; and prior recognition of the group.

Using the incidents of service as a guide to its deliberations, the C/MSRB determined the service of this group, as set out in the application, failed to establish that the U.S. Armed Forces exerted control over the group as if its members were U.S. military personnel. Section III of this memorandum describes the incidents of service in detail and sets out the Board members' analysis of the evidence as it relates to the criteria.

## II Background to this Group's Activities

Shortly after the end of WWII, General Claire L. Chennault of Flying Tigers fame organized a group of pilots to fly relief supplies and other cargo in China, which had been ravaged by WWII and the civil war between the Communists forces and the Nationalist government. To do so, he and others created an airline under Chinese law, eventually named Civil Air Transport (CAT), and due to Chinese law owned in large part by the Chinese government and Chinese nationals.

Initially, CAT primarily carried cargo for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and its Chinese counterpart. It sold excess airlift capacity to the public. By the end of the first year of operations, 1947, CAT owned 18 aircraft and managed over 800 employees. During 1948, a period of ambiguity in the US policy towards the participants in China's civil war, CAT's operations expanded to airlifting Chinese Nationalist food and military personnel and acting on occasion as a paramilitary adjunct to the Nationalist Air Force.<sup>3</sup> In 1949, Chennault publicly urged America to stop communism on and from the periphery of China. While the plan died upon its rejection by the State Department, Chennault's suggestion led to his meeting in May 1949 with the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In the subsequent months, they formulated plans for the infusion of CIA funds into the financially challenged company. On November 1, the CIA and CAT signed a one-year agreement whereby the CIA pledged up to \$500,000 to finance a CAT base of operations and underwrite losses due to hazardous CIA missions. In return, CAT agreed to give CIA's cargo and personnel priority support, at negotiated rates. Hence, what started as a purely commercial enterprise was hired in the final stages of China's civil war by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to airlift arms secretly to the followers of Chiang Kai-shek.

As the Nationalist government lost territory to the Communists and finally had to retreat to Taiwan, CAT moved much of its aircraft to Hong Kong. Due to the airline's complicated ownership construct, the Chinese Communist government claimed CAT's assets.

What ensued resulted in the CIA owning the airline. First, Hong Kong authorities were unsympathetic to the Chinese Nationalist government's claims to the airliner. Additionally, some CAT employees, sympathetic to the Communist government, attempted to seize and fly CAT's airplanes back to the mainland. On the other hand, the American government did not want the establishment of a Chinese Communist airline to emerge from these assets. As a result, CAT's management attempted to legitimize ownership of these assets by, among other business structures, incorporating CAT in Delaware. This new company purchased the airline's assets from the Nationalist government and other owners. Since CAT and its management executives were nearly broke at this time, a CIA official advanced them money to make the purchase. This money was eventually repaid.

In 1950, CAT's headquarters moved to Taiwan, which remained under the control of the Nationalist government, but by the end of March 1950, the airline was broke. At this critical

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<sup>3</sup> Leary, William M., *Perilous Missions, Civil Air Transport and CIA Covert Operations in Asia*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington & London, 2002, Page 51 (Application Exhibit).

point in time, the interests of several parties led to the CIA buying the airline. First, CAT's owners did not desire to sell the assets in the then-depressed market. Second, the CIA recognized it should covertly aid the Nationalists and other countries in Asia through, among other activities, covert air activities. The U.S. government also feared CAT's assets and the assets of other airline companies, related to the legal wrangling over the CAT's ownership, might fall under communist control. As a result, the CIA concluded it was in the national interest to continue supporting CAT. In March 1950, the Departments of State and Defense concurred in the decision. During the ensuing months, the CIA took legal steps to purchase CAT. To that end, two companies were incorporated in Delaware. First was Airdale Corporation, a holding company of three directors, all employees of the CIA's Office of Finance. The second was CAT, Incorporated, whose 7-man board of directors included the three CIA Office of Finance employees and an Agency employee with the airline. Thus, the CIA controlled the operating company's policies, and it became a CIA "proprietary." The CIA's purchase price settled bills and notes due and compensated the various American and Chinese owners.

The airline purchased in 1950 by the CIA was small, but began to grow rather quickly due to CAT's activities in the Korean War and in South East Asia. As these activities make up many of the assertions relating to the criteria for recognition, more of the details will be related later in this memorandum. Nevertheless, a short outline of those activities mentioned in the application is worthwhile.

CAT's activities included the following arrangements revolving around the Korean War, in addition to its normal commercial activities of cargo and passenger service. CAT provided three aircraft to "intelligence sources" to fly between Japan and Korea. It also established a contract with the Far East Material Command to provide maintenance and airlift services between Korea and Japan. These services involved both direct support of combat units and "milk runs." It provided transport to CIA operatives in Japan and Korea; and after the Chinese "volunteers" became involved in the hostilities, it supported the CIA's "secret war against Peking."<sup>4</sup> The secret war involved airlifting arms to anti-communist Chinese forces training in Northern Burma and dropping agents and supplies to pro-Nationalist Chinese guerillas and "Third Force" anti-communist groups in mainland China.

CAT was also active during the 1950's in other parts of Asia. During these years, CAT was involved in normal airline business, although it performed such unusual, but not covert, activities under United Nations contracts as airlifting Nationalist Chinese troops, sent to support anti-Communist Chinese troops, from northern Burma.

Additionally, CAT wanted, since before 1950, to expand its services into French Indochina. CAT found that opportunity during the French war effort against the Viet Minh. CAT airlifted medical supplies from Tokyo to Hanoi under contract to the CIA-connected US Special Technical and Economic Mission. "In addition to overt flying, there was a small covert side to operations in Indochina."<sup>5</sup> The overt services, arranged by the CIA, included airlift and maintenance services to meet the French Air Force's combat requirements against the Communist Viet Minh in Indochina. For example, CAT airlift supported the French troops

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<sup>4</sup> Leary, page 126.

