

Air America Helicopter Detained by Burmese

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VIENTIANE, Nov. 2— U.S. spokesmen have confirmed that an American helicopter was detained by Burmese authorities when it was found to be operating inside their borders around the end of May of this year.

According to the U.S. spokesmen, the Air America

helicopter apparently violated Burma's air space during "bad weather."

However, Michael Morrow of Dispatch News Agency, who reported on the incident in late September, said the "best" sources in Bangkok, Thailand, told him the craft was on a clandestine mission into Burma and was carrying a Burmese military attache

from Bangkok as well as at least one U.S. intelligence agent.

Air America is described as a private charter airline. It provides aircraft for several U.S. missions throughout Southeast Asia and has close links with the Central Intelligence Agency.

Morrow said the sources in Bangkok said the mission of

the white, unmarked helicopter detained in Burma was to visit CIA camps within that country. The craft, according to Morrow's sources, was assigned to the deputy commander of the Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group in Thailand.

Burma is currently engaged in what one recent visitor to Rangoon described as a

"multi-headed civil war" with several opposing forces, some of them politically motivated but some no better than ethnic bandit gangs.

One group of insurgents is led by former Prime Minister U Nu who was ousted in 1962 by the current military regime of Prime Minister Ne Win.

Morrow's report about the Burmese military attache being

on board the detained helicopter would indicate clandestine U.S. assistance to the Ne Win government.

Recent visitors to Burma report increasing evidence there of clandestine American presence and describe it as approximating the earlier presence and operations in Laos. Most areas of the country are off-limits to foreign visitors.

On 10 November, Air America H-34D helicopter (H-62) made a forced landing at Tachilek Airport, Burma, due to weather and a low fuel supply. A three hour SAR mission was conducted by Vientiane Station prior to being notified by Rangoon U. S. Embassy through Bangkok Embassy and Udorn Air Force Base that the aircraft had made an emergency landing and the crew, one American and one Thai, were safe, but in Burmese military custody. The pilot and Thai mechanic are experienced personnel and Air America is convinced the emergency procedures were inadvertent. While being questioned by Burmese officials, the crew reported they were on an air drop mission with tins of beef for refugees. Release of aircraft and crew was delayed by bureaucratic functioning of Burmese Government in spite of pressure from Laotian, Thailand and Burmese Embassies. In addition to evasion, there was unusual secrecy exercised by the Burmese Government and military. The American Embassy reported that perhaps some of the delay was due to two "sten type" weapons being found on board, although it was presumed they were normal survival equipment. Also, Rangoon reported an unconfirmed overflight by another helicopter of similar type approximately 26 hours after the forced landing. On 180100 November, the American Embassy at Rangoon advised the release would take place promptly, and three and one-half hours later the helicopter arrived at Udorn Air Force Base.

Per an intelligence report and information from the American Embassy, Vientiane, the Burmese Executive Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs feels that the Air America helicopter which landed in Burma on 10 November (see November monthly report) was controlled by the Central Intelligence Agency. Also, he alleged that possibly the cargo on board the aircraft (tins of beef) was for U. Nu insurgents vice Laotians refugees. This hypothesis was apparently discarded as a Burmese general, who is very touchy on the subject, granted release of the aircraft, cargo and crew. Prior to release, the pilot was requested to sign a statement that he landed due to low fuel and bad weather; that his aircraft had been returned in perfect condition; that there had been no loss to the documents, arms and ammunition, currencies, personal belongings, and all miscellaneous items relevant to the aircraft; (This statement could be a source for misrepresentation, but Embassy officials do not envision any.) and that he extended his gratitude for his friendly treatment and succor. No repercussions directly relating to this incident are anticipated, but in the event of a recurrence, it is anticipated that GOB may not be quite so cooperative.