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	FROM	TO	MAKE OF AIRCRAFT	TYPE	REGISTRATION OR SERIAL NUMBER	MAKE OF ENGINE	U. S. C. THROAT	AS PILOT-RECHARGE	POTENTIAL	DAY	NOTE	AS SET PILOT	AS SET ENGINE	INTERVAL	DAY	NOTE																																																			
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SPECIAL EDITION SEPTEMBER 2005

**Support S.651 & H.R. 1276 -- Recognize the Service; Honor the Sacrifices**

## HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

The veterans of Air America (AAM) and its predecessor company, Civil Air Transport (CAT), urges your support of Senate bill S.651, and House bill 1276, which provides for **Civil Service Retirement Benefits** for the years those companies were owned, and controlled, by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). For a thirty (30) year period starting with its establishment in 1946, its engagement in full operation from 1947-1975, and its control by the CIA from 1950-1976; Air America provided the United States Government with a unique capability to conduct covert paramilitary action, or intelligence collection operations on an almost world-wide basis.

**French Award Ceremony Honors Civil Air Transport Pilots**

On February 24, 2005, the Government of France honored the seven surviving American civilian pilots who voluntarily flew many hazardous supply missions to the besieged French Expeditionary Forces gallantly at Dien Bien Phu (North Vietnam). Fifty years after their valiant service in support of their French comrades, these Americans received France's highest military and civilian honor, "Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur". The "Legion of Honor", created by Napoleon Bonaparte, dates back to 1802.

In January 1954, at the request of the U.S. Government, twenty-one CAT pilots were checked out in C-119 aircraft to fly supply missions to aid the besieged French garrison of Dien Bien Phu. Describing conditions over Dien Bien Phu, Dr. William M. Leary writes, "The CAT pilots flew through flak as dense as



From left to right: Ambassador of France Jean-David Levitte, Allen Pope, Monson Shaver, Douglas Price, Roy Watts, Nelson Duke, Willis Hobbs. Source: Embassy of France in the United States website

anything Allied planes encountered over the German Ruhr towards the end of World War II." CAT suffered its first casualty on April 24th. CAT pilot Paul R. Holden suffered wounds from a 37mm shell. The French surgeons wanted to amputate Holden's arm.

But Air Force surgeons were able to save Holden's arm. On May 6, 1954 CAT pilots, James McGovern and Wallace Buford, were shot down over Dien Bien Phu. They were the first Americans to die in what later became the Vietnam War.



## AIR AMERICA ASSOCIATION, INC.

Air America Association, Inc. is incorporated in Texas as a non-profit organization.

**Classes of Members and Eligibility.** The association shall have two (2) classes of members. The classes are regular and associate. Each class may be awarded honorary membership as directed by the Board. The designation of each class, eligibility, and rights of the members of each class shall be as follows: Regular class of membership is open to all former employees of the Pacific Corporation or one of its subsidiaries, with their spouse, or widow and children. Associate class of membership is open to the employee's other family members and former spouses. All persons in other organizations that worked along side of us are eligible for associate membership. All associate members must be sponsored by a member who will vouch for their associate status. Acceptance for Regular and Associate membership requires approval by the Board of Directors. The personal conduct of an applicant that is deemed by the Board of Directors to not be in the best interest of the association, or our country, will be denied membership (Bylaws See II Feb 90 Members Section 1).

### Air America -- "First in, Last out"

Adventure, intrigue, danger, sacrifice--words that fit Air America well. Air America was a CIA - owned and - operated "air proprietary" during the Cold War against the global menace of communism. From 1946 to 1975, Civil Air Transport (CAT) and Air America served alongside U.S. and allied intelligence agents and military personnel in the Far East, often in dangerous combat and combat support roles. Behind a shroud of strict secrecy, many Air America personnel were unaware that they were "shadow people" in counterinsurgency operations. Some 243 of them were killed in action in China, Korea, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and elsewhere. Though many of those Asian countries eventually fell to the communists, the contributions of Air America personnel to the cause of freedom remain unparalleled in aviation history. CAT and Air America personnel were the first Americans in China and Korea and, after the U.S. military had withdrawn from Vietnam, Air America pilots risked their lives to evacuate the last Americans. Air America -- "First in, last out."

