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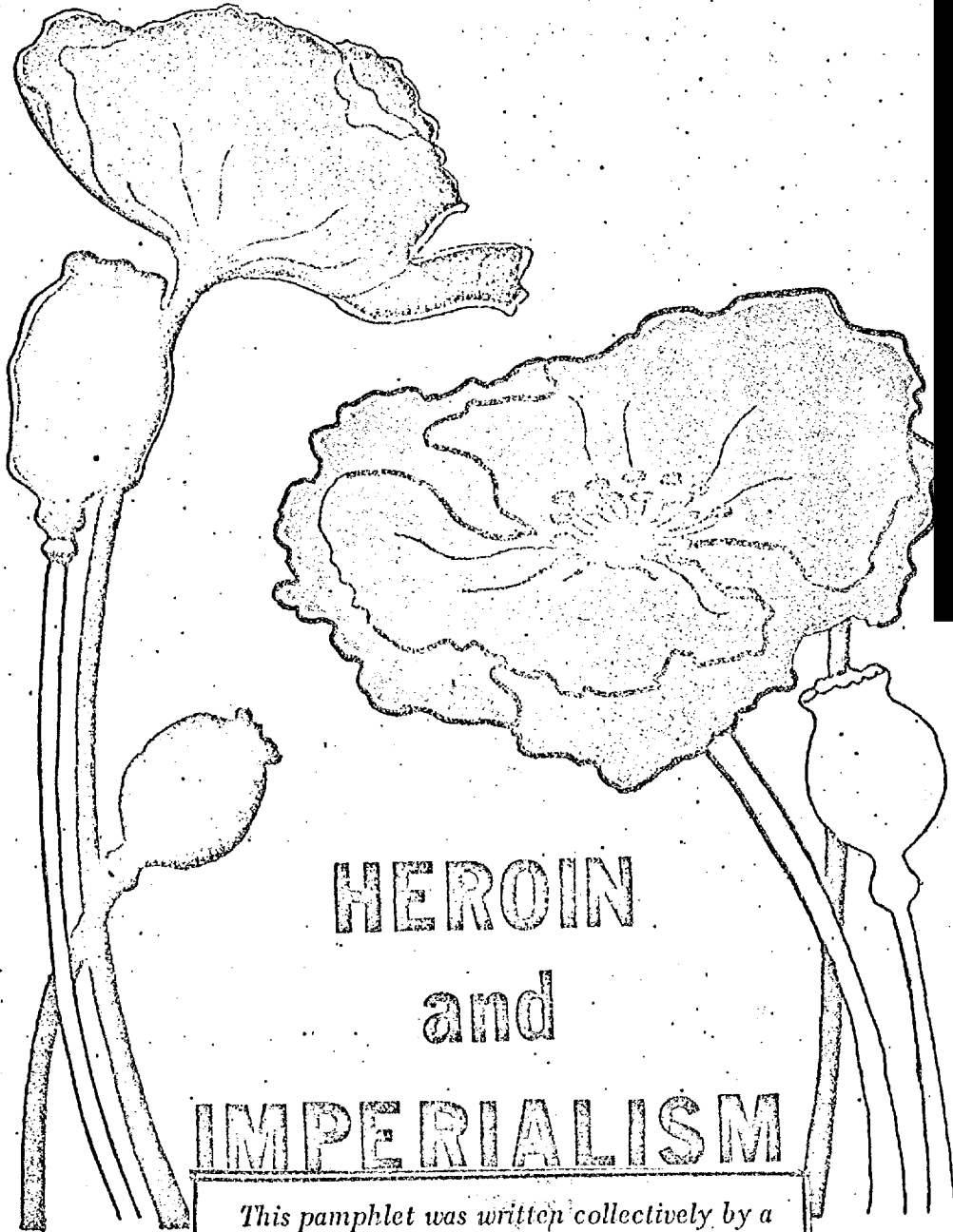
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April, 1972

STATOHR

the opium trail



HEROIN and

IMPERIALISM

This pamphlet was written collectively by a study group supported by the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars. The group included Pat Haseltine, Jerry Meldon, Charles Knight, Mark Selden, Rod Aya, Henry Norr, and Mara. Thanks to all who helped, especially Jim Morrell, Tod McKie, and Jancis Long.

