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## Opium Ames: The Boston Connection

By Jim Morrell

James Barr Ames is a Boston lawyer and a descendant of one of the bluest of blue-blood Proper Bostonian clans, the sort of people of whom Cleveland Amory wrote, "The magic of the Family Name pronounced will open virtually all doors, admit to the best clubs, and even see to a wide variety of special attentions." Successful businessman, partner in the well-connected law firm of Ropes and Gray, member of the ultra-ultra Somerset Club ("the most British club in America"), Tavern Club and Country Club. Ames is past president and chairman of the board of trustees of Mt. Auburn Hospital, member of the governing board of the Greater Boston Hospital Council, former member of council, Boston Bar Association, board member of the Cambridge Civic Association, International Student Association, Cambridge Community Services, Town of Wayland Planning Board and Board of Public Welfare, United Community Service, Animal Rescue League and Buckingham School.

He is also one of the biggest opium shippers in the world.

Ames is a director of Air America, Inc., the CIA's "private" charter airline in Southeast Asia. Air America's motto is "Anything, Anytime, Anywhere — Professionally", and it is one motto that is taken quite literally. For Air America has been flying Meo-grown opium out of north and northeast Laos ever since 1965. From dusty airstrips in the Meo hill country they airlift the raw opium to laboratories in Long Cheng or Vientiane where it is refined into No. 4 heroin (90 to 99 percent pure), then smuggled abroad by Corsican gangsters or Lao diplomats for ultimate disposal in U.S. markets. The Opium Trail leads

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three years he spent as White's assistant, Frank was known as behind the Mayor; staff directorial advisor and leading policy His style was fast-draw, he sions quickly, and this irritated he Mayor's advisors who favor analysis, but he was universally - a rare trait in a place like city d Davis, former chief budget-the Mayor and now assistant rector for Harvard University him as "characterized by a disdain of bureaucrats and ic procedure," and adds the ssesment that Frank is one of ur or five policy analysts in the

hers - and this is a very large eak of Frank at the moving and the Mayor's progressive policies. Frank is credited with 's transportation policy (anti-and with being the most able kesman among the Mayor's on the city's racial policies. aid that while he's generally o the men he has worked with, afed at times in the staff he day after he left the May- e signed a statement calling for tion of marijuana and joined members of the Committee Drug Policy in a public of the pro-legalization argu- of the officers of that com-

from Chris Lydon, then an "objec- tive" reporter for The Boston Globe and now with The New York Times. Shortly, he was working on the campaign. Frank remembers that he had no plans of going into office with the administration, but when White told him he was needed for a good, liberal administration, he stayed.

Frank told me that he has been think- ing about running for the state Legisla- ture from Ward 5 for several years, but had always thought in terms of 1974 or 1978. "Look," he quipped, "talking for a living is attractive but if Dick Cavett couldn't make it on the air, I haven't got much of a chance." Where else? It was over Memorial Day weekend that he heard Maurice Frye, the Republican who has held the seat since 1966 was going to retire. "You see, there will be redistrict- ing in 1974 and 1978, and I was afraid that since Ward 5 politicians are not all that much in tune with the rest of the Legislature traditionally, there might not be a seat if someone strong did not take it now. I think I could hold it."

Right now, he points out, there is no elected official (except the Mayor) living in Ward 5 besides the state rep - there is no city councilor from that area. "With- out someone who works hard to maintain the essential character of the district in the expansion of the redistricting process," he says, "the district could fall like the South End, which essentially has no elected representation."

Besides Frank, there are at least three other candidates seeking the Democratic nomination: Victor Naunthermo, Francis Larkin Jr. and Mark A. Townshend. So far, there is only Virgil J. Aiello seeking the Republican nomination. One candi- date is running as an independent, Andrew Moes. The contest is expected to be between Frank and Aiello.

Frank said he expects the campaign to be "fun"; he returned to the city two weeks ago to begin full-time campaign organizing, although he said he will fly to Washington to help Harrington push a

"I'm going to move to impeach him."

"The crux of the matter is that the man is responsible for men going to jail who shouldn't be in jail," he said. "With that proven, he shouldn't be a judge at the very least."

Frank also plans to propose that the Boston police sign a consent agreement similar to that signed last month by the Washington, D.C. police department agreeing that they would not enforce laws on the books governing private consensual sexual acts involving adults.

## Opium

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the poppy fields of the Southeast Asian "Fertile Triangle" (which now produces at least 70 percent of the world's opium supply) to Saigon, Hong Kong or Marseilles and then right to the waiting arms of America's estimated one million victims of the heroin plague.

If Air America's motto is "Anything, Anywhere, Anytime - Professionally", its other motto should go: "Deny Everything." For years reports have filtered back of the airline's doings in Laos - from journalists, from GIs, from a former Air America mechanic. And for years there has been a solid chorus of denials from Vientiane to Washington to Boston. The public has been having its collective leg pulled in a most impudent fashion. But this year the big cover-up is over, largely thanks to the work of two able CCAS (Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars) investigators, Al McCoy and Cathy Read. They went to Southeast Asia last summer and did not leave until they had produced the first complete and fully documented study of the heroin trade, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, Harper and Row, September 1972. See also Al McCoy's article in the July Harper's magazine. With this work, Air America's [Continued on page 10]

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place in the history of heroin is at last secure.

interviewing top Laotian military figures in Vientiane and Paris as well as former CIA agents and Bureau of Narcotics officials scattered from Washington to New Mexico to Bangkok. In separate interviews Laotian generals Ouan Rathikun and Thal Ma both affirmed that Air America began flying opium to markets in Long Cheng and Vientiane in 1965. Gen. Ouan Rathikun was until last year owner of the largest heroin refinery in Southeast Asia. Gen. Thal Ma is former commander of the Laotian air force.) Then Al McCoy took a bus out of Luang Prabang, hitched a ride in a government truck and when the road gave out started hiking over the mountains. By nightfall he reached a small village, spending a sleepless night under a thin thatched roof. "There was always the sound of a plane somewhere. Sometimes it was far away and sometimes it seemed right overhead. And every so often you would hear the sound of its miniguns going off — 600 rounds a minute at who knows what, anything that sets off its infrared detectors, anything that moves or breathes or gives out warmth."