### OFFICERS

President: Boyd Mesecher	E-Mail: BMesecher@aol.com
Vice President: Ted Mauldin	E-Mail: tedsm2@bellsouth.net
Board Member: Judith Porter	E-Mail: JudyinanRV@aol.com
Board Member: E.G. "Ed" Adams	E-Mail: egadams@sbeglobal.net
Board Member: John Melton	E-Mail: jmelton10@nc.rr.com

### COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

Archives: Jesse Walton  
 Stockroom Sales: Dan Gamelin  
 Nominating Committee Chairman & Chaplin: L. Michael Kandt  
 Stamp Committee Chairman: Jeffrey Blanchford

### GENERAL ASSOCIATION INFORMATION

Membership Secretary: Jane Mullins  
 Treasurer: Patty Sherman  
 Air America Log Editor: Sandi McRainey  
 Website Manager: Steve Maxner

Visit the Website at: [www.air-america.org](http://www.air-america.org)

This official website of Air America and CAT tells the 30-year story of these great Americans--shadow people, largely unknown to Americans and the world. They helped bring the Cold War to an end.



Air America Bell 204B pitches forward as it takes off in South Vietnam  
 Source: Scott Phillips

**Air America --  
 "Anything, Anytime, Anywhere,  
 Professionally"**



# ***AIR AMERICA***

***"From the shrouded peaks  
of Tibet, to the black skies of  
China, to the steaming jungles of  
Southeast Asia, the legendary men  
and women of Civil Air Transport and  
Air America always gave full measure  
of themselves in the defense  
of freedom".***

***The Central Intelligence Agency***

***"First in, last out"***

# The United States of America



## Central Intelligence Agency

### IN COMMEMORATION

During the hottest days of the Cold War, the aircrews and ground personnel of Civil Air Transport and Air America gave unwavering service to the United States of America in the worldwide battle against communist oppression. Over the course of four decades, the courage, dedication to duty, superior airmanship, and sacrifice of these individuals set standards against which all future covert air operations must be measured. From the mist-shrouded peaks of Tibet, to the black skies of China, to the steaming jungles of Southeast Asia, the legendary men and women of Civil Air Transport and Air America always gave full measure of themselves in the defense of freedom. They did so despite often outdated equipment, hazardous terrain, dangerous weather, enemy fire, and their own government bureaucracy. Their actions speak eloquently of their skill, bravery, loyalty, and faith in themselves, each other, and the United States of America.

  
George J. Tenet  
Director of Central Intelligence  
2 June 2001

### CIA CITATION

On June 2, 2001, representatives of the United States Central Intelligence Agency presented the Civil Air Transport and the Air America Veterans with a Unit Citation Award recognizing, honoring, and commemorating our collective service and sacrifice in Asia and Southeast Asia. The CIA also presented individual citations recognizing the specific accomplishments and contributions of Hugh L. Grundy and Robert E. Rousselot. Jim Glerum and a senior CIA representative presented the citations during the joint CAT/Air America Associations Banquet. More than 800 association members attended the event. Commemorative Medallions and Postal Cachets were also available at the reunion.

### CAT on the KOREAN AIRLIFT

CAT, Incorporated, began flying Korean Airlift missions in September 1950. CAT carried all type of cargo to practically every airstrip in Korea capable of landing a C-46, including ammunition, gasoline, rations, aircraft parts, weapons, and barbed wire. Ammo included bombs, machine guns, artillery shells and napalm tanks and mix. Nothing was too dangerous to deliver to the fighting men in Korea, and the CAT pilots took their chances. CAT dropped small teams behind enemy lines helped to convince the Chinese that a guerilla force was operating in their rear. Numerous over flights to China and Manchuria were conducted, flying at low altitude by the light of the moon. Navigation was essentially by compass, ground map and flashlight. There was no rescue capability should things go wrong. These CAT operations were conducted to keep China from committing all its forces to Korea.

**INDONESIA** To contain communism in Indonesia in the late 1950s, the CIA covertly backed the Indonesian rebels. In support of that project B-26 aircraft, flown by CAT pilots, attacked Indonesian airfields, naval vessels, and port facilities. CAT pilot, Alan Pope, was shot down while on a B-26 flying mission, spending almost 5 years in an Indonesian prison. He was sentenced to death, but was later released.

**TIBET** With the growing evasion of Tibet by China in the 1950s, CAT pilots flew airlift missions to aid the Tibetan fighters defending their homeland. The flights departed Takli in Thailand and flew across Burma and India to drop zones in the Himalayas. The flights were flown on nights with a full moon. They were long in duration, around 13 hours, and there was no fuel reserve. There were no electronic navigation aids.

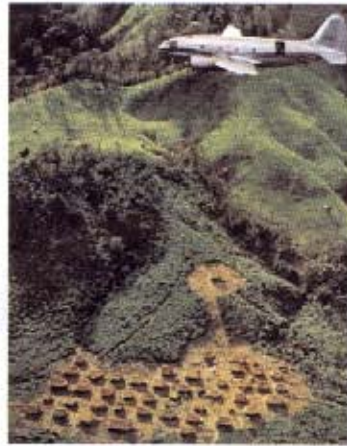
### STATE RECOGNITION

At a later date the states of Kentucky and Oklahoma, recognizing the legendary leadership role of Hugh L. Grundy and Robert E. Rousselot, inducted Mr. Grundy into the Kentucky Aviation Hall of Fame; Mr. Rousselot into the Oklahoma Aviation Hall of Fame.

