

**Mr. Helms (via Colonel White
and General Cushman)**

The attached report on Air America operations in Laos will be of interest, particularly the statistics pertaining to the total effort in 1969 as set forth in paragraph 1.

The summary was included as an attachment by DDP in a memorandum to Dr. Kissinger on 6 February 1970. The memorandum was in response to a query from Dr. Kissinger regarding POW relief operations and food drops in Laos.

SIGNED R. L. Bannerman

R. L. Bannerman

10 FEB 1970

DD/S:RLB:llc (9 February 1970)

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DD/S 70-0506: Memo for Chief, Operations, FE, frm DD/S, subj: Air America Operations in Laos, dated 6 February 1970

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DD/S 70-0506

6 FEB 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief of Operations, Far East Division

SUBJECT : Air America Operations in Laos

1. In accordance with your request of yesterday, there is attached a blind memorandum which outlines the scope of Air America operations in Laos.
2. Except for the General Counsel, who has looked over the paper, and this Directorate, the paper has not been cleared within the Agency. I suggest that your people undertake such additional clearance as is necessary prior to its inclusion in the package for Dr. Kissinger as requested by Mr. Chapin on 4 February.

SIGNED R. L. Bannerman

R. L. Bannerman
Deputy Director
for Support

Att.

cc: General Counsel

(6 Feb 70)

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1. Air America, Inc., has been actively engaged for some twelve years in air support of operations in Laos. This support involves airlifting substantial quantities of rice, other foodstuffs, supplies and military equipment, refugees and indigenous soldiers through Laos. Air America's operating and maintenance facilities at Vientiane and at Udon Thani, across the Mekong in Thailand and forty miles south of Vientiane, served as the base of operations during 1969 for 230 pilots, 46 fixed-wing aircraft and 37 helicopters. These pilots made 109,000 landings with fixed-wing aircraft and 157,000 helicopter landings, while transporting 739,000 passengers and 130,000 tons of cargo in 1969. Some 120,000 aircraft flying hours were required and this represents a growth from 304 flying hours in 1967, the Company's first year of operation in the interior of Laos. ⁵

2. The great majority of the landing strips used for fixed-wing aircraft are in mountainous areas where only small sites can be developed. Frequently operations can be undertaken from one direction only due to the gradient of the terrain or the proximity of hills. One such strip is at Phia Louang. It is at an elevation of 4500 feet, 596 feet long, 55 feet wide, and has a dirt surface. Landings can only be made up-hill to the south and notices to pilots caution that the approach is subject to strong updrafts from the canyon off the north end of the strip. In addition to the small single-engined aircraft that operate into these strips, Air America provides flight crews to man C-130s and C-123s for operation into some larger landing areas and for airdrops.

3. There are 139 landing strips which remain active in Laos, approximately 200 more have been closed for one reason or another, principally the presence of unfriendly forces. In addition, some 240 helicopter pads are in current use. Many of these operating sites are in close proximity to and even surrounded by unfriendly forces and safe availability to Air America must be checked before each day's operation. Navigational facilities are available at only a half-dozen of the larger airports. In addition, a substantial portion of the operation is conducted over territory held by unfriendly forces and subject to ground fire. In the course of these service operations 56 Air America employees have been killed and 56 aircraft have been lost or destroyed in Laos of which 33 were helicopters.

4. Although Air America first went in to Laos in 1957, associated companies have been in Southeast Asia since participating in the airlifting of supplies to the French forces in the ill-fated defense of Dien Bien Phu in early 1954 operating from Haiphong.

5. Living conditions in the interior of Laos are rudimentary, yet pilots remain occasionally overnight at sites which can be considered reasonably secure. Aircraft maintenance and communications station personnel are frequently exposed for extended periods at remote locations. The transportation and storage of supplies for up-country refueling is always a challenge.

6. Supporting the entire Air America operation are 213 Americans and 1109 employees of other nationalities in Laos and 172 Americans and 1325 employees of other nationalities at Udon Thani, Thailand.