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MGDR ✓
Mr. Wayfield
15 April 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: [redacted]

REC'D WAS APR 21 1970

SUBJECT : CBS/TV Interviews - Air America, Inc.

Dear [redacted]

I am persuaded to write you on the above subject, not in the interests of pressing a locally unpopular point, but out of concern for the possible blowback from a continued refusal on my part to grant Bill McLaughlin of CBS/TV the interview on film with two Air America pilots and me.

As the record now stands, both Washington and Taipei have endorsed the proposal, albeit without waves of noticeable enthusiasm. Larry and you have expressed your opposition to the idea, and, mindful of your interests, I have tried to deflect McLaughlin from his purpose. I have told him that I had to coordinate his request with my office in Taipei, and they in turn had to do the same with the Home Office in Washington - that this takes time, and that I was certain there were some people for whom I worked in these places that might have misgivings about what film editors in New York might do to footage taken in Vientiane. I thought that this tack was working.

Last night, McLaughlin called to press me again for an answer. In the course of our conversation, he reminded me that he already has taken considerable footage of Air America and its people, both here in Vientiane at Wattay, and at airfields up country where we flew him and his cameramen at the specific direction of USAID and USIS. As they have been doing with other news media people, and as McLaughlin put it, "The U.S. Embassy has been cooperating with CBS."

He then stated that his editors were insisting on the three interviews in order to unify the coverage of Air America, and added that while he was not "out to screw anybody," if the interviews cannot be filmed, he will have to state, as background sound over his present footage, "that Air America's local management was forbidden by the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane from being interviewed on film." I guess you know where that leaves me when various people in Washington hear it on the Walter Cronkite program, since those who wrote the cable approving the interview will have assumed, in the absence of a response, that it had been accomplished.

My only interest is, and has been, to cooperate with CBS and all the other newsmen who have been crowding my office since early February to the extent that might dispel any aura of mystery or super-secretiveness on Air America's part that might rebound to the disadvantage of the [redacted] activities here. In that aim I think I have enjoyed a reasonable success, and have even been able to kill some potentially damaging false stories about airplane hijacking and the like.

In the CBS/TV case, I am not sure that there is time for a lengthy exchange of views with Washington. McLaughlin leaves this weekend for some "R & R" in Saigon. If the interview does not come off by then, he plans to file his footage with the addendum noted above. FYI, the questions he wanted to ask me are attached.

Sincerely,

[redacted]
James A. Cunningham Jr.

CBS QUESTIONS:

1. How did Air America get started?
2. Air America is often referred to as the CIA airline. Who owns or runs it?
3. How does it happen that most of Air America's flying is done for the U.S. Government in combat zones? Isn't there an easier way to make a living?
4. How big is Air America's operation in Asia? How big is the Laos operation? (Numbers of pilots, planes, average number of flights per day, per month or whatever).
5. How does Air America compare in size with the scheduled airlines in the States?
6. Is it possible to say how much Air America makes a year? Wouldn't it be cheaper for the U.S. Air Force to do Air America's job? Is one of the reasons for Air America's existence political? (I think it is; just fishing to see what you can say to this).
7. What kind of man flies for Air America?
8. Does the CIA tag bother you and the other people around Air America? Or do you find it easy to shrug off?
9. What are the rewards - not just the financial ones - of working for Air America?
10. Has Air America ever been involved in the ferrying of Lao and foreign troops in Laos? Why do so many of your pilots base just across the river at Udorn?
11. Are Air America pilots and planes ever involved in the fighting in Laos? Do your pilots ever wear personal arms during flights?

(Retyped from original given me by Bill McLaughlin, CBS/TV)