Rice Drop by an AA C46 over Laos - Photo  
from the Frank Donansinga Collection

## MISSING IN ACTION

### Eugene Henry DeBruin



Missing in action on September 5, 1963, an Air America C46 aircraft was hit by ground fire and crashed about 2 kilometers from Tchepone, Savannakhet Province, Laos. Eugene DeBruin, Chui To Tik and two Thai nationals parachuted to safety but were immediately captured by the Pathet Lao. Crew members, Joseph C. Cheney and Charles Herrick, were killed in the crash. Later, the Pathet Lao photographed DeBruin and four others prisoners and published a leaflet naming the five as their prisoners. Several times during their captivity the entire crew was moved to different locations within Savannakhet and Khammouane Provinces.

In early July 1966, Eugene and six other prisoners made an escape. However, only two of the seven, Dieter Dingler and one of the Thai nationals who was part of Eugene's crew, reached safety. One report stated that DeBruin was killed in the escape attempt, but the Thai national reported that DeBruin was last seen attempting to reach high ground in a classified location. Eugene's family has not stopped looking for answers. They were able to find a report that Eugene may have been alive as late as January 1968. His brother, Jerome traveled to Laos in 1972 in search of information.

<http://www.phaseoop.com/foreignprisoners/campaign-mia.html>



Left to right: American, Eugene Henry DeBruin; Thai, Puichit Intharat; French, Prosperisswan, Prosit Thaneet; Hong Kong Chinese, To Yick Chiu; The Pa Chien Village Prison, Laos (WE 8705) May, 1964

Source: Save-A-Life  
Foreign Prisoner  
Support Service



## Pentagon Determines That Remains Found in China Are U.S. Spy Pilot's

US News, The Pentagon has confirmed that human remains unearthed in China last summer at a remote site where a CIA spy plane was shot down in 1952 are those of Robert C. Snoddy, of Roseburg, Ore., a civilian pilot whose CIA connection was kept secret for decades.

"It's nice to finally bring him home," said Ruth Boss, of Creswell, Ore., who will bury her brother at the cemetery where their mother and father are buried. Boss said in a telephone interview Friday that she received the news earlier this week from a CIA official who expressed some concern that, after all these years, Boss might take it badly.

Schwartz was at the controls when the plane encountered a Chinese air defense ambush while trying to retrieve a spy near the town of Antu in the northeastern province of Jilin. Snoddy and Schwartz were pilots for Civil Air Transport, a CIA airline that supported covert missions in the Far East and Southeast Asia.

*"It's nice to finally bring him home."*

In December 1998 their names were added to the Book of Honor at CIA headquarters. That marked the government's first public acknowledgment of the men's agency connection. They flew their mission during a time when China and the United States were fighting on opposing sides in the Korean War and the CIA was trying to undermine the fighting communist regime on its home territory.

When the Chinese guns opened up, the unmarked, twin-engine C-47 was making a low approach to a site where a CIA agent was waiting to be snatched and reeled aboard with a cable strung from the belly of the plane. The cockpit was riddled with bullets and the plane apparently made a belly landing on frozen ground, with Schwartz and Snoddy caught in an intense cockpit fire.

In response to a 1975 U.S. government inquiry about the missing pilots, the Chinese government wrote to President Gerald Ford that "it is impossible to locate them now."

An initial visit to the crash site in July 2002 by a team from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command in Hawaii found wreckage of the downed plane but no human remains. In their post-mission report they concluded that the probability of finding remains was "quite low." But a search team returned last July and found a small amount of remains. DNA testing confirmed it was Snoddy, but none of the remains have been confirmed to be those of Schwartz, family members said.

The CIA initially went to considerable lengths to cover up the failed mission. A false flight plan was produced, dated four days after the actual flight and indicating a Korea-to-Japan route. The cover story was that the plane disappeared in the Sea of Japan—far from the actual crash site.



CAT Flight Crew standing on the stairs of a CAT DC-6



With the spread of communism throughout Southeast Asia, CAT's mission changed. In 1959 CAT was renamed Air America. Under the new corporate name, (though CAT continued to fly scheduled passenger flights out of Taiwan), Air America flew all other type of air operations in Laos and South Vietnam. Operating in mountainous terrain, Air America crews flew with skill and courage in supplying the anticommunist forces in Southeast Asia.

