

# HERB CAEN



## Pacific Tell & Tell

**IT'S ODD THAT** the name of William H. Bird hasn't surfaced yet in the sudden outpouring of headline "news" about clandestine U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia, especially since this Bird isn't especially shy.

A couple of years ago I reported that he had bought the big old Leamington Hotel in Oakland for \$2 million, and was spending another million to refurbish it. His first big publicity splash was to play host to the wives and families of American POWs arriving at Travis Air Force Base from Vietnam because, said Bird expansively, "I made a fortune over there" (with his charter airline, Bird Air, and in constructing airstrips) "and I'd like to do something for the people who fought the war."

**Bird, who spends most of his time in Bangkok, is still fighting the war himself. On his latest visit to Oakland, in a remarkably frank interview with Steve Talbot of Berkeley's Internews, he said his Bird Air is "flying an average of 10 missions a day to airlift military supplies into Cambodia." The Air Force, he went on, is using Bird Air "to get around the Congressional ban on U.S. military involvement."**

As he puts it, the Air Force supplies the C-130 aircraft and he supplies the "civilian pilots," all recently retired Air Force men. He's using 32, he says, on the daily runs into Cambodia, an area he knows well. Bird has operated in Southeast Asia — for himself, the military and the CIA — for over 30 years, but I guess Congress knows all this. Interested investigators can reach him through the Leamington Hotel, Oakland.

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