<sup>5</sup> Leary, page 163.

surrounded by the Viet Minh in northern Laos during the spring and early summer of 1953; provided similar support to the French troops surrounded at Dien Bien Phu during 1954; airlifted supplies to other isolated French outposts; and evacuated people from North to South Vietnam after the armistice between the Communists and the French. The covert flying included activities such as aerial reconnaissance, airlifting equipment and arms for CIA's stay-behind paramilitary networks in North Vietnam, and aerial assistance to dissident, anti-communist forces in Indonesia and Tibet. Many covert missions may yet be undisclosed.

In the 1950's, CAT also engaged in other activities arising out of Cold War international relations, particularly in Laos. The Geneva Conference of 1954 divided Vietnam and confirmed to all parties the independent status of Laos, and all parties agreed to keep foreign military troops out of Laos. When in 1955 the U.S. desired to increase the economic and military aid it had been supplying Laos since 1950, it turned to CAT among other resources. In 1957, CAT began a contract with the US Embassy ferrying personnel and supplies in support of the Royal Lao Army. As Laotian politics became increasingly unstable, CAT's activities in Laos also increased and resulted in the addition of helicopter and short takeoff and landing aircraft in Laos to its primary cargo aircraft fleet. (CAT's name was changed in 1959 to "Air America" to avoid confusing its activities with operations of another CIA proprietary in Japan.) In the turbulent political and armed strife among various Laotian factions, the U.S. backed the most anti-communist, to which Air America provided significant airlift support in a variety of roles including transporting food, supplies, personnel, and arms. This airlift support, as well as normal passenger and cargo service, continued with varying intensity throughout Asia until June 1974.

Eventually, Air America became "the largest 'commercial' airline in the world."<sup>6</sup> Much of its activities were unrelated to the U.S. Armed Forces, although it worked closely on a number of occasions with allied military forces.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, 75 percent of Air America's flights in Southeast Asia were unrelated to the war or to CIA's involvement in the war.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the application indicates many of its missions and resources supported a disparate group of customers, including non-U.S. government agencies such as the *International Commission of Control and Supervision*, whose mission was to supervise the Geneva Accords in Laos.

CAT and Air America participated in other activities both overt and covert, and the above is meant to relate only a general summary of the work of the group under consideration. As mentioned earlier, this memorandum will discuss other activities and details later in this memorandum.

On June 30, 1976, the CIA dissolved the airline and returned 20 million dollars to the U.S. Treasury. It appears the CIA disbanded Air America when the Agency's sponsorship of the airline was exposed and its utility diminished.

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<sup>6</sup> CAT Association and Air America Association, *"Shadow People" Out of the Shadows, After Fifty Years of Silence, Civilians Who Worked for CIA Tell Their Story*, Executive Summary, 2004, p. 10, citing Christopher Robbins' 1979 book, *Air America: The Story of the CIA's Secret Airlines*.

<sup>7</sup> See for example, Application Volume 3, "Background Information - Air America, Inc.," which details the Company's contractual support of the Thai military and Border Police Force, as well as various U.S. government agencies, including USAID, ARPA, and JUSMAG, Thailand.

<sup>8</sup> Application Volume 3 Exhibit: Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial, *Vietnam Bits & Pieces*, p. 3.

### III Criteria and Considerations

#### A Incidents of Service Favoring Equivalency

##### I Uniqueness of Service

The first consideration for the Board was the question of uniqueness. DoDD 1000.20 recognizes "Civilian service (civilian employment or contractual service) is a vital element of the war-fighting capability of the Armed Forces. Civilian service during a period of armed conflict is not necessarily equivalent to active military service, even when performed in a combat zone. Service must be beyond that generally performed by civilian employees and must be occasioned by unique circumstances."

To have this incident of service favor equating civilian service to active military service, the directive states the civilian group must have either been created or organized by the U.S. Government to fill a wartime need or, if it existed before that time, have had its prewar character substantially altered by its wartime mission. The possibility an applicant group might have been shot at, shelled or bombed, or was even captured by the enemy, is not, in and of itself, relevant. If the application is based on service in a combat zone, the mission of the group in the combat zone must have been substantially different from the mission of similar groups not in a combat zone.

DoDD 1000.20 does not define the term "wartime." Nevertheless, since only service during a "period of armed conflict" may be considered for recognition,<sup>9</sup> the directive's definition of "period of armed conflict" logically applies to the directive's guidance concerning this incident of service and the term "wartime." The definition of "armed conflict" is "A prolonged period of sustained combat involving members of the U.S. Armed Forces against a foreign belligerent. The term connotes more than a military engagement of limited duration or for limited objectives, and involves a significant use of military and civilian forces." The directive's examples of armed conflict are WWI and II, and the Korean and Vietnam Conflicts. The directive's examples of military actions which were not "armed conflict" are the incursion into Lebanon in 1958 and peacekeeping forces there in 1983; the incursions into the Dominican Republic in 1965 and into Libya in 1986; and the intervention into Grenada in 1983.<sup>10</sup>

The Board members had a variety of views whether or not the work of the CAT/Air America was, under this description, "unique."

One perspective was CAT/Air America's work was "unique," as a necessary part of the global plan to contain or push back communist expansion during the Cold War. In this regard, the U.S. Government organized CAT/Air America as part of the CIA's counterinsurgency

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<sup>9</sup> DoDD 1000.20, paragraphs, 4.1.3 and 4.2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, paragraph E2.1.1.

activities against communist guerrillas and CIA's support for guerrilla warfare against leftist regimes. These low-level conflict tactics addressed the shortcomings of the military strategy of "massive retaliation" and conventional warfare; thereby reducing the risk of "escalation." For example, the support of the indigenous peoples in Laos, especially the Hmong, allowed them to resist the Communist Pathet Lao attempts to conquer the country. Moreover, it addressed the North Vietnamese violations of the Geneva Accords (inserting its uniformed military forces into Laos) without the U.S., itself, committing similar violations. Additionally, the CIA's and State Department's support of the Hmong had the collateral benefit of diverting North Vietnamese armed forces that would otherwise have been directed at the conventional military forces defending South Vietnam.