## The History of CAT/Air America

Civil Air Transport (CAT) was a unique airline formed after World War II in China by General Claire I. Chennault and Whiting Willauer. The history of CAT is marked by adventure and international intrigue. Using surplus aircraft from the war, in 1946 CAT began to airlift supplies and food into war-ravaged China. During the Chinese Civil War, under contract with the Chinese Nationalist government and later the Central Intelligence Agency, CAT flew supplies and ammunition into China to assist the Chinese Nationalist forces on the Chinese mainland. With the defeat of the Nationalists in 1949, CAT helped to evacuate thousands of Chinese by air to the island of Taiwan.

In 1950 the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) bought the airline to use in clandestine missions to fight communism in Asia. CAT continued to fly scheduled passenger flights while simultaneously using other aircraft in its fleet to fly covert missions. During the Korean War, CAT airlifted thousands of tons of war materials to supply United States military operations. In 1954 CAT aircrews airdropped supplies to the French at Dien Bien Phu in Indochina. Throughout the 1950s CAT flew this fascinating combination of scheduled commercial flights and clandestine missions.

Air America flew a variety of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters because of the region's unforgiving topography. Missions included airdropping thousands of tons of food, evacuating civilians, rescuing downed U.S. aircrews, and emergency medical evacuations. In 1975, Air America helicopter crews helped to evacuate Americans and South Vietnamese from South Vietnam during the fall of the country. In 1976, Air America's approximately thirty year tenure as the CIA's airline came to a close. **The CAT/Air America experience is unparalleled in commercial aviation history.** More than two hundred and forty civilian CAT and Air America employees gave their lives in Asia from 1946 to 1975.



Photographs courtesy of the Robert Rousselot Collection, Box 2, Folder 5, History of Aviation Collection, Special Collections Department, McDermott Library, The University of Texas at Dallas



Robert Rousselot and CAT pilots in front of a C-46

# COMMENDATION

FROM: Department of the Air Force  
Headquarters 13th Tactical Fighter Squadron (PACAF)  
APO San Francisco 96237

REPLY TO ATTN OF CC

8 September 1971

SUBJECT: Rescue of Downed F4 Aircraft  
1st Base Manager, Air America, Inc.  
c/o Air Force Liaison Officer  
Room 65, APO San Francisco 96237

- On 7 September 1971, one of the aircraft of the 13th Tactical Fighter Squadron (13th "Panther Pack") received hostile damage to their aircraft and crashed in a hail of flames. Fortunately, both crew members were able to eject prior to impact, but they were both injured. Impassioned and helpless on the ground, in Indochina, they were in imminent danger of capture or death from hostile forces surrounding them. Two Air America helicopter crews saved their lives by landing in the open field to pick them up, even though under enemy fire.
- A Bell 205, crewed by Mr. Tom Cash, Mr. Wayne Lannin, and Mr. William Parker, rescued Captain Ron Fitzgerald, the Weapons Systems Officer of the fighter. Both Mr. Lannin and Mr. Parker risked their lives by exposing themselves directly to enemy fire to hold the injured Captain Fitzgerald aboard the helicopter.
- An H-34, piloted by Mr. Don Heathman, landed to pick up Major Jim Compton, the Air Force Commander of the downed fighter, while a crew member, Mr. Ernie Guitze, risked his life by exposing himself to hostile ground fire to lift Major Compton into the helicopter.
- The two helicopters took off in a hail of enemy fire and airlifted the injured Panthers to a landing site nearby where they were transferred to an Air America Panther aircraft. They were then airlifted to a shipping base, where they were attended by a surgeon and subsequently were returned to United States Air Force Base aboard an Air America C-123 aircraft.
- The deep gratitude felt by the 13th TFS towards the valiant Air America crews who saved our comrades is difficult to express. There is no doubt that their prompt, heroic action saved two lives that day. We will long remember and be grateful for their actions. We all hope that we may be of help if Air America crew ever face a similar test.
- Letters are over as warm as a drink and a handshake. The 13th TFS, therefore, cordially invites Messrs. Cash, Lannin, Parker, Heathman, and Guitze to be our guests at a going away "Sawadee Party" for some of our men who are completing their combat tours in Southeast Asia. The party will be held on 18 September at 1900 hours in the main banquet room of the Udorn Officers' Open Mess. The "Panther Pack" is looking forward to thanking all of these men in person.
- To all of the personnel of Air America, the 13th TFS "Panther Pack" sends a "Well Done" with admiration for the fine work done day after day in support of our allies in Southeast Asia. Keep up the good work!

