

The 100 U.S. Air Attaches in Laos

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With more than 100 U.S. air attaches attached to the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane — as rumor here, so frequently true, has it — this embassy probably has the largest such contingent in the world, and must be more informed about the host country's air force than anywhere else in the world.

The truth itself, however, is classified secret. Officially — that is, "on the book" — there are only seven U.S. air attaches, four officers and three enlisted men with one airplane, an aging C-47 cargo plane.

Officially — that is, "on the book" — the air attache office advises American Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley on air matters in Laos and maintains liaison for the embassy with Laos' air force.

In laymen terms military attaches say the function is

"overt intelligence on the Lao air force, just as it is elsewhere."

Precise figures on the Lao air force are classified. It is rumored to have about 70 aircraft, including about 40 propeller-driven T-28 bombers, about ten helicopters, about ten C-47 cargo planes, and some of them converted to A C-47 "Spooky" gunships, and a few small observation planes.

More than 100 air attaches for this? As an attache explained, "Our job is to help you (newsmen-public) gain information."

However, as the U.S. press attache in Vientiane, Andrew P. Guzowski, said, "The air attache is not required to see the press" and "that is an on-the-record statement" of why for three years interviews with the air attache here have been routinely denied. Elected officials have been degrading the no-information

policy on Laos. Where American spending and activity in Laos is concerned, Senator Stuart Symington, a former secretary of the Air Force, told the Senate in October, "It is clear also that the public has been kept completely in the dark," and went on to demonstrate where the failing of information lies.

"In a statement on March 6, 1970, President Nixon provided the American people with what he described as a 'precise description of our current activities in Laos,'" the Senator said.

"According to the President, the pertinent facts were:

"First. The United States was providing regular and irregular Lao forces with equipment, training and logistical support.

"Second. The United States was conducting air operations to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail, reconnaissance flights in northern Laos; and,

on request from the Lao government, combat support missions for Lao forces."

The President's report "glossed over the following details which subsequently came to light," the Senator charged.

"First. Most of the war in Laos is coordinated through and by the American Embassy in Vientiane.

"Second. The United States trains, arms, and feeds the Lao Army and Air Force.

"Third. The United States, through the Central Intelligence Agency, trains, advises, pays, supports, and coordinates an irregular army — elements of which are de-

played in four of the five military regions in Laos.

"Fourth. The United States, through the Central Intelligence Agency, and in cooperation with the Thai government, trains, pays, supports, and coordinates a growing force of Thai soldiers in Laos.

"Fifth. In addition to interdiction operations over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the U.S. Air Force flies hundreds of combat air missions throughout Laos in close support of Lao regular and irregular ground combat forces. These missions are also coordinated by the American Embassy in Vientiane."

The coordination of those "hundreds of combat air missions through Laos" is done by the "more than one hundred" U.S. Air Force men working for Vientiane's Air Attache office.

The ranking officer and U.S. Air Attache is Colonel Hayden C. Curry, who carries on the at least three year tradition of refusing to speak on the public record.

As a result little is known publicly about the spending of a projected \$350 million in direct aid to Laos during the current fiscal year of which \$125.8 million is for military aid.

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