

# ROYAL LAO AIR FORCE / RAVENS: CESSNA U-17s

by Dr. Joe F. Leeker

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RLAF U-17B "69-7306" taken by Tom Lum, probably at Udorn in the early seventies (photo no.VA024822, No Date, Allen Cates 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 Laotian Air Force. The first pair of U-17s was transferred to the RLAF 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 RLAF colors, all U-17s maintained by Air America personnel at Udorn (and elsewhere) belonged to the USAF 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).

## **Statistics:**

From National Archives sources, the following details of MAP Grant Aid deliveries to Laos were submitted to the author by Sid Nanson (e-mail dated 30 May 2013, kindly sent by Sid Nanson to Paul Oelkrug who forwarded it to me); it should be noted, however, that these are deliveries that were programmed – they may not necessarily have taken place that way:

### **RLAF U-17s**

3 U-17s received 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter FY 64 (1 Oct 1963-31 Dec 1963)  
2 U-17s received 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter FY 65 (1 Jan 1965-31 Mar 1965)  
2 U-17 received 1<sup>st</sup> quarter FY 66 (1 July 1965-30 Sep 1965)  
1 U-17A received 1<sup>st</sup> quarter FY 67 (1 July 1966-30 Sep 1966)  
1 U-17A/B received in FY 68 (1 July 67-30 June 68)  
1 U-17A/B received in FY 69 (1 July 68-30 June 69)  
3 U-17A/B received in FY 70 (1 July 69-30 June 70)

Also coming from National Archives sources, the following details of attrition for the RLAF were submitted to the author by Sid Nanson (e-mail dated 30 May 2013, kindly sent by Sid Nanson to Paul Oelkrug who forwarded it to me):

### **RLAF U-17**

U-17A/B, 1 (Operational) attrition in FY 68 (1 July 67-30 June 68)  
U-17A/B, 1 (Operational) attrition in FY 69 (1 July 68-30 June 69)  
U-17A/B, 2 Combat attrition in FY 70 (1 July 69-30 June 70)  
U-17A/B, 1 Combat attrition in FY 71 (1 July 70-30 June 71)

## 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:** reportedly lost in Laos in December 64 – 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
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**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/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 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).



RLAF U-17A 64-14867 taken at Thakhek (L-40A) on 17 June 1966 by Dr. Jonathan Pote  
(with kind permission from Dr. Jonathan Pote)

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:** reportedly lost in Laos on 24 February 70 – 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).

Cessna U-17A      64-14868      185-0648      64?      USAF 64-14868

**Service history:** ?

**Fate:** reportedly lost in Laos on 26 January 65 – 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). This U-17 was probably the one destroyed at Vientiane on 25 January 65, when a fully armed RLAF T-28 exploded on the ramp of Vientiane airport; as a consequence of that incident several more bombs cooked off, and flying metal also caused damage to a number of other aircraft parked nearby (Liebchen, *MAP Aid to Laos 1959-1972*, p.38; Telegram dated 26 January 65 sent by the US Embassy in Thailand to the US Department of State, in: <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v28/d160>; Report "Blow up", that is document no. GML-65-036H sent by Dave Hickler to Air America's President on 28 January 1965; copy in the possession of Joe Hazen who kindly faxed it to the author on 9 May 2005).

Cessna U-17A      64-14869??    185-0649??    64?      USAF 64-14869??

**Service history:** reportedly flown as 64-14894, but this was not a U-17

**Fate:** reportedly U-17 64-14894 was lost in Laos in October 64 – an AIRA-controlled aircraft; the correct identity is believed to have been 64-14869, a MAP U-17A ("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).

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 (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:** 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/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); 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, microfilm reel 24).

Cessna U-17B	66-8549	185-1066	23 June 66	USAF 66-8549, del. under MAP to Laos
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**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	67-22518	185-01276	67?	USAF 67-22518, del. under MAP
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**Service history:** reportedly 67-22158, but this was not an U-17

**Fate:** reportedly AIRA U-17 67-22158 was lost in Laos on 24 April 70 and RLAF U-17 "518" was lost in Laos on 30 April 70 - probably the same aircraft flying as "518" 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); the date 24 April 70 seems to be correct for U-17B 67-22518 / "518" and this seems also to be the Raven U-17B that, piloted by Jim Cross, was shot down in the Ban Ban valley at 193458N/1033059E on 24 April 70, killing Jim Cross and Dave Reese (Robbins, *Ravens*, p. 247; see also Thomas E. Lee, *Laos Incident list*, at: <http://www.angelfire.com/home/laoslist/crl70.html>).

Cessna U-17B	68-10538	185-1442	68/9?	USAF 68-10538, del. under MAP
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**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:** reportedly lost in Laos on 29 March 71 – 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 2 June 2011). Also reported as “68-10538” of the Philippine Air Force (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:** reportedly lost in Laos on 28 April 74 – 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).

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:** AIRA U-17 “305” was reportedly lost in Laos on 18 November 72, while AIRA U-17 69-7305 was reportedly lost in Laos on 13 November 72 – probably the same 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-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:** Cessna to TL MAP on 22 September 71 (71265); 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); 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), but given there as “71-11046” – a serial that did not exist.

**Fate:** to the Philippine Air Force as “11046” in ? (Anido/Austria-Tomkins, *Pictorial history of the Philippine Air Force*, p. 70).

Cessna U-17B	71-1050	18501926	15 Oct. 71	USAF	71-1050,	del.
					under MAP	

**Service history:** Cessna to TL MAP on 15 October 71 (71288); 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); maintained by Air America, Udorn, at least 1 March 72 to 1 March 73; again 1 June 1973 (Lists of Assigned, maintained aircraft of 1 January 72 to 1 June 73, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 reels 23/4).

**Fate:** U-17 “71-1050” was reportedly lost in Laos on 2 March 73, 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 2 June 2011); it seems to have been repaired and sold to the Philippine Air Force as “11050” in ? (Anido/Austria-Tomkins, *Pictorial history of the Philippine Air Force*, p. 70).

In his e-mail dated 17 February 2005 sent to Dr. Carlson, who forwarded it to the author, Jan Forsgren points out to the following to Laotian U-17s:

- Sometime in 1969 or 1970, a Lt Ratsuma Sanamnikone was killed in a crash. His aircraft was the sole U-17 assigned to the Air Training Command at Savannakhet. (Source: Pratt, John C., *The Royal Laotian (sic) Air Force 1954-1970* (U), p 89. CHECO report).
- In the aftermath of the failed Thao Ma coup d'état on 20 August 1973, Col Bounleut Saycocie stole a U-17 from Wattay, and escaped to Thailand (Source: Conboy, Ken, *Shadow War*, p. 406-407).

Former RLAF U-17s “863”, “869”, “974”, and “977” were seen at Vientiane on 4 October 77 in the colors of the Air Force of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) (Telex no. 01391 dated 5 October 77 sent by the US Embassy, Vientiane, to the Secretary of State, Washington, online at <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=231599&dt=2532&dl=1629>, kindly sent to the author by Sid Nanson on 30 December 2014), but their identities are unknown.