*Charles W. Collins*  
CHARLES W. COLLINS, 1st Colonel, USAF  
Commander

The deep gratitude felt by the 13th TFS towards the valiant Air America crews who saved our comrades is difficult to express.

-- 8 Sep 1971

On behalf of the Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base Fire Department I take this opportunity to extend sincere appreciation to Fire Chief Ricardo B. Malisci and the Air America Fire Department... without regard for their safety... firefighters were exposed to intense heat, toxic smoke, and falling debris for more than two hours fighting the disastrous fire. -- 14 May 1970

## COMMENDATION

December 14, 1967

Mr. William Cain  
Air Operations,  
USAID  
Saigon, Vietnam  
Dear Mr. Cain:

Before leaving Saigon, I want you to know how much I appreciated the quick thinking and resourcefulness of the Air America helicopter crew which took my wife to safety from Dak Son, under fire, then returned to rescue me and my party.

It is my feeling that Captain James W. Davis, the pilot, Captain Lawrence G. Strubbe, the co-pilot, and C. W. Kelley, flight mechanic, deserve the highest commendation. USAID and Air America should be proud of these men and their courage in a difficult situation.

Sincerely yours,

*Charles H. Percy*  
CHARLES H. PERCY  
United States Senator



The commended crew, Lt. Col. James Strubbe, Lt. Col. Kelley, Captain James W. Davis and Pilot Officer Lawrence G. Strubbe standing in front of a Bell 205.

I want you to know how much I appreciated the quick thinking and resourcefulness of the Air America crew which took my wife to safety from Dak Son, under fire, then returned to rescue me and my party. -- 14 Dec 1967  
Senator Charles Percy

UDORN



## COMMENDATION

14 May 1970

Base Manager/Mr. C. J. Andrie, Jr.  
Air America Inc.  
Udorn RTAFB, Thailand

1. On behalf of the Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base Fire Department (USAF) I take this opportunity to extend sincere appreciation to Fire Chief Ricardo B. Malisci and the Air America Fire Department for the rapid and effective manner in which they responded to our emergency call 10 April 1970.

2. At 1408 hours, 10 April 1970, an RF-4C aircraft crashed into the cantonment area of Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base and ignited ten (10) buildings. When an enormous cloud of smoke was observed in the vicinity of the Base Officers Quarters we realized that a conflagration existed and that we urgently needed the assistance of Chief Malisci and his firefighting force to effect fire control, rescue, and extinguishment. Their response to our request for assistance at 1410 hours was instant and effective. Without regard



UDR Fire Chief Ricardo B. Malisci standing in front of an AAM fire truck.

for their safety, Chief Malisci and his firefighters were exposed to intense heat, toxic smoke, and falling debris for more than two hours fighting the disastrous fire. They manually extended from their fire apparatus, three (3) two and one half (2 1/2) inch hoses, four hundred (400) feet in length into the conflagration area and applied water to burning and exposed buildings. Their action prevented fire from propagating to several buildings located northeast of the base. Without aid from the Air America Fire Department, control of the fire could not have been attained as soon as it was contained, at least three other buildings and their contents would have been destroyed.

3. The courage, physical endurance, and professionalism displayed by Chief Malisci and his firefighters reflect credit upon themselves and the Air America, Inc.

## THE SECRET WAR IN LAOS

For more than 13 years, the CIA directed native forces that fought major North Vietnamese units to a standstill in Laos.

Air America, previously known as CAT, Inc., was a vital component in the Agency's operations in Laos. There were more than 300 pilots, copilots, flight mechanics, and air freight specialists flying out of Laos and Thailand. During 1970, Air America crews transported tens of thousands of troops and refugees, flew emergency medevac missions and rescued drowned airmen throughout Laos, inserted and extracted road-watch teams, flew nighttime airdrop missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, monitored sensors along infiltration routes, conducted a highly successful photoreconnaissance program, and engaged in numerous clandestine missions using night-vision glasses and state-of-the-art electronic equipment. Without Air America's presence, the CIA's effort in Laos could not have been sustained. Air America flight crews faced extremely hostile terrain and weather conditions. Air America rotary wing aircrews rescued an extraordinary number of U.S. military flight personnel—primarily in Laos. These were truly remarkable and usually heroic achievements. At the end Air America was tasked with the evacuation of Saigon and Vietnam.

