

Cutback of U.S. Pilots Flying For C.I.A. in Laos Is Reported

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VIENTIANE, Laos, July 2 (UPI)—A sharp cutback in the number of American charter pilots flying for the Central Intelligence Agency and other United States Government agencies in Laos is under way, according to well-informed sources here.

The sources said that the reduction resulted from sharply decreased military activity since the cease-fire on Feb. 22, continuing American disengagement from Indochina, and a \$500-million reduction in United States military aid to Laos and South Vietnam in the new fiscal year, which started Sunday.

Air America, biggest of the charter carriers here, expects to reduce by about one-third its pilots flying from Vientiane and the American base at Udon Thani in nearby northeastern Thailand.

Continental Air Services, a smaller company that is a subsidiary of Continental Airlines, is cutting the number of its planes and pilots at the two locations virtually in half.

Pilots for two lines, some of

whom are paid more than \$40,000 a year, carry troops, ammunition and nonmilitary supply cargoes aboard planes ranging from single-engine utility aircraft to four-engine military style transports.

Helicopters operated by Air America regularly evacuated wounded Laotian and Thai troops supported by the C.I.A. and performed other military missions.

The cost of the air support had been running at about \$40-million a year, with Air America getting roughly 80 per cent.

Part of the cutback in Air America's operations in Vientiane involves a dozen C-123 military transports that are being turned over to the Laotian Air Force. The planes belong to the United States Defense Department.

One pilot for Continental Air Services whose single-engine plane went down in northern Laos in May is the only known American prisoner of war remaining in the hands of Communist forces in Indochina. Pathet Lao officials announced that he had been captured.