POST

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Airline Sought Pilots Here

By CHUCK GREEN

Denver Post Staff Writer

A little-known airline, believed controlled by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and paid to fly secret missions in Southeast Asia, has tried to recruit pilots and mechanics in the Rocky Mountain Empire, The Denver Post has learned.

Response to the recruitment efforts couldn't be determined.

The work is being done by Air America, Inc., probably the world's most secretive airline.

According to the Pentagon papers, the company is run by the CIA, but it has a fleet of aircraft almost the size of Pan America World Airways.

Air America pilots flew T28 fighter-bombers on raids in Laos in 1964 before the American public knew of U.S. military involvement there, the Pentagon documents show.

Air America flyers also have played key roles in search and rescue missions beyond the borders of South Vietnam.

Dean Rusk, secretary of state in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, once cabled the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane, Laos, that "Air America pilots can play critically important" roles in the missions.

Some Laotian

In the same cable, Rusk granted "discretionary authority to use Air America pilots in T28s for SAR (search and rescue) operations when you consider this indispensable."

The published version of the Pentagon papers tells of Air America's involvement in the early stages of the air war in Laos:

"The second major segment of the Administration's covert war against North Vietnam consisted of air operations in Laos. A force of propeller-driven T28 fighter-bombers, varying from about 25 to 40 aircraft, had been organized there. The planes bore Laotian Air Force markings, but only some belonged to that air force.

"The rest were manned by pilots of Air America (a pseudo-private airline run by the CIA) and by Thai pilots under the control of Ambassador Leonard Unger."

The parenthetical description is a part of the Pentagon papers published version. Unger was chief U.S. diplomat in Laos at the time.

These brief glimpses into Air America's purpose are in sharp contrast to its superficial character.

for Missions Over Asia

The company, believed to operate a fleet of about 175 planes, was formed in 1953 as a wholly owned subsidiary of Pacific Corp., a Delaware corporation.

American Pilots

Air America's executive offices are in Washington, D.C., and it survives primarily on overseas U.S. government contract work.

One of Air America's properties, Air Asia Ltd., owns the most sophisticated aircraft maintenance facility in the Far East on Taiwan.

Air America spokesmen have said they employ about 400 pilots, most of them American.

Air America advertising accounts in Denver date back at least to 1965, although most of the ads don't even mention the company itself. Respondents are supposed to correspond to a Washington, D.C., post office box.

Typical of the ads bought by Air America was this classified in The Denver Post last fall:

HELICOPTER PILOTS

Overseas openings for Helicopter Pilots with H-34 or H-33 Pilot in Command Experience. Applicants must have 1,500 hours Helicopter Pilot Time with 1,000 hours Pilot in Command Time and Instrument Rating in Helicopters. Send letter and resume to P.O. Box 19230, Washington, D.C. 20036. Equal Opportunity Employer.

Both the H34 and H53 choppers are used by the military. The Navy uses the S58 helicopter, and the modified version of that, the H34, is an Army transport craft.

Neither machine has been widely used commercially.

Air America spokesmen have said the company employs about 8,500 persons, and has at times had up to 11,000 on its payroll.

Ads in Denver during the last 18 months have offered jobs for airplane pilots, mechanics, supervisors, electronic technicians, teachers and quality control personnel.

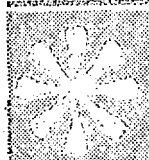
The company did about \$8 million worth of business last year, with almost \$3 million in profit before taxes.

The Pentagon papers came from a Robert S. McNamara to determine how

the United States became involved in the Vietnam war.

