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**BATTERED BASE** — This helicopter view shows Long Cheng, the badly damaged secret military base in Laos maintained by the CIA to help Laotian irregulars battling

Communist forces. The base includes a mile-long paved runway, reloading facilities and stores of bombs for Laotian T-28 bombers and housing for 30,000 civilians.

## Downed U.S. Pilot Rescued in Laos

By Jack Foisie  
Los Angeles Times

VIENTIANE, Laos, Jan. 20—Jim Russell is one lucky fellow. He is 49 and beefy, but he outran North Vietnamese soldiers for two miles today through Laotian jungle and was lifted to safety by a fellow Air America pilot.

James W. Russell is a seven-year veteran of Indochina flying. He makes about \$40,000 a year for doing what almost caused his death today for Air America, which is operated for the CIA.

"It was one of those bad days, maybe the worst."

Authorized by his bosses to talk about it, Russell related how his small "Porter" transport plane had been destroyed by mortar fire after landing on a remote dirt

strip 100 miles northeast of this Laotian capital. He and five Laotians who were his "customers" ran through mortar and rifle fire for more than one hour.

"They set a trap to catch an American pilot on the ground, and they almost succeeded," he said.

"I was working with a Lao who I know only as 'swamp rat.' He said to shut down the engine while they got some bundles ready for paratroop.

### 'Not My Element'

"The moment my prop stopped turning, the bad guys knew they had me on the ground—and that's not my element," Russell said. "The first mortar riddled the aircraft, the second dropped me to the ground. Swamp rat and the others and I started running for the jungle.

"They knew they had an American and those little fellows (the North Vietnamese) took after us. They were shouting and shooting. It was tough getting through the bamboo. I cursed myself because I had been slipshod. I hadn't my gun strapped on and I didn't have any smoke to signal a rescue helicopter. But I knew where I was and I headed for some high ground with a bare spot on it."

Russell activated his pocket emergency radio and contacted a helicopter. It was flown by his fellow pilots, "Frenchy" Smith and J. J. McCauley. "They said they were coming to pick me up. It's lucky we all know the area."

Russell and the five Laotians reached a clearing by

the creek. Two of the Laotians formed a rear-guard team to hold off the North Vietnamese. Russell plunged into the creek. "Man, I'd been running for an hour. I was so dehydrated I drank the jungle water." They could hear the North Vietnamese troopers crashing through the bamboo.

### War Hotter

"But Frenchy and J. J. got there first. They hauled me up on a cable. It broke when they tried to pick up my customers but another chopper came and got them, too."

Air America pilots are finding the Laotian war hotter than ever. Twenty-four of these CIA-chartered aircraft were hit by ground fire in December and three were shot down. The record in January is described by Air America pilots as even worse.