

# AIR AMERICA: CESSNA U-17s

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Last updated on 1 June 2009

## The types of missions flown by the U-17s:

Although some Air America pilots like Paul M. Severson actually flew Cessna U-17s in Laos, no Air America inventory mentions this type of aircraft. The U-17 was the military version of the Cessna 185, and the aircraft mentioned here did not belong to Air America, but to the Military Assistance Program for Laos. So they were USAF aircraft painted in the colors of the Royal Laotian Air Force. The first pair of U-17s was transferred to the RLAFF in October 64. In the early days, they were used to train pilots at Savannakhet (Conboy, *War in Laos*, pp. 37 and 54), but already in 1966/67, U-17s were also used on FAC missions, Strike missions, Armed Recce missions, and Psy Ops missions, that is to drop surrender leaflets (Moody, *The great adventures*, Episode 1, pp. 5/6). Some U-17s were modified by the USAF to carry smoke rockets and were used by the *Ravens* at places like Na Khang (LS-36) where one of them crashed (Robbins, *Ravens*, p. 56). Beginning in 1968, however, all *Raven* U-17s were periodically maintained by Air America's Udorn facility (Robbins, *Ravens*, pp. 77/8), so that they appear on Air America's "List of assigned / maintained aircraft at Udorn" (as in the list of 1 April 72, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2). But in spite of their RLAFF colors, all U-17s maintained by Air America personnel at Udorn (and elsewhere) belonged to the USAF and were operated under the control of the US Ambassador at Vientiane (Fax dated 7 August 2000, sent by B.G. H. Aderholt to the author).

## Statistics according to official Air America documents:

As the U-17s were not part of Air America's official fleet, there are no Company statistics.

## The individual aircraft histories:

Type	registration / serial	c/n (msn)	date acquired	origin
Cessna U-17A-CE	64-17796	185-0775	2 Oct. 64	USAF 64-17796, del. under MAP to Laos

**Service history:** official delivery ex Cessna on 31 July 64 to MAP Laos (e-mail dated 14 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by John Davis); according to the USAF Assignment Records transferred to the US Military Assistance Program for the Royal Laotian Air Force on 2 October 64; assembled in Bangkok (T-09); test flown by Joe Hazen, Air America's Chief pilot of the STOL program, on 26 October 64 and ferried to Udorn (T-08) the same day (e-mail dated 9 September 2003 sent by Joe Hazen to Erik Carlson who kindly forwarded it to the author).

**Fate:** ?



RLAF U-17A “64-17797”, taken at Vang Vieng in October 65 by John Anthony (photo no.VA031041, No Date, John Anthony Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, with kind permission from Steve Maxner)

Cessna U-17A-CE    64-17797    185-0776    2 Oct. 64    USAF 64-17797, del. under MAP to Laos

**Service history:** official delivery ex Cessna on 15 July 64 to MAP Laos (e-mail dated 14 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by John Davis); according to the USAF Assignment Records transferred to the US Military Assistance Program for the Royal Laotian Air Force on 2 October 64; assembled in Bangkok (T-09); test flown by Joe Hazen, Air America’s Chief pilot of the STOL program, on 23 October 64 and ferried to Udorn (T-08) the same day; Joe Hazen checked out Air America captain Paul M. Severson on 21 January 65 or 25 February 65; there after, the aircraft sat on the ground at Udorn for quite a while (e-mail dated 9 September 2003 sent by Joe Hazen to Erik Carlson who kindly forwarded it to the author); bore the Erawan (see the accident photos nos. VA031039 and VA031041 in the John Anthony collection at TTU); flown by Richard B. Crafts out of Udorn on 26 February 65 and on 6 and 14 September 65 (Log book of Richard B. Crafts, at: UTD/Leary/I B6F2); flown by Paul M. Severson between 1 and 5 October 65 out of Vientiane (Flight crew member monthly movement report of Paul M. Severson, in: UTD/Severson/B3F26).