The next morning Al and interpreter walked down from the mist-enveloped mountains into the village of Long Pot, ten miles west of the Plain of Jars. There, under the shadow of 6200-foot Mt. Phou Phachau, which dominates the entire district, Al found himself at the head of the Opium Trail. The next section in the manuscript is entitled "Long Pot: Rendezvous with Air America."

Long Pot district is located 30 miles

northwest of Long Cheng. It is one of the few remaining areas in northeast Laos where opium history could still be observed: close enough to Long Cheng to be under Vang Pao but far enough away to escape the fighting. Vang Pao is the head of the CIA's so-called "Clandestine Army" of Meo tribesmen whose only cash crop is opium. The CIA's deal with Vang Pao, baldly put, comes to this: you send us soldier's and we'll buy your opium.

The village of Long Pot is a Meo community of 47 wooden dirt-floored houses. It is one of 12 Meo and Lao Theung villages that make up Long Pot District. One of the oldest Meo villages in northeast Laos, it has a tradition of political power and is the home of District Officer Ger Su Yang. According to the author's interview with Ger Su Yang, the village households produce 15 kilos (33 pounds) of opium apiece. They are guaranteed an adequate food supply by Air America rice drops. Vang Pao's officers pay them a high price for the opium.

The 47 households' harvest of 700 kilos of opium will yield 70 kilos of pure morphine base after it has been boiled, processed and pressed into bricks. After processing in one of the region's seven heroin labs, the Long Pot harvest will yield 70 kilos of No. 4 heroin. Worth \$500 to the villagers of Long Pot, it will bring \$225,000 on the streets of New York or San Francisco — or Boston.

Formerly Long Pot's opium harvest was bought up by Chinese merchant caravans, but these stopped coming after fighting intensified in 1964 and 1965. They were replaced by pony caravans of Vang Pao's men. But the 1969, 1970 and 1971 opium harvests were flown out in Air America UH-1H helicopters. District Officer Ger Su Yang described the rendezvous with Air America:

Meo officers with three or four

stripes (captain or major) came from Long Cheng to buy our opium. They came in American helicopters, perhaps two or three men at one time. The helicopter leaves them here for a few days and they walk to villages over there (swinging his arm in a semi-circle in the direction of Gier Goot, Long Makkhay and Nam Pac), then come back here and radio Long Cheng to send another helicopter for them. They take the opium back to Long Cheng.

The American helicopters referred to were Air America's; the pilots were always Americans, and the Meo army traders did the buying.

The headman of Nam Ou, a Lao Theung village four miles north of Long Pot, confirmed the district officer's account. In 1969 and 1970 Meo officers helicoptered into Tan Son village, hiked to Nam Ou and purchased the opium harvest, then continued on their way to Nam Suk and Long Pot.

The harvest of 1971 may well have been Long Pot's last. In return for the rice drops and opium purchases Vang Pao and the CIA kept demanding soldiers. USAID built a school in the village and "Mr. Pop" ("Pop" Buell, the CIA's chief operative in Laos) had high hopes for the place, but in 1970 Vang Pao demanded that all the young men in the village including the 15-year-olds join his army fighting the Pathet Lao. Ger Su Yang complied and they were flown away by Air America helicopters in late 1970. But reports of heavy casualties came in, and the village refused to send more. Ger Su Yang described what happened next:

The Americans in Long Cheng said I must send all the rest of our men. But I refused. So they stopped dropping rice to us. The last rice drop was in February this year.

Fight or starve — this was the CIA's

answer to the villagers of Long Pot. Air America flew the village's young men away to fight a war that assuredly was not theirs. And it flew their corpses back to the village — "professionally," of course, neatly wrapped in sanitary plastic bags.

For the CIA the Meos offered a convenient instrument for keeping alive the war in Laos — a war that no group within that country had any interest whatever in fighting — but for the Meos their alliance with the CIA and Air America has only brought disaster. They have been decimated and the survivors have fled the hills for the refugee camps around Long Cheng. Long Pot's 1972 opium harvest was destroyed when allied fighters napalmed the village and three nearby Lao Theung villages. And the NLF reported that on January 10, 1972 units of the Lao People's Liberation Army took Long Pot.

Because of the fighting, in fact, Laos will only account for a fraction of Southeast Asia's estimated 1000-ton 1972 harvest, and Air America may be shipping more dead bodies than opium this year.

Directing an airline that ships large quantities of Laotian dope might not come to mind as the most appropriate activity for a Proper Bostonian, but there is historical justification. The old Forbes mansion in Milton with its China trade artifacts has recently been opened to the public, and there one learns that many a First Family founder made his initial killing in the opium trade during the early 1800's. American traders did such a rousing business in "foreign mud", as the Chinese called it, that the Chinese Commissioner in Canton thought Turkey was an American colony. Thus Ames may be said to be only keeping up a venerable family tradition, with the one difference that today the traffic is moving in the opposite direction. ■

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