**"I saw the disappointment these soldiers faced when they came to the U.S. and found that no one knew about the sacrifice they made in Laos for the U.S....."**

## The "Secret War" in Laos Memorial

The lakefront of Sheboygan, Wisconsin, will be home to a new memorial for the Lao, Hmong and American veterans of the "Secret War" in Laos. It will commemorate the courage of those who fought and celebrate their contributions to the United States. This monument will lift up that committed spirit of the soldier again and that respect of and trust in the U.S. will carry on to the next generations, so that those who fought and sacrificed their lives for freedom will not be forgotten. [www.secretwarinlaos.com](http://www.secretwarinlaos.com)



Photographs from the Gary Shank Collection at the Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech: Laos, undated



## PILOTS' NEWEST CIA MISSION IS TO GET BENEFITS

Apr 21, 2005 -- By Philip Morgan,  
pmorgan@tampatrib.com (article excerpts)

ST. PETERSBURG -- They came to Siam Garden restaurant once a month, having developed a real love for the cuisine while flying out of Thailand for the Central Intelligence Agency. 'Lies and war stories,' says Charlie Weitz. That's the usual talk among these veterans of Air America and other CIA-run airlines that operated in Southeast Asia from 1950 to 1975. 'It used to be women and drinking and carousing around, but we can't even remember that,' deadpans Weitz, 71.

The Marine veteran with the gray flattop rescued 11 downed American fliers as a civilian helicopter pilot. Weitz, a Sarasota resident, still wears a thick gold bracelet bearing his last name. A lot of the Air America crews wore them. If they were captured, the chain links might bribe natives to help them escape. That was the story, anyway. 'If you got caught, they'd just cut your arm off and take the bracelet,' Jim Hyder says. The 65-year-old Tampa resident served as a flight mechanic on CIA missions.

Most of the comrades reminiscing over curry chicken and Thai-style salmon flew airplanes or helicopters as civilians during the Vietnam era. They supplied food and arms to the Laotian military factions and tribal allies who fought North Vietnam-backed Communists in Laos. They transported troops and evacuated wounded and rescued U.S. airmen.

France recently awarded the Legion of Honor to seven Americans - including two South Florida residents - who flew for Air America's predecessor, Civil Air Transport. The honorees braved withering fire to supply besieged French soldiers at the 1954 battle of Dien Bien Phu. The defeat in southwest Vietnam ended France's colonial rule in Indochina.

In 2001, the CIA finally recognized all who flew with Air America by awarding them a Unit Citation. At that event, the airmen received commemorative medallions bearing the number 243 - for the fliers who died in missions for CIA-controlled airlines. The survivors complain that Uncle Sam hasn't really recognized them. Represented by the Air America Association, an affiliation of former employees of Civil Air Transport and Air America and their families, they're pushing two bills in Congress to grant them civil service status and retirement benefits for their CIA years.

**There's only 500 of us**, so it's not like millions and millions of dollars, 'says Jack Knotts of Tampa, the association's immediate past president. Knotts, 80, flew with Air America from 1965 to 1969.



The Gary Shank Collection at the Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech: Laos, undated

### SUPPORTING THE "SECRET WAR"

CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955-1974 -- William M. Leary

#### A Distorted View

Air America's public image has fared poorly. The 1990 movie *Air America* is largely responsible for this. It featured a cynical CIA officer who arranged for the airline to fly opium to the administrative capital of Vientiane for a corrupt Asian general--loosely modeled on Vang Pao, a military leader of the mountain-region-based Hmong ethnic group. The film depicts the CIA man as having the opium processed into heroin in a factory just down the street from the favorite bar of Air America's pilots. The Asian general, in return, supplied men to fight the war, plus a financial kickback to the CIA. Ultimately, we learn that the Communist versus anti-Communist war in Laos was merely a facade for the real war, which was fought for control of the area's opium fields.

#### A Bum Rap

The connection among Air America, the CIA, and the drug trade in Laos lingers in the public mind. My nearly two decades of research indicate that Air America was not involved in the drug trade. As Joseph Westermeyer, who spent the years 1965 to 1975 in Laos as a physician, public health worker, and researcher, wrote in *Poppies, Pipes, and People*: "American-owned airlines never knowingly transported opium in or out of Laos, nor did their American pilots ever profit from its transport. Yet every plane in Laos undoubtedly carried opium at some time, unknown to the pilot and his superiors--just as had virtually every pedicab, every Mekong River sampan, and every missionary jeep between China and the Gulf of Siam."

If the CIA was not involved in the drug trade, it did know about it. As former DCI William Colby acknowledged, the Agency did little about it during the 1960s, but later took action against the traders as drugs became a problem among American troops in Vietnam. The CIA's main focus in Laos remained on fighting the war, not on policing the drug trade.

May 11, 1975

Capt. D. B. Busenart,

On 29 April 1975 Air America, Inc. was tasked to effect the evacuation of Saigon, Vietnam, a difficult and hazardous mission that required a maximum effort for all concerned.

