

Paramilitary Flights Into Cambodia

Air America Pilots'

Saigon

After risking their lives for a decade in Indochina, a number of seasoned, privately employed American helicopter pilots are now expressing bitterness and resentment over a U.S. government contract that requires them to fly what they call dangerous paramilitary missions into Cambodia.

Most of the pilots have flown in Vietnam for the Army or the Marines, and in Laos as part of the secret air war in the 1960s work for Air America, the private airline financed largely by the Central Intelligence Agency, the State Department and other government bodies.

In interviews last week, ten of the 35 helicopter pilots based in Saigon described flying hazardous missions from time to time in Cambodia during recent months; ferrying American military officers — often armed with grenades and rifles — into combat areas, transporting weapons and ammunition for the Cambodian army, evacuating the wounded and carrying Cambodian troops and high-ranking Cambodian officers into besieged

cities.

The dangers anger the pilots, mostly because they no longer receive the lucrative combat pay of earlier years.

Air America, arguing that its operations were becoming purely commercial, decided last October to cut off the extra pay, thereby reducing wages, pilots complain, from about \$45,000 a year to \$28,000.

Furthermore, the risks seem higher now.

Without the U.S. Air Force to provide search-and-rescue operations, the pilots believe that they have no chance of being picked up if they go down in Cambodia.

And rumor has it that the Cambodian insurgents never take prisoners, they execute them.

When you're half way between Sihanoukville (Kompong Som) and Phnom Penh and you get a fluctuating oil pressure," one pilot remarked, "I'll tell you, that rumor really plays hell with your mind."

Air America's Cambodia operations appear to fall just within the legal bounds set by congressional acts that prohibit the use of U.S.

military advisers and armed forces in Indochina.

The anger, the reluctance to fly into danger, also has deeper roots that grow out of this strange period of American ambivalence in Indochina.

The U.S. has withdrawn its troops, but not its military aid, has shifted its goals, but has not abandoned its interests and so this dwindling corps of elite pilots remains among the last Americans to face combat.

Some of them, in the absence of high pay and clear American goals, are no longer sure why they are doing it.

A few have resigned, and others are planning to leave.

Ronald L. Dubinsky, who started flying in Vietnam 11 years ago as a Marine pilot, was fired a few weeks ago by Air America because he refused to fly any more missions in Cambodia.

He plans legal action against the company contending that his contract did not call for paramilitary operations. Air America officials in Saigon declined to comment.

Dubinsky, 38, had flown for six years for Air Ameri-

Complaints

ca in the Loatian war. "I didn't want to get into the old game again," he said. just don't want to see us get started again by doing this paramilitary stuff."

New York Times

"I'm opposed to it! My whole attitude has just gone to super-dove. I have a feeling — from what I've seen in Laos — that it starts this way, from a couple of civilians operating this way. I

Dragonfly

Washington

The dragonfly never walks, being a creature of the air

United Press