Another perspective, similar but not identical to the first, was the CIA adopted CAT/Air America's business practices and assets to address a host of foreign policy challenges which were best not addressed by overt government activities. From this perspective, most of the activities of CAT/Air America were unrelated to the Cold War; but the CIA operated the company in order to perform other activities essential to U.S. foreign policy. This perspective also asserted many of these overt and covert activities to address CIA goals filled a wartime need if the term, "wartime" were to include the Cold War generally. This perspective did not believe the governing directive contemplated such an interpretation. This perspective noted an essential criterion for recognizing civilian work as equivalent to active military service was the work had to support the U.S. Armed Forces during a period of "armed conflict," which is defined in DoDD 1000.20, paragraph E2.1.1. That definition would appear to exclude the "Cold War" as an "armed conflict," although periods of sustained combat, such as the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, did occur during the Cold War. Hence, the activities of the group, as defined by the application, would not be "unique," but allowed the possibility for some services, limited in time, place, and participants, might be "unique."

A third perspective was CAT/Air America was clearly not "unique," as defined by DoDD 1000.20. CAT/Air America was not "created" to meet a "wartime need" and CAT/Air America's activities, overall, were not substantially altered by the "Cold War," even the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. As the application's author explained to a newspaper reporter, "'Our work was humanitarian...' and Air America's work in Vietnam 'was almost like a corporate aircraft operation.' But not exactly."<sup>11</sup> A recent Air America "alumni" publication may have described best the work of the applicant group, when it quoted a newspaper account of its activities: "Most of Air America's operations involved straightforward commercial flying moving cargo and passengers. But revenue from that supported the classified missions that no one talked about."<sup>12</sup>

This third perspective also allowed for the possibility that *at times* CAT/Air America operations may have had "a wartime mission" substantially altered from its prewar or normal airline character. Examples of this transformation might be CAT's airlift into Dien Bien Phu, albeit in support for French military forces not the U.S. Armed Forces and, therefore, not

<sup>11</sup> Application, Volume 1, Tab 1, Stanford, Judy, "The Secret War Air America Pilots tell of their time in Southeast Asia," *Lafayette Advertiser*, May 8, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Application, Attachment to Cates Ltr., February 2, 2004, "Aviator Headed up Clandestine Venture Air America was a Front for Secret CIA Missions," *Air America Log*, Volume 20, No. 4, Oct, Nov, Dec, 2003, page 12.

recognizable service under the statute; possibly its activities during Operation Booklift in support of U.S. (and U.N.) forces during the Korean Conflict; and its paramilitary operations in Laos under the control variously of the State Department, the CIA, and possibly the U.S. Armed Forces.

With regard to this third perspective, the members recognized the preponderance of CAT/Air America's activities in combat zones (such as Vietnam, Laos, and the Thai border regions) were similar to the work or mission of other airlines not in a combat zone; e.g. carrying cargo and personnel, sometimes for the U.S. Armed Forces under a routine contract. At other times, its combat zone activities were substantially different from other airlines, and may have been under the control of the U.S. Armed Forces.

A good example of the latter would be Air America's search and recovery (SAR) activities in Southeast Asia, especially those relating to the recovery of U.S. Armed Forces aircrews. In this regard, the U.S. Armed Forces recognized, as it was building up its own SAR resources in Southeast Asia, Air America's unusual and extensive knowledge of Laos' terrain and the proximity of Air America's SAR resources within that country for the recovery of Air America's own downed aircraft. As a result, for a period beginning in 1964, the U.S. Armed Forces gave Air America the responsibility for SAR activities relating to downed military aircrews in all of Laos. The nature and duration of this relationship between Air America and U.S. Armed Forces was not clear from the application. For example, the C/MSRB noted during August 1964, the U.S. Ambassador to Laos withdrew authority for Air America to participate in "air rescue combat patrol"; yet military documents indicate, between June 1964 and June 1965, Air America made 21 successful recoveries of "American pilots" in Laos and North Vietnam.<sup>13</sup> (The Board differentiated the SAR effort for American military aircrews from Air America's SAR operations to recover its own American aircrews and those of allied air forces.) But, the application's evidence did not allow the C/MSRB to determine the nature of the relationship between Air America and the military command and control leading up to the SAR services provided the U.S. Armed Forces.

Another example of "unique," "wartime mission" activities supporting the U.S. Armed Forces could be Air America's assistance to Lima Site 85 in northern Laos. The application provides some information about Air America's support of the site's "Air Force contingent of 19 men"<sup>14</sup> operating "the USAF installed...TSQ-81 (TACAN) navigational device."<sup>15</sup> The State

<sup>13</sup> Application, Volume 5, Tab 7, "Project CHECO Report, USAF Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia (1961-1966)," HQ PACAF, October 24, 1966, pages 34-35. Compare Application, Volume 5, Tab 8, "Project CHECO Report, Search and Rescue Operations in Southeast Asia, 1 January 1971 - 31 March 1972," HQ PACAF, October 17, 1972, which essentially did not mention Air America, except in the rescue of Spectre 22's aircrew in March 1972.

<sup>14</sup> Application Volume 3, McGowan, Sam, "Air Force's Ground Support in Vietnam," *The Gold Bar, The Official Magazine of the OCS Foundation*, May 14, 2002, page 2 of 7.

<sup>15</sup> Application Volume 4, "Action Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Bundy) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Bohlen)," Washington, February 23, 1968, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968*, Volume XXVIII, Laos, Department of State.

Department explained, "these individuals are USAF personnel, formally converted to civilian status as Lockheed employees for the duration of their tour of duty in Laos."<sup>16</sup>

In sum, the majority of the C/MSRB members concluded the application did not address many criteria set out DoDD 1000.20 relevant to these activities. As a result, the C/MSRB was left to speculate about whether or not Air American's SAR work, service to Site 85, and possibly other activities might qualify for recognition.

## 2

### Organizational Authority Over the Group

Another "incident of service," which would support recognizing civilian service as equivalent to active military service, is the presence and degree of military command authority over the group. The concept of military control is reinforced if the military command authority determines such things as the group's structure, location, mission and activities, and staffing requirements such as the length of employment and pay grades.

