

The Evening Star

MONDAY, JULY 10, 1972

Air America Bans Smuggling

SIR: Judith Randal, in her column of June 29 made certain charges that I as managing director of Air America must take violent exception to. Her allegation "..... that this opium byproduct has been one of the more important cargoes carried by Air America" is completely false. Needless to say, Miss Randal failed to provide any proof for this allegation and it is my opinion that a charge as damning as the one made by Miss Randal should be supported by more than just rumors.

Air America is acutely aware of the individual opportunities for smuggling that inherently exist with our type of operation. We realized that these opportunities are made even more attractive by the fact that we operate in areas of the world where extremely high value, low bulk items such as gold and narcotics are easy to obtain and can be readily disposed of at tremendous profit.

The company continually works to impress upon its employees the seriousness with which any and all smuggling is viewed and evidence of such activity is cause for immediate termination! Also as a means for combating this situation we have for years assigned highest priority to the regular inspection of company aircraft, crews and cargoes by our own security force.

The establishment of a separate Security Inspection Service under a USAID-Air America contract constitutes a major advance in preventing illegal transportation of drugs aboard U.S. government-chartered aircraft in Laos. Through the continued and expanded efforts of programs such as these, more effective means will be developed for greatly reducing and eventually eliminating the opportunities for smuggling that still exist.

Air America, in denying similar charges made by Alfred McCoy to the Senate Foreign Relations Operations Subcommittee on June 2, 1972, stated that "if Mr. McCoy or any other individual can provide proof that any Air America employee has been connected in any manner with the drug traffic, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken and the matter referred to the proper authorities."

To date, no such proof has been forthcoming and we now extend the same invitation to Miss Randal and The Star.

Paul C. Velte, Jr.

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