

1964

On November 21, an RF-101 on a Yankee Team mission was lost forty miles east of Thakhek. The pilot ejected and came down in a tropical rain forest. An Air America H-34 happened to be in the area and recovered the survivor within an hour. Within thirty-six hours the Air Force was forced to rely on Air America twice to perform aircrew recovery missions. At the end of 1964 it was evident that the Air Rescue Service was not able to handle the rescue mission in Laos.¹⁰³

In the last months of 1964, American casualties, both on the ground and in the air, increased as the fighting in Southeast Asia intensified. In October and November additional HH-43B/F rescue helicopters were sent to Vietnam, but the limited range of these choppers restricted their usefulness. Industry, employing the latest in helicopter technology, was only beginning to respond to the urgent need for an improved aircrew recovery aircraft. Tactics were emerging to meet the challenges presented by enemy opposition, the climate, and the diverse geographic features of Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, in late 1964, flyers continued to fly missions without the kind of search and rescue support they — and the Air Force — would have liked to have had.