The Board's general impression was the military command authority did not determine these aspects of CAT/Air America activities. Of course, some of CAT/Air America's activities, both overt and covert, but mostly covert activities, were closely coordinated with various agencies of the U.S. government, and *might* have included the military. An example of these operations would be its activities supplying anti-Communist forces in Tibet. Nonetheless, the application indicates the airline was not under military command authority. To the contrary, the group's personnel policies relating to such subjects as compensation, training, hours of service, vacation, leaves of absence, seniority, bidding for positions, furloughs, and grievances were dictated by the company and outlined in its own personnel manual.<sup>17</sup> The Board recognized, as with other airline companies, the military had contracts that on occasion determined flying schedules of CAT/Air America. Moreover, those contracts allowed various officials within the military organizations to expand or shrink the contracts' demands on Air America. Nevertheless, even in these circumstances, the application did not define well the nature and length of any *military command or organizational authority* over the applicant group.

Even the contracts, which were part of the application, between Air America and the U.S. Air Force (JUSMAGTHAI) provided limited insight into the nature of any military authority, organizational or otherwise, over the applicant group. In carrying out its military assistance program inside Laos, the U.S. Embassy, including its Air Force Attaché, Army Attaché, and CIA provided a "shopping list" to the Requirements Office (RO) within the U.S. Agency for International Development. The RO, in turn, acquired the material from the Deputy Chief, JUSMAGTHAI and supervised its distribution in Laos. The Embassy's Airlift Support Section distributed the material, generally using Air America and Continental Air Service and frequently, USAF aircraft. The Ambassador, not the military, approved all these activities. Of course, the Ambassador's approval of an activity did not guarantee their full implementation. Nevertheless,

<sup>16</sup> Application Volume 4, "Memorandum From the Director of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to Secretary of State Rusk, Washington, February 28, 1968, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968*, Volume XXVIII, Laos, Department of State.

<sup>17</sup> Application, Volume 1, Tab 3, *Compensation and Rules of Employment for U.S. Citizen Pilots of Air America, Inc.*, January, 29, 1973.

for the purposes for evaluation of this incident of service, it was clear the military authorities, 7/13 AF, could advise the Embassy, but not veto the Ambassador's plans.<sup>18</sup>

In some instances, not well defined by the application, such as Air America's SAR activities in Laos recovering downed U.S. Armed Forces aircrews, the military command authority *may* have directed the where and when of those activities. The Board noted, for example, Air American pilots in T-28s escorted SAR helicopters in Laos from August 1964 to August 1965, when "hundreds of U.S. Army, Marine Corps, Air America, and Vietnamese Air Force choppers made aircrew pickups on an informal and unofficial basis."<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the C/MSRB was left to speculate as to the complicated relationship during these SAR missions between Air America and the military.

As a result, the application lacks evidence of the amount of military control, if any, over these Air America activities. While the application suggests some sort of military control of Air America assets on occasion, as when it asserts, "sometimes, Saigon's Air America Bell 204Bs supported US Navy Seals in underwater demolition work,"<sup>20</sup> it supplied little or no explanation of the nature of the support or of the military authority over the applicant group.

Moreover, the application's evidence clearly indicated the Secretary of State and the U.S. ambassadors to Laos, not the military, controlled U.S. airpower, including SAR activities, in Laos.<sup>21</sup> With relation to Air America's role in these SAR activities, the Secretary of State's 1964 cable to the embassy stated, "You are... granted as requested discretionary authority to use AA Pilots in T-28's for SAR operations when you consider this indispensable, rpt indispensable to success of operation and with understanding that you will seek advance Washington authorization whenever situation permits."<sup>22</sup> This control by the State Department, through the U.S. Ambassador to Laos, was dramatically displayed in the SAR efforts on August 19, 1964, to recover the "American pilot" of a downed helicopter. The civilian members of the embassy staff thoroughly briefed Ambassador Unger on the "terrain, position of the H-19, where ground fire was coming from, what the problems were and... recommendations that only Napalm (sic) would do the job." After the Ambassador made his decision to allow napalm, the "Ambassador individually briefed each pilot" as to his rules of engagement and use of napalm.<sup>23</sup> Even the USAF forward air controllers (FAC) in Laos, known as "Raven FACs," who provided targeting assistance to U.S. and Lao aircraft "operated under the direction of the American ambassador in Vientiane."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Application, Volume 5, Tab 3, "Project CHECO Report, Air Operations in Northern Laos 1 Apr - 30 Nov 71," HQ PACAF, June 22, 1973, pages 11-16.

<sup>19</sup> Application Volume 1, Tab 9, Tilford, Earl H., "Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia, 1961-1975," page 3 of 7.

<sup>20</sup> Application Volume 2, Tab 2, "Air America: Bell 204B."

<sup>21</sup> Application Volume 1, Tab 12, Boyne, Walter J., "The Plain of Jars," *Air Force, Journal of the Air Force Association*, Vol. 82, No. 6, June 1999, page 6 of 8.

<sup>22</sup> Application Volume 1, Tab 8, *Rusk Cable to Embassy in Laos on Search and Rescue Pilots*, August 26, 1964, with copy to Commander in Chief, Pacific.

<sup>23</sup> Application Volume 4, Hickler Ltr, "Personal Observation, Reference: Our XOXO Message of 18 August 1964 Regarding the Loss of H-19," August 22, 1964, pages 1 & 2. This letter also makes it clear that the Air America SAR assets did not have radios capable of keeping in contact with military authorities.

<sup>24</sup> Application Volume 2, Tab 4, Air America: North American T-28s.

Additionally, the extensive State Department message traffic relating to Laos, submitted as part of the application, indicates the State Department, not military authorities controlled Air America's and American military activities in that country. A telegram from the U.S. Ambassador to Laos to the Commander, MACV, graphically displays the Ambassador's control over military and paramilitary activities, and one must assume Air America operations, in Laos. In it he aggressively asserts he, not MACV, would determine where and when to employ road-watch teams along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. He asserted this "zone is not a piece of territory which has been detached from my responsibilities in Laos and given over to your command.... MACSOG is *permitted* to conduct certain types of operations which have been agreed to by higher authority in Washington, *subject to my concurrence.*"<sup>25</sup> (Emphasis added.)

