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CIA HAS LOST A PLANE

NELSON BENTON: The Central Intelligence Agency has lost a C-123 cargo plane somewhere over northern Laos with three Americans and one Laotian aboard. It was operated by Air America, the CIA airline that the Agency doesn't talk about very much. In fact, the CIA talks publicly about very little except in rare cases. Such a case is that of Victor Marchetti who worked at the CIA as an executive assistant for 14 years. Marchetti left the Agency somewhat disillusioned, and we talked with him about the CIA recently at his home in suburban Virginia.

MARCHETTI: The only real control over them from the outside comes through Senate committees and House committees that are usually dealing with appropriations, but when you're handling a big -- first of all \$130 billion -- billion national budget of which \$80 billion is military and buried in there is \$6 billion worth of intelligence, it's almost impossible to find out where it is or what it's being used for. Take Laos, for example. Since 1962 there's been a war going on in Laos controlled and operated by the CIA, financed partly by the CIA, but mostly through the military. Thousands of local tribesmen have been killed and wounded. There are, fortunately, not very many Americans, but there's been a great deal of destruction there, and all that's left of Laos today in friendly hands is one little teeny stripe down along the western border. The rest of it is either no-man's land or under Pathet Lao or North Vietnamese control. They could probably take that place tomorrow if they wanted to. Well, at \$450 million a year for that war, what has it gotten us? -- nothing.

QUESTION: Has the CIA kept that war going in Laos, in your opinion?

MARCHETTI: Yes. In my opinion -- the CIA -- first of all, they follow orders. They were told to go into Laos and they did, and they've done a wonderful job about it. They're not doing it on their own without the knowledge of the White House or anything. I mean they're following instructions.

QUESTION: You were working for the CIA during much of the formation, or certainly the operation of Air America in Southeast Asia. Is that justified, and operation such as that, airplanes that are used...?

MARCHETTI: No, I think it's gotten all out of control. When Southeast Asia blew up as it did into a regular war in South Vietnam, this fantastically large guerrilla operation in Laos, which affected Cambodia, Thailand and other areas on the fringes, the Air America just grew and grew and grew into a fantastically large organization, and, to the best of my knowledge, it's still controlled by the CIA, and I just think it's kind of ridiculous that the CIA should own a private airlines that -- and I think Air America claims they have only ten thousand people working for them, but they have a fleet that's bigger than most of our major airlines.

QUESTION: Does the CIA have any other airlines operations that you know of?

MARCHETTI: Yes, they have others. I brought some of these to the attention of one Congressman in the hope that he would be able to do something about it, and perhaps something can be done about it. The particular airlines that I mentioned to him were Southern Air Transport, which operates out of Miami, and another one, Rocky Mountain Air, which operates out in the Southwest. Now these airlines exist for only one reason and that's -- particularly Southern Air Transport. That's the contingency that black operations may have to run against Latin America or in the Caribbean somewhere.

QUESTION: Black operations?

MARCHETTI: Well, this means when you want to take in people or materiel, either in support of some government or support of a movement in some country, without attribution to the United States Government. Some CIA spokesmen or people defending the CIA, such as Lyman Kirkpatrick, say well, you know, how -- these assets have to exist. How else do you expect the United States to be able -- or how else do you expect the CIA to be able to carry out the wishes of the Federal Government in certain areas in a clandestine fashion? Well, that's the problem. I mean it gets right back to that. Do you handle certain foreign problems this way or don't you? I feel that we shouldn't. Other people do. Well, the only way you're ever going to resolve this is to have it talked out in some proper arena instead of just letting these things happen, letting these things grow up over a period of years.

BENTON: Victor Marchetti, former CIA man who wants to change intelligence policies.