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*Washington Merry-Go-Round* by JACK ANDERSON



WASHINGTON — A Royal Laotian prince and the Laotian Army commander have now been identified as the principal traffickers in the heroin used by U.S. troops in South Vietnam.

Furthermore, a congressional investigation has confirmed our earlier allegations that the Central Intelligence Agency is involved in the Laotian heroin operations.

The investigation was made by Congressman Bob Steele, D-Conn., and Morgan Murphy, D-Ill., both members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Steele is preparing a report that will allege CIA "Air America" aircraft have been used to transport the drug from northern Laos into the capital city of Vientiane.

It says, however, there is no evidence that the CIA had any official policy of letting its planes be used to move the drugs. Furthermore, it adds that the agency has now cracked down on the practice.

According to the draft report,

prepared by Steele for the House Foreign Affairs Chairman Tom Morgan, D-Pa., the deadly drug is transported from opium fields in Laos to the battlefields of South Vietnam in the following manner:

First the raw opium is hauled from deep in northern Laos through Burma and into the Laotian town of Ban Bouei Sai, with former Nationalist Chinese soldiers-turned-drug smugglers riding shotgun on the shipments.

At Ban Bouei Sai, Laotian Army Commander Gen. Quan Rathikoun takes over. He supervises the shipment of the opium into Vientiane, using American-supplied planes and protecting the smuggled cargos with U.S.-supplied arms.

Once it reaches Vientiane, the morphine base is processed in Gen. Rathikoun's labs into "number four" heroin, a pure grade of the deadly drug almost unknown in Southeast Asia until traffickers began turning it out especially for American troops.

P R O T E C T I O N A N D

PAYROLL — Throughout Laos, the heroin operation is protected and abetted by Prince Boun Oun, Inspector General of the realm. The prince gets part of the take from the drug running.

Once processed, the heroin is flown into South Vietnam aboard military and civilian aircraft from both Laos and South Vietnam.

Some of the carefully wrapped packages of the white powder are air-dropped near U.S. troop emplacements in the fields. Others reach the troops after being landed at outlying air strips or flown directly into Saigon's Tansohut airport.

With Vietnamese custom officials looking the other way, the heroin passes into illicit channels. The Congressman identifies South Vietnamese Premier Tran Thien Kheim as the man behind the corruption of the customs agents, but they stop short of calling him an outright trafficker.

The angriest language in Steele's draft report is reserved for U.S. diplomats who have failed to use their leverage against such men as Rathikoun and Prince Boun Oun to get the drug traffic cut off at its source.

Steele points out that in Turkey some progress has been made, although slowly, through diplomatic channels to cut off the flow of heroin to the U.S.

In a future column, we will detail how American ex-GIs and deserters, assisted by corrupt Thai officials, are beginning to move huge quantities of heroin into the U.S. to replace the Turkish supply.

Footnote: In a March 22 column, we cited a letter from a former CIA employe, S.M. Mustard, who charged that South Vietnam's Vice President Ky once flew opium out of Laos. Afterward, an off-duty Air Vietnam stewardess was arrested at the Saigon airport with close to 20 pounds of heroin in her possession. Significantly, she was carrying names of prominent South Vietnamese politicians who apparently are implicated in the heroin traffic.