The overall evidence in the application does not indicate military command authority determined the structure, location, mission, activities, and staffing of the group, as defined by the application.

### 3

#### Integration into the Military Organization

A third "incident of service," which would favor equating civilian service to active military service, is the integration of a civilian group into a military organization as evidenced by the degree to which the group is subject to the regulations, standards, and control of the military command authority. Examples of this integration are the exchanging of military courtesies; wearing of military clothing, insignia, and devices; assimilation of the group into the military organizational structure; the use of commissaries and exchanges; or membership in military clubs. A group integrated into the military would give the impression that the members of the group were military, except that they were paid and accounted for as civilians. The integration of a group into the military would give the group the expectation that its service would be imminently recognized as active military service.

The C/MSRB members concluded the group was not integrated into the military in any appreciable manner. For example, the group did not wear military clothing and accouterments or exchange military courtesies. Nor did the group give the impression that it was a military organization. To the contrary, the group's goal was to act as any civilian airline and was proud of its non-military lifestyle and interaction among themselves and with others. Similarly, it was not assimilated into the military organizational structure. Not surprising, since many of the CAT/Air America personnel were former military members, CAT/Air America internally structured itself at times like a military organization. The C/MSRB noted at times during the Korean War "CAT functioned as a military squadron, performing the same tasks and taking the same risks as Air Force transport units."<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, overall CAT/Air America's contracts with the U.S. Armed Forces were similar to those of any independent airline. The contracts

<sup>25</sup> Application Volume 4, "Telegram From the Ambassador to Laos (Sullivan) to the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Westmoreland), Vientiane, August 10, 1967," *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968*, Volume XXVIII, Laos, Department of State.

<sup>26</sup> Leary, Page 119.

called for payment "on a sliding scale" and guaranteed dedicating only part of the aircrafts' flying hours to the U.S. Armed Forces.<sup>27</sup>

Other evidence indicated CAT/Air America was for the most part acting as a commercially independent entity, outside a military organization. First, Air America advised its American employees in Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam they could assert with the IRS a claim their pay was "tax-free" since they had a "bona fide foreign residence,"<sup>28</sup> an untenable claim for a military member to assert. Second, Air America conducted its own investigations into aircraft accidents and incidents.<sup>29</sup> Third, even when involved in paramilitary activities its "chain of command ran from Washington to Hong Kong, where Al Cox had far-reaching responsibilities for developing and implementing (CIA) projects in East Asia, especially activities that involved CAT."<sup>30</sup>

It was clear to the C/MSRB "the relations between the official US military and Air America were often blurred, as assets, including aircraft like the C-130, were transferred in secret when the need arose."<sup>31</sup> These relations were further blurred by the complex inter-relationships and responsibilities in Laos, where "by Presidential directive, the U.S. Ambassador was responsible for the overall ... activities supporting the Royal Laotian Government... (But) CINCPAC vested COMUSMACV with the responsibility for U.S. air operations over Laos and the passes from NVN into Laos."<sup>32</sup> Such a complicated command and control system may create the suspicion the U.S. Air Force had considerable control over some Air America flights in Laos, but evidence in the application contradicted that suspicion. With the present evidence, the best description is that various assets available to assist the Royal Laotian Government were not integrated into, but were coordinated by and with the various American agencies.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, it was not clear in many occasions described in the application, which government agency was helping which. In other words, were the CIA and CAT/Air America helping the military, or the military helping the CIA? In most individual instances, the latter structure appeared likely. For example, when Air America infiltrated and exfiltrated special CIA ground teams deep into enemy-held territory for clandestine operations, the "USAF provid(ed) A-1 escort and back-up helicopter support." Moreover, the CIA and Embassy even rejected "for security reasons" the USAF request to participate in planning these and other larger operations.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Leary, Page 117.

<sup>28</sup> Application, Attachment to Cates Ltr., June 24, 2004, "Taxation of Air America Employees: Foreign Residence"

<sup>29</sup> Application Volume 3, "Aircraft Accident Review," October 12, 1967; Local Board of Review M-9933? Accident, July 23, 1965.

<sup>30</sup> Leary, Page 128.

<sup>31</sup> Application Volume 1, Tab 12, Boyne, Walter J., "The Plain of Jars," *Air Force Journal of the Air Force Association*, Vol. 82, No. 6, June 1999, page 5 of 8.

<sup>32</sup> Application, Volume 5, Tab 3, "Project CHECO Report, Command and Control 1966 - 1968," HQ PACAF, August 1, 1969, pages 35-37.

<sup>33</sup> Application, Volume 5, Tab 4, "Project CHECO Report, Air Operations in Northern Laos 1 Apr - 1 Nov 70," HQ PACAF, January 15, 1971, pages 3-5.

<sup>34</sup> Application, Volume 5, Tab 4, "Project CHECO Report, Air War in Northern Laos 1 Apr - 30 Nov 71," HQ PACAF, June 22, 1973, pages 51-54.

If part of the applicant group's activities (such as those during the Korean War mentioned earlier) were integrated into the military organization, the application did not provide evidence showing that integration.

As an aside, the application did not describe CAT/Air America as a group integrated into a military organization to nearly the same degree as the airline groups that in WWII flew overseas under contract to the Air Transport Command. (While this memorandum cannot detail the differences, those WWII civilian aircrews and ground support personnel were under the direct command and control of military commanders and organizations.) To the contrary, the application presented evidence that contradicted this type of military-company relationship and suggested a much more traditional contractual arrangement. It is clear such a traditional relationship existed when the Air Force asserted it would not pay CAT, Inc., for some of its work during the Korean War under the "Booklift" contract, as the "changes in the contract were made by the Contracting Officer in excess of his authority."<sup>35</sup>

The group had access to commissaries, exchanges and membership in military clubs, where available. On the other hand, the U.S. Armed Forces extends such privileges to many contractors at overseas bases. Moreover, the application was clear: "all community services for the America Community in Laos have been placed by the Ambassador under the jurisdiction of" the Ambassador's Administrative Support Team, not the military.<sup>36</sup> Hence, this aspect of the group's relationship with the military was not very helpful to the applicant group.