**Fate:** destroyed at Vang Vieng (L-16), Laos, on 11 October 65, when the aircraft took off with controls locked, as the check off list was not used (List “Company operated aircraft lost or destroyed”, in: UTD/CIA/B1F10, and in: UTD/CIA/B51F12; List “Aircraft accidents 1965”, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2; List “Aircraft destroyed or lost”, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2; photos of this accident can be found in the John Anthony collection at TTU (nos. VA031039 and VA031041).

Cessna U-17A    64-14867    185-0647    64?    USAF 64-14867

**Service history:** probably ex Cessna on 30 September 63; official delivery on 23 October 63 to MAP Thailand. Later transferred to Laos (e-mail dated 14 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by John Davis); photo taken at Thakhek (L-40A) on 17 June 1966 (e-mail dated 15 July 2008, kindly sent to the author by Jonathan Pote)

**Fate:** ?; not current on 1 January 72 (List of Assigned, maintained aircraft of 1 January 72 in UTD/Bisson/B5 reel 24).

Cessna U-17A-CE 65-10853 185-0924 28 May 65 USAF 65-10853, del.  
under MAP to Laos

**Service history:** probably ex Cessna on 28 May 65; official delivery on 29 June 65 to MAP Thailand. Later transferred to Laos (e-mail dated 14 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by John Davis); used by the US Military Assistance Program for the Royal Lao Air Force; flown by Air America captain Paul M. Severson on 15 November 65 from Vientiane to Udorn, on 2 January 66 out of Sam Thong, on 4 and 5 January 66 out of Vientiane, and between 3 and 7 March 1966 out of Vientiane (Flight crew member monthly movement report of Paul M. Severson, in: UTD/Severson/B3F26); FAC aircraft; flown by Raven Ed Gunter out of Luang Prabang (L-54) between July 69 and February 70 (e-mail dated 12 January 2004 sent by Ed Gunter to Larry Sanborn, who kindly forwarded it to the author); flown by Raven Ed Gunter flown by Raven Larry Sanborn out of Long Tieng (LS-20A) between 7 March 71 and 23 April 71 (e-mail dated 1 Sept. 2003, sent by Larry Sanborn to Erik Carlson who kindly forwarded it to the author).

**Fate:** was destroyed in a mid-air collision with Air America PC-6 N180K one kilometer north of Moung Nham (LS-63), Laos, at 1544 hours local time on 29 April 71; both occupants of the U-17 as well as the pilot of the Air America PC-6, Captain Harry E. Mulholland, were killed (Accident synopsis, in: UTD/Anthony/F4); the U-17 was destroyed and was no longer current on 1 April 72 (List of Assigned, maintained aircraft of 1 April 72 in UTD/CIA/B49F2).

Cessna U-17A-CE 65-10854 185-0926 29 June 65 USAF 65-10853, del.  
under MAP to Laos

**Service history:** official delivery on 29 June 65 to MAP Thailand; used by the US Military Assistance Program for the Royal Lao Air Force; flown by Air America captain Paul M. Severson on 13 and 17 October 65 out of Vientiane (Flight crew member monthly movement report of Paul M. Severson, in: UTD/Severson/B3F26); flown out of Udorn by Air America pilot Richard B. Crafts on 31 November 65 as well as on 20, 21, 22 and 27 December 65 (Log book of Richard Crafts, in: UTD/Leary/I B6F2).

**Fate:** ?; probably destroyed; Cessna records show it as "Attrited" (e-mail dated 14 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by John Davis); not current on 1 January 72 (List of Assigned, maintained aircraft of 1 January 72 in UTD/Bisson/B5 reel 24).

The following Raven Cessna U-17s were maintained by Air America, Udorn, in April 72 (List of Assigned, maintained aircraft of 1 April 72 in UTD/CIA/B49F2).

