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### Into the Shadow of Vietnam

but the scheduled October date might be too late. The ambassador wondered why no one had acted on his prior suggestion to place fuel at isolated lima sites and stage the HH-43s from them. The selected lima sites (36, 46, and 107) were held by FAR and Meo ADC (militia) battalions and were considered secure for this type of operation. Friendly troops also occupied sufficient countryside to screen observation, not only from the communists, but also from "the prying eyes of ICC, French, press, etc." Sullivan thought the helicopters could fly to these sites, refuel, have enough range to fly the search and rescue, and return to the forward operating location for another refueling before going back to Thailand. If Admiral Sharp accepted the plan, Sullivan was sure he could "nudge the [Washington] machinery into motion."<sup>129</sup>

Sharp shared Sullivan's concern over the ever increasing risk in Air America rescue operations. "This is properly the job for the military," he observed, "and we are going to take it on just as quickly as we can get in shape to do it." CINCPAC next contacted Generals Harris and Moore. Harris cabled General McConnell in Washington that this was what chance the Air Force had been looking for—a chance to move into the search and rescue picture, replacing Air America. McConnell approached the other chiefs and they authorized two unmodified (unarmored, no SSB radio) CH-3Cs to be sent by Tactical Air Command to Nakhon Phanom for ninety days temporary duty. Fuel was flown to the lima sites, and the first HH-43 staging flights took place on June 26. Two days later, the Royal Thailand Government authorized the deployment to Nakhon Phanom of the two CH-3Cs and between twenty and forty personnel.<sup>130</sup>

The question of special air warfare pilots flying T-28s during search and rescue was likewise settled. When this was first proposed, the Bangkok embassy did not think it a wise move, since the RTG approved the SAW deployment solely as a training mission.<sup>131</sup> The United States did have permission to use Thai-based forces in SAR over Laos; but to the embassy, using Water Pump's T-28s "with freshly painted USAF insignia" was the equivalent of stationing five bona fide Air Force fighters at Udon. However, using Nakhon Phanom or Udon as a staging base would require a new RTG clearance. The embassy hinted the Thai would thumb down the idea.<sup>132</sup>

Sullivan went along with this rationale for two months; but by mid-May, he was troubled over how often he had given Air America T-28 pilots permission to fly low cover for SAR helicopters. He had been obliged to do this because the Navy could not furnish any A-1Hs for alert at Udon and because those from carriers always seemed to arrive over Laos too late. Sullivan knew that every flight by a contract pilot in a T-28 jeopardized the Air America mission. There was a close call the previous week when a T-28 was shot up on a SAR mission over North Vietnam but managed to crashland in friendly territory. Accordingly, Sullivan urged again that the Udon SAW pilots be allowed to put USAF markings on their T-28s and fly this low coverage when needed.<sup>133</sup> This time, General Harris went along and the Bangkok embassy agreed to ask the Royal Thailand Government  On June 4, 1965, the Thai Supreme Command gave approval.<sup>134</sup>

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129. Msgs, AmEmb Vientiane to CINCPAC, SECSTATE, 2065, Jun 22, 1965, AmEmb Vientiane to SECSTATE, 2085, Jun 26, 1965.

130. Msgs, CINCPAC to AmEmb Vientiane, 230353Z Jun 65, AmEmb Vientiane to 2d AD (Personal Maj Gen Moore to Amb Sullivan), 251057Z Jun 65, CINCPACAF to CINCPAC, 230131Z Jun 65, AmEmb Bangkok to SECSTATE, 2133, Jun 28, 1965.

131. However, one of Water Pump's original missions was to provide a readily available source of U.S. aircraft to augment the RLAf, if needed. [Msgs, JCS to CINCPAC, 052053Z Mar 64, CINCPAC to JCS, 130443Z Mar 64.]

132. Msg, AmEmb Bangkok to 2d AD, SECSTATE, 1313, Mar 10, 1965.

133. Eventually, three-sided brackets were mounted along the rear half of the T-28 fuselage. Panels with either RLAf or USAF insignia were slipped into the brackets depending on the mission. Training flights carried no national markings whatsoever. [Personal recollections of the author.]

134. Msgs, AmEmb Vientiane to AmEmb Bangkok, SECSTATE, 1884, May 18, 1965, AmEmb Bangkok to