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Laos 'Secret War'

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CIA Masquerade As AID Officials

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WASHINGTON — Central Intelligence Agency officials in Laos continue to masquerade as Agency for International Development employes in prosecuting the "secret war" against Communist Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese troops, Charles Mann, director of the U.S. AID Mission in Laos, disclosed today.

"AID has provided some CIA personnel with cover positions," Mann said in an interview at the end of a week of talks here before returning to Vientiane today. "Let me hasten to add, however, that these personnel have absolutely and utterly no policy functions," he said.

Mann also denied allegations, included in a report last month by the Senate Refugees Subcommittee, that AID funds were still being misused to support training and resettlement of indigenous Meo tribesmen that make up the government armies.

Pledges Cited

"There are no funds appropriated to AID that are being used for military purposes," he said.

AID Director John Hannah pledged almost exactly a year ago, in a letter to

subcommittee chairman Senator Edward Kennedy, that "at the beginning of fiscal year 1972, all of the AID financing with which you have been concerned will be terminated."

A new cost-sharing arrangement was created whereby the CIA refunded the State Department agency for its medical assistance and other services provided the secret Royal Laotian Army.

Under this arrangement, Kennedy's subcommittee charged, about \$2.5 million, or about half of the \$4.9 congressional appropriation for humanitarian aid in Laos will be spent this year on financing the war against the Communists.

According to Mann, in addition to providing "cover" for CIA agents working out of AID offices, CIA officials are still relying on AID for logistical and medical support.

'Logical,' He Says

He called the cost-sharing plan a "perfectly logical and sensible arrangement" and said that the charge that AID funds have been used to support CIA activities was "basically wrong."

"We have 200 field dispensaries," Mann explained. "Obviously if a wounded sol-

dier comes to a dispensary or if a dependent of a soldier or a civilian who might have stepped on a mine or unfortunately just been wounded comes to us, you're not going to ask 'my dear friend, are you a soldier or are you a dependent of a soldier?' Are you going to tell him that because you stepped on a mine, therefore I cannot treat you and god bless, good luck, go some place else where there is no medical care.

"For the last year, nobody has hidden the presence of the CIA in Laos and the involvement of the irregular troops fighting there," Mann said.