Cessna U-17B 66-8549 185-1066 23 June 66 USAF 66-8549, del.  
under MAP to Laos

**Service history:** Cessna to TL MAP on 23 June 66 (66174); delivered ex Cessna on 30 June 66 to Laos (e-mail dated 14 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by John Davis); used as a Raven aircraft, owned by the USAF, but operated under the control of the US Ambassador at Vientiane (Fax dated 7 August 2000, sent by B.G. H. Aderholt to the author); current at least 1 January 72 to 1 June 73, since March 73 with the RLAf only (Lists of Assigned, maintained aircraft of 1 January 72 to 1 June 73, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 reels 23/4).

**Fate:** to the Philippine Air Force as "68549" in ? (Anido/Austria-Tomkins, *Pictorial history of the Philippine Air Force*, p. 70).

Cessna U-17B          68-10538          185-1442          68/9? USAF   68-10538, del.  
under MAP

**Service history:** delivered ex Cessna on 12 December 68 to MAP Laos (e-mail dated 14 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by John Davis); used as a Raven aircraft, owned by the USAF, but operated under the control of the US Ambassador at Vientiane (Fax dated 7 August 2000, sent by B.G. H. Aderholt to the author); flown by Raven Ed Gunter out of Luang Prabang (L-54) between July 69 and February 70 (e-mail dated 12 January 2004 sent by Ed Gunter to Larry Sanborn, who kindly forwarded it to the author); flown by Raven Larry Sanborn out of Luang Prabang (L-54) between 21 June 70 and 30 January 71 and out of Long Tieng (LS-20A) between 6 June 71 and 20 July 71 (e-mail dated 1 Sept. 2003, sent by Larry Sanborn to Erik Carlson who kindly forwarded it to the author); maintained by Air America, Udorn, current at least 1 January 72 to 1 June 73, since March 73 with the RLAF only (Lists of Assigned, maintained aircraft of 1 January 72 to 1 June 73, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 reels 23/4); a photo can be seen in <http://www.ravens.org/154.jpg>.

**Fate:** to the Philippine Air Force as "68549" in ? (Anido/Austria-Tomkins, *Pictorial history of the Philippine Air Force*, p. 70).

Cessna U-17B          69-7304          185-1543          12 Aug. 69   USAF   69-7304, del.  
under MAP

**Service history:** according to the USAF Assignment Records transferred from Cessna to TL MAP on 12 August 69 (69224); delivered ex Cessna on 15 August 69 to MAP Laos (e-mail dated 14 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by John Davis); used as a Raven aircraft, owned by the USAF, but operated under the control of the US Ambassador at Vientiane (Fax dated 7 August 2000, sent by B.G. H. Aderholt to the author); flown by Raven Larry Sanborn out of Long Tieng (LS-20A) between 5 May 71 and 2 August 71 (e-mail dated 1 Sept. 2003, sent by Larry Sanborn to Erik Carlson who kindly forwarded it to the author); maintained by Air America, Udorn, current at least 1 January 72 to 1 June 73, since March 73 with the RLAF only (Lists of Assigned, maintained aircraft of 1 January 72 to 1 June 73, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 reels 23/4).

**Fate:** ?

Cessna U-17B          69-7305          185-1545          12 Aug. 69   USAF   69-7305, del.  
under MAP

**Service history:** according to the USAF Assignment Records transferred from Cessna to TL MAP on 12 August 69 (69224); delivered ex Cessna on 15 August 69 to MAP Laos (e-mail dated 14 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by John Davis); used as a Raven aircraft, owned by the USAF, but operated under the control of the US Ambassador at Vientiane (Fax dated 7 August 2000, sent by B.G. H. Aderholt to the author); flown by Raven Larry Sanborn out of Luang Prabang (L-54) between 28 November 70 and 16 December 70 and again out of Long Tieng (LS-20A) between 5 May 71 and 1 July 71 (e-mail dated 1 Sept. 2003, sent by Larry Sanborn to Erik Carlson who kindly forwarded it to the author); maintained by Air America, Udorn, current at least 1 January 72 to 1 November 72, no longer current on 1 Dec.72 (Lists of Assigned, maintained aircraft of 1 January 72 to 1 Dec.72, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 reels 23/4).

