

31 January 1970

Pealer's LORAN Ranch

Story and photographs:
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SATTAHIP THAILAND --- On a farm-like setting in a small valley here, stands a 625-foot-tall red and white antenna. It transmits an electrical pulse, which is used by aircraft, ships, and land forces, for precise navigation more than 1,200 miles away.

The U.S. Coast Guard Long Range Navigation Station (LORAN) was established here in 1966 to operate along with one other in Thailand and two in the Republic of Vietnam. These stations, and a monitoring unit in Northern Thailand, make up what is known as the Southeast Asia LORAN Chain.

The commanding officer of the LORAN-C Master Transmitting Station in Sattahip is LT. N. A. Pealer. He is known as the "straw boss" of this "LORAN Ranch". This Master Station sets up the electrical pulse for the other stations in the Southeast Asia Chain to synchronize with.

The contrast of the outside 'country ranch' atmosphere, with the intricate electrical machinery inside is intriguing.

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Lt. Pealer said the most important task he has is that of, "keeping the 500,000-watt-transmitter on the air constantly," he said, "if we have to go off for three minutes in a 30 day period, it's a really bad affair".

The station has a 99.96 per-cent average "on the air" transmitting time since it opened in 1966. The captain said, "In case of a breakdown we have a twin-component system throughout the station, this gives us a complete system to take over, or any part of the system, while we make repairs." He continued, "The only delay would be something like getting a diesel-powered 350,000 watt generator up to proper speed before kicking it into the system".

He said, "The modern computerized aircraft, which uses our signal for it's navigation, has a built in four-minute memory, after which time the pilot's life and his plane is in danger". He stressed that, "This is why our transmission must be constant".

The station uses sound-powered, hand cranked, telephones for on-station communications. These phones put out a sound like a wavering horn when cranked. A continuous crank is used also for the "general alarm" , when the men on watch at the transmitter building detect a problem which might cause the station to go off the air. He cranks the phone with it programed to all buildings on the station.

Lt. Pealer said, "Our last breakdown happened in the early hours the crew was alerted, we ran and some rode bicycles to the transmitter room about 50-yards away. We were out of breath, half-dressed and still a little sleepy, but the repairs were made and we were back on the air after three minutes".

This is a small sample of the technical know how and spirit for getting the job done that is typical of the men who run modern Coast Guard LORAN stations around the world. It doesn't matter if they are located on a ranch site in Thailand, or in a place so remote and cold that even the Polar Bears leave in the winter.

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