I would like to convey at this time my personal thanks along with those of our various customers and the Board of Directors of Air America, Inc. for an outstandingly successful accomplishment of that mission.

The performance of our flight crew members again reflected what can be accomplished by a dedicated professional group acting together as individuals and as a team.

I realize that each and every one of you will be departing this Company in a very short time, but before doing so I want you to know as a member of that group that your participation in this humanitarian act stands out in the highest traditions of the American spirit. Again thanks for an outstanding job well done.

Sincerely,

*Paul D. Volte, Jr.*  
 Paul D. Volte, Jr.  
 Chairman of the Board of Directors  
 and  
 Chief Executive Officer

## A Story of Tigers, Cats, and Eagles

-- by Leon V. LaShomb

Some of the original employees of CAT and Air America were, as General Chennault, ex "Flying Tigers" and World War II veterans of the China campaign. As the organization grew in size and scope, crew and support personnel were recruited from all branches of the military services and from civilian sources. These individuals were the most highly skilled, adventurous, and patriotic aviation personnel who could be found.

Some were captured, some are still missing, and many of them died during those difficult operational years which ended with the final Air America helicopter evacuation flights from the roof of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon on April 29, 1975.

The TIGERS, CATS, and EAGLES who flew the aircraft, repaired the aircraft, and supported the missions have erected a Memorial to properly honor those who have gone and whose stories may not have been told before now.

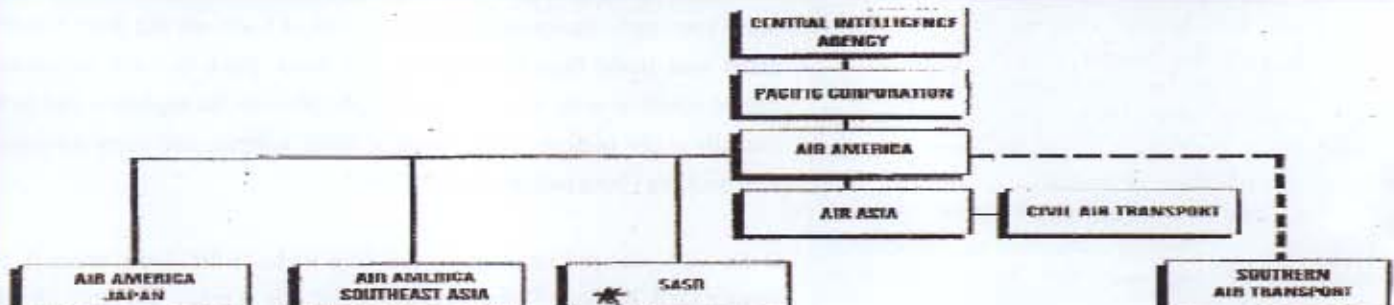
## CLOSING THE BOOKS

Over the years Civil Air Transport (CAT), Air America, and associated companies operated efficiently and economically. The employee's base pay, including pilots, was based upon the U.S. civil service pay scale at the time.

CAT and Air Asia Company Ltd. (the large aircraft maintenance facility) had a number of commercial operations that were money makers, which helped fund operations, including purchase of aircraft, equipment, etc. At the end, on closing the books on CAT and Air America's activities, more than \$20,000,000 was returned to the United States Treasury.

The Air America operation was said to have been the most successful operation the Agency ever had, and it was due in no small measure to the professional, dedicated employees who were proud to be involved in the work. CAT and Air America employees lived overseas in Asia, at times under primitive conditions, beginning in China in the late 1940s under the leadership of General Claire L. Chennault of Flying Tiger fame, and ending with Air America's evacuation of Saigon in April 1975.

Source: Mr. Lindsey Herd, Treasurer/Controller of Air America, Air Asia Co. Ltd., and Civil Air Transport



\* Special Air Services Ryukyu - based in Naha to the outlying islands around Okinawa - a commercial airline operation.



Compliments of the History of Aviation Collection, UT Dallas

...each of you confronted danger and endured terrible hardships, and each of you rose to the challenge; you never faltered....free people everywhere owe you more than we can ever hope to repay, our greatest debt is to your companions who gave their last full measure of devotion....

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

May 5, 1987

It gives me great pleasure to greet everyone gathered for the Air America Club's 1987 reunion, and to dedicate a memorial for the pilots and associates of Air America who died in the line of duty in Asia during 1947-1975.

Each of you has gone his separate way in the world, but -- as this reunion shows once again -- the unique service you shared in defense of freedom forged a bond of brotherhood that time and distance cannot break. Unsung and unrecognized, each of you confronted danger and endured terrible hardships, and each of you rose to the challenge; you never faltered. Although free people everywhere owe you more than we can hope to repay, our greatest debt is to your companions who gave their last full measure of devotion. Just as their names are inscribed on this memorial, so their memories are inscribed in our hearts. We will never forget them or their families, some of whom still seek answers.