The top secret documents were exposed by the New York Times in a series of articles in June and since have been published in paperback form.

How the CIA Runs Secret Airline in Asia



SPECIAL REPORT

By JAMES MCCARTNEY
Herald Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The CIA, in supersecrecy, is running an airline in Southeast Asia with as many planes as Pan American — and about as many employees as the CIA itself — some 18,000.

Although virtually unknown to the U.S. public, which pays the bills, it ranks in numbers of planes among the half-dozen largest U.S. air carriers.

The airline is called Air America Inc., and it probably is the world's most secretive airline.

Its pilots — supposedly "civilians" — have manned T28 fighter-bombers on raids in Laos, according to the Pentagon papers.

THEY OFTEN fly hazardous missions in Laos, carrying troops into battle — and the wounded out.

They play the role of a part-time air force to many "irregular" of guerrilla fighters for a secret, CIA-sponsored guerrilla army in Laos.

Says a former CIA official: "Without Air America there could never have been a Laotian war."

Air America also carries freight, owns and operates Asia's largest aircraft maintenance facility, carries passengers, evacuates refugees, drops rice to the starving — and carefully hides its activities.

THE STORY of Air America, in fact, is one of the most intriguing of the U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, shrouded in Oriental mystery.

Its mysteries, however, have now attracted the attention and concern of congressional investigators.

For the first time they have become fascinated with Air America — as well as with other CIA-related airlines that long have provided "cover" for clandestine U.S. activities.

Air America simply is the largest of a highly complex structure of secret, and semi-secret, CIA-related corporations with interests in air power.

"Nobody on Capitol Hill seems to know exactly what Air America does," says one investigator.

"But I can guarantee you that we're trying to find out."

THE CORPORATION has every outward sign of complete legitimacy — a Wall Street board of directors, thickly carpeted offices in Washington, neatly marked and maintained aircraft in the Far East often doing yeoman service for the U.S. government.

Many of the services of Air America are completely open in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan.

But then there is the covert side.

Says Victor Marchetti, a former special assistant to the CIA's chief of plans, who quit in "disenchantment" and is now cooperating with congressional committees:

"The CIA created Air America. We owned it. It did our bidding.

"The top man of Air America, the man who built it, George Doole Jr., was a CIA man."

MARCHETTI recalls seeing an internal CIO memo in which the officer in charge of Air America's budget complained that the airline had become "so huge."

"The memo complained that Air America had more employees than the CIA — and the CIA had 18,000," Marchetti says.

Marchetti recalls that at one time the CIA made a movie about its activities in Laos — hoping to get public credit for its long-secret activities.

"The big star of the movie was Air America," he says.

"It carried the supplies and weapons into battle, supported the guerrilla army of Meo tribesman, and evacuated the wounded." The movie was never shown publicly.

THE PENTAGON papers also furnished a flash of insight into Air America's activities.

In talking about the beginning phases of the escalation of the aerial war in Laos, the published version of the papers says:

A force of propeller-driven T28 fighter-bombers, varying from about 25 to 40 aircraft, had been organized there (in Laos).

"The planes bore Laotian Air Force markings, but only some belonged to that air force. The rest were manned by pilots of Air America (a pseudo-private airline run by the CIA) and by Thai pilots . . ."

THE PAPERS also include the text of a cablegram from then Secretary of State Dean Rusk to the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane, granting "discretionary authority" to use Air America pilots in T28 fighter-bombers for search and rescue flights.

Rusk mentioned "T28 operations" as "vital both for their military and psychological effects in Laos" — but did not discuss the full scope of Air America's role.

The Pentagon papers make clear that Air America pilots were flying heavily armed combat missions as long ago as 1964.

OFFICIALLY, Air America activities are supposed to be limited to carrying cargo and men on government contracts.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee investigators in Laos in recent months have been puzzled by the fact that T28 fighter, bombers at major airbases have been unmarked except for serial numbers on their tails.

Continued