Finally, with regard to this incident of service, the C/MSRB concluded the group did not have an expectation its service would be imminently recognized as active military service. Again, to the contrary: many members of the group were recruited from civilian life after they had been in the military or were recruited from the military, gave up their military status, and purposely became civilians in order to be hired by CAT/Air America.

#### 4

### Subjection to Military Discipline

The C/MSRB then examined whether members of the applicant group were subject to military discipline. This factor would also support equating civilian service with active military service. Examples of military discipline, as compared to military justice, would be military commanders placing members under a curfew, requiring members to work extended hours or unusual shifts, changing duty assignments and responsibilities, restricting travel to and from a military installation, and imposing dress and grooming standards. Consequences of not complying with restrictions placed upon the members of the group by military commanders might include the loss of some privilege, dismissal from the group, or trial under military law.

The group was subject to changing duty assignments or responsibilities, but, overall, CAT/Air America, State Department, or CIA officials, not military authorities imposed these assignments and responsibilities. The C/MSRB realized, of course, that over a period of years,

<sup>35</sup> Application Volume 3, "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors of CAT Incorporated, January 17, 1955," page 3.

<sup>36</sup> Application, Volume 3, Letter from N. G. W. Thorne, Chairman, Administrative Support Team, to Mr. David H. Hickler, General Manager, Air America, Vientiane, February 23, 1966.

especially in South East Asia, CAT/Air America experienced "mission creep," as the CIA expanded the airline's activities that blurred into those of the U.S. Armed Forces. On occasion, this "mission creep" suggested, but did not show, military officials may have changed CAT/Air America's paramilitary activities. For example, the military in 1964 asked Air America to take over SAR operations in Laos for downed U.S. aircrews. On the other hand, the many instances of U.S. Armed Forces training CAT/Air America aircrews on short notice did not involve military officials changing the aircrews' duty assignments and responsibilities. Other authorities (i.e., CIA and the State Department) ordered those changes and directives.<sup>37</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the military did not impose dress or grooming standards on the group.

Additionally, there was no persuasive evidence the military placed the team members under a curfew. It appeared the State Department and CIA may have placed curfew and travel restrictions on the group, as it did on all American contractors in a given geographical area; but the application offered no persuasive evidence the military imposed restrictions on the application members' travel.

It is clear the group's members, at times, either chose to or were required to work extended hours or unusual shifts. The times the group's members believed they were required to work extended hours or changing work schedules, they were tasked to do so by the CIA and State Department or chose to do so as part of the group's admirable "can do" culture. There *may* have been times when military authorities imposed such changes to assignments and responsibilities, but the application did not develop in any appreciable manner those occasions. Hence, the C/MSRB was not convinced the group satisfied this favorable incident of service.

Finally, the military did not impose any loss of some privilege or trial under military law on the members of CAT/Air America for noncompliance with any restrictions the military authorities imposed on the group. Such noncompliance would have been handled routinely by civilian authorities; i.e. the company, the CIA, the State Department, etc. The Board concluded the applicant group was not under military discipline.

## 5

### Subjection to Military Justice

Another consideration evaluated by the C/MSRB was whether members of a civilian group were subject to the military criminal justice system. During times of war declared by the Congress, "persons serving with or accompanying an Armed Force in the field" are subject to the military criminal justice code. Those who were "serving with" the U.S. Armed Forces may have been treated as if they were military and subjected to court-martial jurisdiction. Such treatment is a factor in favor of recognition.

The application acknowledged this incident of service did not apply to the members of this group.<sup>38</sup> They were not subject to military justice.

<sup>37</sup> Leary, Page 164; Smith, Felix, *China Pilot, Flying for Chennault During the Cold War*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington and London, 1995, Page 220 (Application Exhibit).

<sup>38</sup> Cates Ltr, October 22, 2003, Page 1.

### Prohibition Against Members Joining the Armed Forces

Some civilian organizations may have been formed to serve in a military capacity to overcome the operation of existing laws or treaties or because of a governmentally established policy to retain individuals in the group as part of a civilian force. This factor favors recognition.

During its deliberations, the C/MSRB also recognized there could be several perspectives about this incident of service and CAT/Air America's work for the U.S. Armed Forces.

One perspective would urge the U.S. government used, at times, CAT/Air America to carry out U.S. foreign policy while meeting treaty and other legal obligations. This civilian airliner could legally accomplish certain activities, such as supporting anti-communist forces in Laos, which by international agreement military forces could not conduct. One could even argue the CIA created paramilitary forces that the applicant group supported, and at times, the applicant group may have been the paramilitary force. Therefore, this perspective would argue, CAT/Air America was serving in a military capacity to overcome existing laws or treaties.

The more persuasive perspective was the government established the CIA and approved its overt and covert activities, including the purchase and use of CAT/Air America, on occasion, to support a diplomatic agenda. It did so by having civilians, as compared to military forces, carry out certain actions, such as airlifting cargo to pro-western forces, in support of U.S. national policies. In this regard, the government did not form CAT/Air America to overcome existing laws, but it utilized the group on some occasions to carry out legally existing national policies. To this end, the CIA supported many pro-western military and paramilitary forces throughout the world. In Asia, it used CAT/Air America, among other assets, in this support role. For example, under CIA's guidance CAT, Inc., supplied anti-Chinese Communist forces in Tibet. Similarly, the CIA's "proprietary" could assist allied governments while drawing less attention than would occur by the use of U.S. Armed Forces, as it did when Air America helped the Thai government move its troops and equipment into Laos to combat the Pathet Lao on its borders.

One could speculate the government had a policy to retain individuals in the group as a civilian group. In fact, it is clear CAT, Inc., and Air America management sought out active and former military personnel to fill its ranks. Nonetheless, other airlines had similar motives for hiring these same people; i.e., the military offered a well-trained, experienced workforce. Moreover, the application provided little evidence to establish a governmental policy to retain individuals in the group, any more than any other civilian airline company would desire to keep its workforce intact.

