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Captain TN Castle
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Dear Captain Castle,

Air America had an excellant communication system throught. CAS and Bird & Sons used the network as well but I don't know what arrangements were made between the companies, if any.

All the pilots were required to call in on HF frequency 8765 once per hour with a call sign followed by "Operations Normal" and possibly a position report. If the call didn't come in from a pilot then everyone would start calling on the radio after maybe thirty minutes.

I can recall one day being in the far northern part of Laos north of Luang Prabang (L54) and hearing a faint Mayday on my HF 8765. I wasn't sure if it truly was a Maybe and I called it into Vientiane (V-08) with that explanation. It didn't take very long for AA operations in Vientiane to know that an H34 hadn't called in. They knew where he was working north of the PDJ so I flew there immediately and found the crew on the side of a mountain after a safe autorotation. Another H-34 soon came to the sight and all was well. I was in a Dornier or Pioneer.

Air America had radio stations manned by Taiwanese radio operators who spoke good english. They were located at Udorn, Vientiane, Ban Houie Sai (home of Dr Dooley's hospital), Luang Prabang, Sam Tong, Paksane, Thaket, Savanaket and Pakse. Each station had HF and VHF capability 8765 and 119.1...I think we all had a secondary HF frequency we used something like 5542 but I'm not too clear on that.. Sam Tong is the village just over the ridge to the north from Long Tieng. I beleive the station was moved onto the ridge line between Sam Tong and Long Tieng for improved line of sight VHF communication and it was called Skyline station but you best match that with other information you get. I also think there was a station at Sayaboury. I have enclosed maps for your use.

Also, Air America Bangkok was on the HF net and I think they had 119.1 also.

The Air America crews used to call in to the stations out & off times and on & in times. I think at the end of each day the radio operators sent that info in to VTE or UDN for maintenance purposes. Then the times might have been sent to TPE or Tainan..

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two..

Air America also had CW communications to Taipei and their was a constant flow of operational messages between Southeast Asia and there.

From A pilot standpoint I thought the communication setup was outstanding considering where we were. Our big problem was the lack of navigational facilities but we managed. Generally speaking it was the policy of all the companies to keep equipment off the airplanes not needed so we could carry more payload and get better performance off the short strips. This was especially criticle because of the temperatures and altitudes we had to cope with.

Air America did operate one beacon for ADF nav about 15 miles north of Sam Tong and we called the place Delta.

Continental Air Services had a 90 watt Collins radio at VTE and late in the afternoon they could contact Continental Airlines headquarters in Los Angeles. Other times of the day no contact to LA could be made. Sometimes we would use the radio for personal use to call family in the states and LA would run a phone patch for us.

Other general communication information was we had no telephones in our homes so many of us bought CB radios and we had a nice net going. Many of us also bought the Zenith Transoceanic radio to entertain ourselves with VOA, BBC and anything else we could pick up.

In January 1966 I transferred to Vietnam. The USAF had by then established an ATC system and flight following system that was superb and we used that. Navigational facilities were good there thanks to the USAF.

The control tower at VTE was manned by Laotians and we used 118.1 with them.

I think I should sum it up now having to state I don't know how a US military plane would communicate with Air America for SAR if in trouble but they did it somehow and very quickly. I think Bill Solin or Fred Walker can let you know.

Thank you for your call today. I was surprised and really enjoyed talking with you..

Regards,

Jim MacFarlane