

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

CIA's Secret Airline Not So Secret

By Drew Pearson
and Jack Anderson

There is a mysterious office not far from the White House which illustrates the importance of the move by Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D-Minn.) to establish a watchdog committee to check on the activities of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The office is on the seventh floor of the new building at 815 Connecticut ave., and in the lobby downstairs there is an office listing for the "Civil Air Transport." Actually, if you go upstairs you will find that "CAT" is the Nationalist Chinese airline which does a good job of flying passengers around the Far East. It was established by Gen. Claire Chennault and is operated by Chiang Kai-shek and the Formosan government.

On the seventh floor you will find one of the most secretive offices in Washington. On the wood-paneled suite is the name "Air America, Inc.," which, as far as the caller can ascertain, has no connection with the Nationalist Chinese airline.

Inside the suite, a luxurious, wall-to-wall, tangerine-colored carpet covers the reception room and five inner offices. A young man, pressed and pomaded, explained earnestly to a representative of this column that both CAT and Air

America are engaged strictly in business operations, the first with passengers, the second with cargo.

As he spoke, rugged-looking young men with large briefcases moved swiftly in and out of the offices. They talked in whispers and carefully closed doors behind them.

A big, square-shouldered blond fellow barged through the entrance. He nodded affirmatively when the receptionist asked whether he had come to see "about employment."

Immediately, a man stepped out from an inner office.

"I'm Colonel Green," said the blond visitor, though he was dressed in mufti. "I spoke to Barnes at Tachikawa." The two men disappeared behind closed doors.

More Whispers

The door of another inner office opened for a moment.

"Don't go telling . . ." came a voice. Then the door closed again.

Another inside man came out and whispered to a secretary. He said something about Fort Bragg, home of the Green Berets.

The records show that Air America is wholly owned by the Pacific Corporation, a U.S. holding company which also owns 40 per cent of Civil Air Transport. The majority 60 per

cent is owned by the Nationalist China government.

This establishes a curious tie between the Chinese Nationalist passenger line and the CIA-subsidized cargo carrier. The CIA has used Air America to ferry supplies to the remote reaches of Laos and Thailand. It has also delivered rice and arms to Meo tribesmen in Laos and border patrols in northeastern Thailand. All this is done in the guise of a commercial company.

Of course, the line also hauls legitimate cargo, thanks to contracts largely drummed up by the CIA. Officials have been known to approach shippers and ask them to route some of their cargo by Air America.

In diplomatic circles there is nothing very secret about the CIA's hookup with the Nationalist Chinese. The hush-hush pantomime is not fooling foreign governments. The system of sending material to Southeast Asia through Air America may be necessary, but it should be under the scrutiny of a committee of Congress. No other agency except the FBI operates without Congressional checking — and the FBI has got into a lot of trouble over its unchecked and promiscuous wire tapping.

Russian Hospitality

Much interest is being focused on the case of the Amer-

ican citizen, formerly a Czech, Vladimir Kazan-Komarek, who was arrested after being taken off a Russian plane in Czechoslovakia.

The irony of the Kazan-Komarek case is that he was invited to Moscow in order to promote tourism to the Soviet Union. Yet the Russians stopped their plane in Prague so that Kazan-Komarek could be arrested.

It's interesting to note that 40,000 American tourists went to Czechoslovakia in 1964, while only 2300 Czechs came to this country. A total of 22,500 Americans visited Russia that year, with only 1900 Russians coming here. So the travel balance is strongly in their favor.

If the Russians and Czechs continue harassing a man like Kazan-Komarek, who operated the Harvard Travel Service to promote tourism to Eastern Europe, American travel to these countries will be drastically reduced.

Political Postscripts

The Democratic National Committee has been in total disarray since the election. In fact, it was floundering throughout the campaign. Congressional candidates complain that they got no help from the committee except a few canned speeches on the Great Society.

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