

Laos Operation

CIA's Airline Closing Down

Bangkok

Air America, a "spy" charter airline working mostly under a cloak of secrecy for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, has quietly gone out of business in Laos and its fleet of planes is up for sale, aviation sources said yesterday.

The industry sources said all of Air America's aircraft in the Laotian capital of Vientiane have been moved to Udorn, Thailand, where its helicopters are based. The U.S. also keeps many of its RF-4 photo-reconnaissance jets at Udorn.

Udorn is 290 miles northeast of Bangkok and 40 miles from Vientiane, where Air America had been operating since 1959.

At the height of American involvement in Indochina, Air America crews flew 6000 flight hours a month in Laos and had 40 planes based in Vientiane alone.

Now, the sources said, only a few administrative personnel remain along with

ten flyers who are helping train Royal Laotian Air Force pilots to fly C-123 transports.

During the Indochina conflict, Air America's civilian pilots earned \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year risking their lives over Laos and North and South Vietnam. At least 17 men were killed and another is known to be a prisoner of the pro-Communist Pathet Lao in northern Laos.

Air America still does business in Vietnam, working under a contract with the International Commission for Control and Supervision which is policing the cease-fire there.

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