As the C/MSRB discussed this incident, it was not clear this group was formed to overcome the operation of existing laws or treaties, or because of a governmentally established policy to retain these individuals as a civilian force. As explained in the "Background" portion of this memorandum, the airline was not created to overcome the operation of laws or treaties. Nevertheless, the U.S. government purchased the airline with the intent to use it *on occasion* when it would be inappropriate for the U.S. Armed Forces and other government entities to act due to the constraints of law or treaties. This use may have been most obvious in the use of the

airline to carry cargo and personnel in Laos, when military assets could not be used due to the Geneva Accords.

## 7

### **Receipt of Military Training/Achieving Military Capability**

If a group employed skills or resources that were enhanced as the result of military training or equipment designed or issued for that purpose, these acts favor recognition.

The Board, again, had more than one perspective of this incident of service as it relates to CAT/Air America. One perspective was military training and equipment on occasion enhanced the group's skills and resources. From this perspective the recruitment of trained former military aircrews, for example, satisfied this incident of service. The many instances of Air Force training CAT/Air America aircrews throughout their corporate histories bolstered this perspective. Moreover, the group members used various military aircraft for paramilitary, if not military, activities; for example, photo-reconnaissance.

Another perspective is that the application indicated such activities were very rare,<sup>39</sup> and the group generally used its prior skills and experience to carry out the company's business ventures. Even in carrying out the CIA's and State Department's goals, the group, on the whole, did not receive new military training after members were recruited. The company did most of its own training and certification of its employees.

At the end of its discussion, the C/MSRB was unsure the case file provided evidence the entire group underwent military training after being part of the group or displayed, on the whole, a military capability different from those displayed by other airlines.

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<sup>39</sup> "Most of the flights did not involve combat action by the Air America planes, although the aircraft available to Air America did include combat-capable types." Application Volume 3 Exhibit: Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial, *Vietnam Bits & Pieces*, p. 3

**B**  
**Incidents of Service Not Favoring Equivalency**

**1**  
**Submission to the U.S. Armed Forces for Protection**

Submission to the Armed Forces for protection is one of the incidents of a group's service that weighs against recognition. A group that seeks protection and assistance from the U.S. Armed Forces and submits to the military control for its own well-being is not deemed to have provided service to the Armed Forces equivalent to active duty military service, even though the group may have been armed by the U.S. military for defensive purposes; instructed by the U.S. military for the defense of the group when attacked by, or in danger of attack by, the enemy; or otherwise submitted themselves to the U.S. military for sustenance and protection.

The U.S. military did not arm the applicant group for defensive purposes. Nor did the group submit itself to the U.S. military for sustenance and protection. It was clear there was some interrelationship between the Defense Department and the CIA for the provision of some aircraft to Air America, and some of those assets had a particularly military nature; but were not acquired for protection (*per se*) of the applicant group. Of course, the U.S. military, as did friendly indigenous military forces, provided some security to CAT/Air America property and lives. Those military forces provided this protection to CAT/Air America and other contractors in such places as South Korea during the Korean War and in SEA during the Vietnam War. In this regard, the U.S. military may have instructed the group for the defense of the group when it was in danger of attack. On the other hand, CAT/Air America provided protection to the U.S. Armed Forces during SAR operations and, arguably, at Site 85.

Suffice it to say, the C/MSRB concluded the applicant group on the whole did not submit itself to the U.S. Armed Forces for protection, nor did it find this incident of service helpful in its deliberations about the ultimate question in this case.

**2**  
**Permitted to Resign**

Another factor, which does not support a group's recognition, is their ability to resign at will, as contrasted with the service of military personnel. The ability of members to resign at will and without penalty acts against military control. A penalty may be direct and severe, such as confinement, or indirect and moderate, such as difficult and costly transportation from an overseas location.

The Board concluded the group could resign at will without any penalty, legal or otherwise, except financial and economic inconvenience. There is evidence some members of the group had three-year contracts, and quitting before or after they fulfilled any contractual obligation might have repercussions other than the loss of future pay. The application did not

provide these repercussions, if any. Finally, the American members of the group could lose any "overseas resident" tax advantages.

While arriving at the conclusion the CAT/Air America group could resign at will, the C/MSRB was very cognizant of the group's "can-do" attitude, perseverance, and in some cases very heroic acts in carrying out the CIA's and State Department missions.

### 3

#### **Prior Recognition of Group Service**

Finally, recognition of a group's service by agencies of a State or local government does not provide support in favor of recognition under DoDD 1000.20. It does not appear a state or local government has recognized this group.

### IV

#### **International Law Status**

The C/MSRB considered whether international law regarded and treated members of an applicant group as civilians, or assimilated to the Armed Forces. HQ USAF/JAO evaluated the application and concluded members of the group were "civilians, rather than as persons assimilated into the armed forces under international law." Reviewing the application, JAO concluded the members of the group did not qualify as lawful combatants under the Geneva Conventions for a variety of reasons. First, they "were not subject to command, as they were contractor personnel" not working for the U.S. but for a third party, CAT/Air America. Second, they could not be "ordered to do anything, even including performing the contracted services." Additionally, JAO observed CAT/Air America aircraft and personnel did not have distinctive U.S. military or other military markings. Fourth, JAO could not determine from the application whether the group carried arms openly. Fifth, the group's members were not under the Uniform Code of Military Justice or an internal disciplinary system to enforce the international law of armed conflict. The advisory did note if, as the application asserts, members of the group might have engaged in a variety of military operations, those members would have been "unlawful combatants" under international law. While making this conclusion, JAO observed, "members (of the group) worked valiantly over an extended period of time, apparently often placing their own lives at great risk while performing their work... (but they) remained as civilians rather than as persons assimilated into the armed forces." Therefore, this consideration did not favor recognition.

## V Summary

The C/MSRB thoroughly evaluated the application and complete case file against the criteria in the statute and directive. The Board concluded CAT/Air America displayed few of the incidents of service that would indicate the group's work was equivalent to active military service. Moreover, the group displayed incidents of service indicating its work was not equivalent to active military service. In essence, the application did not carry the burden of proof on these matters.