**Fate:** ?



RLAF U-17B “69-7306” taken by Tom Lum, probably at Udorn in the early seventies (photo no.VA024821, No Date, Allen Cates Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, with kind permission from Steve Maxner)

Cessna U-17B	“69-7306”	185-1547	12 Aug. 69	USAF	69-7306,	del.
					under MAP	

**Service history:** according to the USAF Assignment Records transferred from Cessna to TL MAP on 12 August 69 (69224); delivered ex Cessna on 15 August 69 to MAP Laos (e-mail dated 14 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by John Davis); used as a Raven aircraft, owned by the USAF, but operated under the control of the US Ambassador at Vientiane (Fax dated 7 August 2000, sent by B.G. H. Aderholt to the author); flown by Raven Ed Gunter out of Luang Prabang (L-54) in January 70 (e-mail dated 12 January 2004 sent by Ed Gunter to Larry Sanborn, who kindly forwarded it to the author); flown by Raven Larry Sanborn out of Luang Prabang (L-54) between 19 June 70 and 22 January 71 and out of Long Tieng (LS-20A) between 24 March 71 and 8 June 71 (e-mail dated 1 Sept. 2003, sent by Larry Sanborn to Erik Carlson who kindly forwarded it to the author); maintained by Air America, Udorn, current at least 1 January 72 to 1 June 73, since March 73 with the RLAF only (Lists of Assigned, maintained aircraft of 1 January 72 to 1 June 73, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 reels 23/4); a photo probably taken at Savannakhet, where the aircraft was used for pilot training and FAC duties, and a drawing of “69-7306” can be found in Conboy, *War in Laos*, pp. 37 and 54; after landing at Savannakhet (L-39) on 23 October 72, U-17 “69-7306” taxied to the AOC area, when the engine stopped; when the pilot restarted the engine, fire broke out under the engine section, but could be extinguished (Report dated 27 Oct. 72, in: UTD/CIA/B29F2); photos of 69-7306, probably taken at Udorn in 1972/3, showing an Erawan painted on the aircraft, can be found in the A. Cates collection at TTU (nos. VA024821 and VA024822).

**Fate:** ?

Cessna U-17B	71-1046	18501921	22 Sept. 71	USAF	71-1046,	del.
					under MAP	



**Service history:** current at least 1 January 72 to 1 January 73; not current 1 February 73  
**Fate:** to the Royal Thai Air Force

Cessna T-41D            71-1053            c/n R.172-0480            ex South Vietnam  
**Service history:** current at least 1 January 72 to 1 April 72; not current 1 June 72  
**Fate:** to the Royal Thai Air Force

Cessna T-41D            71-1056            c/n R.172-0487            ex South Vietnam  
**Service history:** current at least 1 January 72 to 1 January 73; not current 1 February 73  
**Fate:** to the Royal Thai Air Force

Cessna T-41D            71-1057            c/n R.172-0488            ex South Vietnam  
**Service history:** current at least 1 January 72 to 1 April 72; not current 1 June 72  
**Fate:** to the Royal Thai Air Force

Cessna T-41D            71-1058            c/n R.172-0489            ex South Vietnam  
**Service history:** current at least 1 January 72 to 1 January 73; not current 1 February 73  
**Fate:** to the Royal Thai Air Force

Cessna T-41D            67-15066            c/n R.172-0067            July 72  
**Service history:** current at least 1 July 72 to 1 January 73; not current 1 February 73  
**Fate:** ?

Cessna T-41D            67-15067            c/n R.172-0068            July 72  
**Service history:** current at least 1 July 72; not current 1 August 72  
**Fate:** ?

Cessna T-41D            67-15163            c/n R.172-0164            Nov.72  
**Service history:** current 1 November 72 to 1 January 73; not current 1 February 73  
**Fate:** noted at *Musée de l'Armée Populaire*, Vientiane, Laos, in the summer of 2003.

Cessna T-41D            67-15166            c/n R.172-0167            Nov.72  
**Service history:** current 1 November 72 to 1 January 73; not current 1 February 73  
**Fate:** ?

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