I send a special salute to all those members of Air America present, and reaffirm my Administration's pledge to obtain the fullest possible accounting on the fate of our missing in action. You have my best wishes. God bless you, and God bless America.

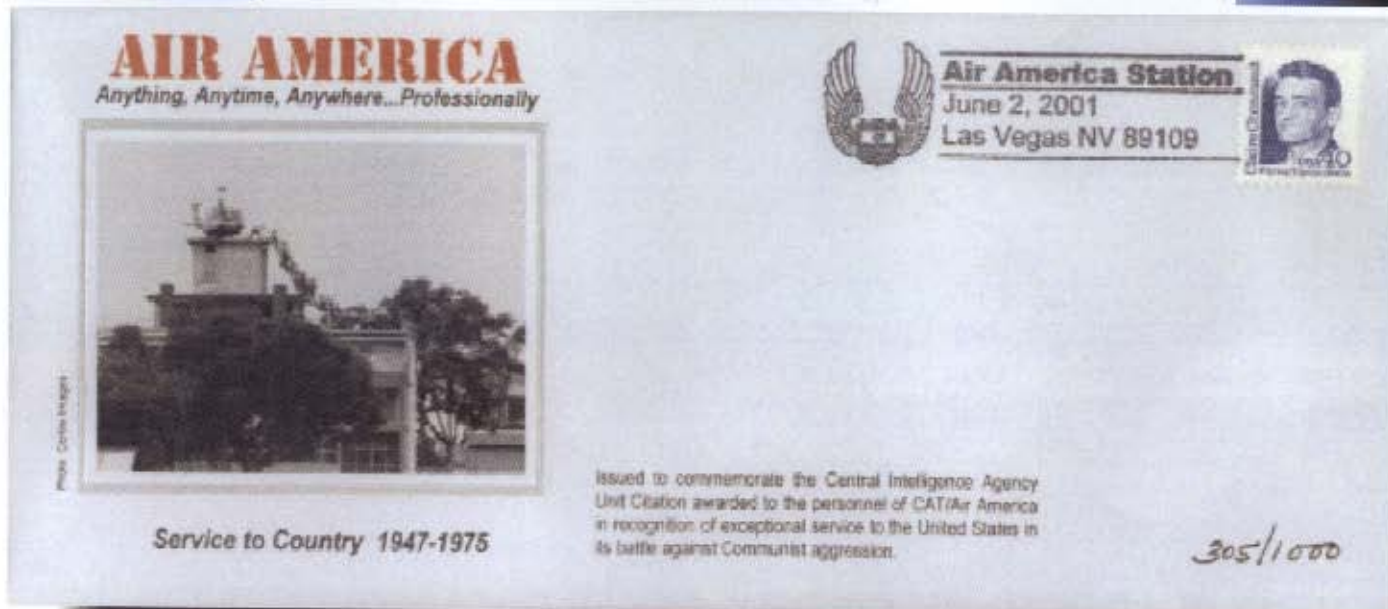
*Ronald Reagan*

## Acknowledgements

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**"...these pilots were performing acts  
of heroism for no other reason than it  
was the right thing to do."**



## **The Last Day**

On April 29, 1975, the largest airlift of refugees in the Vietnam War took place as the North Vietnamese Army overran Saigon with artillery, rockets, and mortars. Almost all of the American troops had long since departed. As the NVA moved in, civilians climbed walls to get into American installations in an attempt to escape. Tragedies were as common as boards on a picket fence, but spontaneous heroics occurred as well.

As ground fire became more intense, only helicopters were able to fly in and out of Saigon to aid in the evacuation. The Pittman building, the structure seen pictured, became one of the few landing areas Air America Huey pilots could use with relative safety. Air America was the CIA's covert paramilitary airline. The men and women of Air America were an organized group of professionals who risked everything to aid the cause of freedom.

The story of this photograph is in many ways the story of Air America. Hugh Van Es, of United Press International, took a quick snapshot of an interesting scene, refugees climbing a ladder on the side of a building to the helicopter waiting above. The man extending his hand to the refugees is O. B. Harnage, a CIA case officer. No one knows who the helicopter crew was, they didn't know they were being photographed nor would they have cared.

The men who flew these helicopters on the last day of Saigon were not there because of international economics or political issues. None of them ever received official commendation for this valor; in fact, very few people realize that the helicopter in the photograph that became famous around the world was an Air America helicopter with a civilian crew. Unheralded and unknown, these pilots were performing acts of heroism for no other reason than it was the right thing to do.

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