

Richard V. Secord

8/26/2004

Dear Mr. Cates.

This memo does not purport to analyze the many roles and missions of Air America in support of US Armed Forces engaged in SEAsia all through the 1960's and into the '70's. However, this memo is based upon first hand experience while serving on detail to CIA during 1966, 67, and 68

In July and August 1966 I worked in the US Embassy Saigon in the Air Office which supervised Air America (AAM) operations in South Vietnam. AAM crews and aircraft closely supported COORDS missions which were combined CIA/US Armed Forces operations aimed at destroying enemy infrastructure. Thousands of AAM fixed wing and rotary wing missions were flown in this short period of time to my knowledge. From September 1966 and for more than the two following years I was in charge of Agency tactical air operations throughout Laos and occasionally into North Vietnam. This entailed requesting USAF air support and directing AAM fixed wing and rotary wing ops in support of Agency paramilitary forces in Laos as well as US Armed Forces ground operations in combat against enemy forces in Laos.

In this regard, AAM supported the Joint project 404 (US Army and USAF personnel deployed at the 6 main operating sites in Laos) which entailed continuing combat. AAM also directly supported the USAF RAVEN FAC program in Laos with both fixed and rotary wing aircraft. This program too was both long and famous.

Additionally, AAM support of the US manned "Site 85" radar bombing facility in far Northern Laos during 1967 and 1968 is well documented. I was the Agency officer in charge of the defense of this site. AAM helicopters rescued all our surviving military personnel on 11 March 1968 while the site was under heavy NVA Infantry and Artillery attack. And I might add, a few months earlier an AAM helicopter shot down an enemy AN2 Colt aircraft that was attacking the same site.

Finally, I have a severe problem with any US Administration office which can find no record of AAM roles in support of US Armed Forces during the SEAsia war - for example, the AAM role in rescuing downed US aircrew men in Laos is a well known and heroic story stretching over many years.

Sincerely,


Richard V. Secord
Major General, USAF (Ret)