The majority believed the following about the group as defined by the applicant:

1. The group was not unique, as the U.S. government did not create or organize CAT/Air America to fill a wartime need and its prewar character was not *substantially* altered by its wartime mission. Moreover, the group's mission, hauling cargo and personnel, in combat zones was not *substantially* different from the mission of similar airlines not in the war zone. The majority recognized some aspects of the group's activities were substantially different, but the application did not support or well define these activities as to time, place, etc.

2. The group was not under military command authority, and the military did not have organizational authority over the group. Commercial interests drove and directed the overwhelming percentage of the group's activities. On one hand, the airline's hierarchy determined the group's structure, location, mission, activities, and staffing/employment policies. On the other hand, the CIA and State Department determined nearly all of the group's unusual missions and activities. While it is possible the military *may* have had some authority over the group *at times*, the application did not present substantive evidence of those times and the nature of that authority.

3. The group was not integrated into the military organization in any appreciable manner.

4. The group was neither under military discipline nor subject to military justice.

5. The members of the group were not prohibited from joining the Armed Forces. It appears the government sustained the group in order to carry out some limited activities, which the military was constrained from doing due to treaties and diplomatic concerns.

6. The group, *as a whole*, did not receive military training or achieve a military capacity. Many of the aircrews had received training when they were members of the U.S. Armed Forces, and, on occasion, the military trained certain members of the group. Nevertheless, the company had its own training and certification programs for the vast majority of its members. The C/MSRB's majority recognized some members of the group achieved a military capacity and on relatively rare occasions displayed that capacity in reconnaissance, SAR, and other activities. Yet, most of the applicant group's work, even in combat zones, was not of a military character.

The minority of the Board members thought the group should be recognized for the following reasons:

1. The group's work was "unique" as part of the global strategy during the Cold War to contain or push back communism. (The minority believed, in this case, the Cold War met the spirit of the requirement that recognized service must be during a period of armed conflict.) As part of this strategy, the group was able to accomplish missions that the U.S. Armed Forces were unable to address due to law or policy. Moreover, the nature of some paramilitary activities (for example, infiltration and exfiltration of teams, reconnaissance and SAR) were clearly "unique," as defined for both normal usage and for purposes of the regulation. The combat-zone mission of these members of the group was clearly different from the mission of similar groups; i.e., airlines, not in a combat zone.

2. The nature of the paramilitary activities indicates they had to be integrated into a military organization and under military authority of some nature.

3. Some members of the group received military training, especially aircrews flying former military aircraft, and developed a military capacity, as seen by the Air America's crewmembers shooting down a North Vietnamese aircraft attacking Site 85. Equally important, many of the pilots and other members of the group received military training when they were in the military, before they joined CAT or Air America.

The majority's conclusions about the group did not diminish the majority's admiration for the heroic acts displayed by various individuals. Yet, the evidence indicated many of these events occurred in the group's support of allies, under the direction of the CIA, not under the authority and command of U.S. Armed Forces or in support of the U.S. Armed Forces. The most obvious example of this type of heroism was the CAT's support of the French forces at Dien Bien Phu.<sup>40</sup> Even during the Vietnam conflict most of Air America's paramilitary activities, the application indicated, were for foreign governments.<sup>41</sup> The evidence also clearly indicates most of the activities were under the control of non-military government and non-government entities.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, the application presented insufficient information relevant to the recognition criteria about those relatively isolated (in light of the 25-year expanse and total work of the applicant group) services in support of the U.S. Armed Forces. In this regard, the application did not show the group was under the control of U.S. Armed Forces in support of a military operation or mission, among other criteria. Therefore, the majority could not recommend recognition of even those limited services to the U.S. Armed Forces as equivalent to active military service.

Finally, the Board was fully cognizant of the national effort and sacrifices made during the past 50 years, including during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, by U.S. civil servants and other civilians such as those in the applicant group. Nonetheless, only those civilian groups which evidence shows meet the statutory and regulatory criteria, are to be recognized under PL 95-202.

<sup>40</sup> The French government recently honored this heroism in ceremonies at the its embassy in Washington, DC.

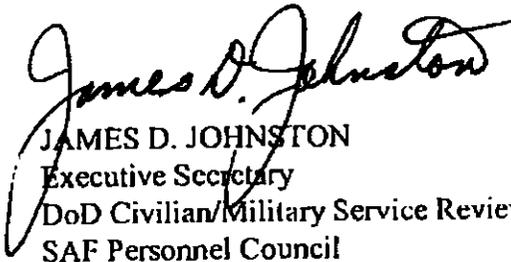
<sup>41</sup> See for example, Application, Volume 1, Tab 14, "U.S. Foreign Relations Series, Laos Volume (1964-1968), Released by the State Department," pages 1-2, "Johnson and his advisors ... (sent) Air America pilots and propeller driven T-28 planes to reinforce the fledgling Lao Air Force.... The United States supported a Royal Lao Armed Forces' military plan.... Air America's transport and fighter propeller planes joined the campaign."

<sup>42</sup> See for example, Application, Volume 1, Tab 15, "The USAF in Thailand During the War in Southeast Asia," page 2, "Air America, under CIA structure and organization, specialized in carrying out missions in Laos."

## VI Recommendation

The C/MSRB determined the service of CAT/Air America satisfied almost none of the criteria that would indicate that U.S. Armed Forces exerted control over the group as if its members were U.S. military personnel. As a result, the majority of the C/MSRB concluded the service of this group should not be considered active military duty for VA benefits.

The C/MSRB recommends SAF/MR sign the attached Secretarial instrument determining the service of this group is not equivalent to active military duty, and sign the memorandum to the Service Secretaries notifying them of that decision.

  
JAMES D. JOHNSTON  
Executive Secretary  
DoD Civilian/Military Service Review Board  
SAF Personnel Council

**Attachments:**

1. Secretarial Instrument
2. Secretarial Memorandum
3. Historical Advisories
4. AF/JAO Advisory
5. Application & Third Party Comments