

AIR AMERICA: CESSNA U-17s by Dr. Joe F. Leeker

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RLAF U-17A “64-17797”, taken at Vientiane on 11 October 65 by John Anthony (photo no.VA031039, No Date, John Anthony Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, with kind permission from Steve Maxner)

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 Lao Air Force. All U-17s were maintained by Air America personnel at Udorn (and elsewhere) and were operated under the control of AIRA, i.e. the US Air Attaché in Laos, which means the US Ambassador at Vientiane (Fax dated 7 August 2000, sent by B.G. H. Aderholt to the author). The U-17s listed here are those known to have been flown by Air America pilots – for more details about the Royal Lao Air Force U-17s see my file *RLAF U-17s* at <http://www.utdallas.edu/library/collections/speccoll/Leeker/index3.html> .

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: 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: reportedly lost in Laos in December 64 – an AIRA-controlled aircraft (“Aircraft

All Loss by Tail number”, pages 135-287, no date, Folder 15, Box 10, Garnett Bell Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, details kindly sent to the author by Sid Nanson on 30 May 2011).



RLAF U-17A “64-17797”, taken at Vientiane 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: 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/B44F6); 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 Vientiane, Laos, on 11 October 65, when the aircraft took off from Vientiane 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; (DD/S, Monthly Report for October/November 1965, p. 3, online at 1818029/196510); 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-CE 65-10853 185-0924 28 May 65 USAF 65-10853, del.
under MAP to Laos

Service history: 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; used to train Air America pilot Bensuswan on 15 May 67 (Memo of 3 June 67, MFD-VTE to DFD, re Training Flight Time Record for May 67, in: UTD/Walker/B11F3); used to train Air America pilot OB Chai on 24 September 67 (Memo of 30 September 67, MFD-VTE to DFD, re Training Flight Time Record for September 67, in: UTD/Walker/B11F3).

Fate: was destroyed in a mid-air collision with Air America PC-6 N180K one kilometer north of Mounng Nham (LS-63), Laos, at 1544 hours local time on 29 April 71; both occupants of the U-17 (Raven pilot Dennis E. Morgan and his backseater) as well as the pilot of the Air America PC-6 (Captain Harry E. Mulholland) and 3 indigenous passengers were killed; the U-17 was destroyed and was no longer current on 1 April 72 (Accident synopsis, in: UTD/Anthony/F4; List of Assigned, maintained aircraft of 1 April 72 in UTD/CIA/B49F2; Thomas E. Lee, *Laos Incident list*, at: <http://www.angelfire.com/home/laoslist/crl70.html>).

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

Service history: 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/B44F6); flown as “854” in RLAF service.

Fate: reportedly lost in Laos on 11 July 68, probably flying as “854” in RLAF colors – an AIRA-controlled aircraft (“Aircraft All Loss by Tail number”, pages 135-287, no date, Folder 15, Box 10, Garnett Bell Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, details kindly sent to the author by Sid Nanson on 30 May 2011).