PROJECT

CHECO

SOUTHEAST ASIA

REPORT

THE EMPLOYMENT OF AIR BY THE THAIS AND KOREANS IN SEA

SPECIAL REPORT

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PROJECT
Contemporary
Historical
Examination of
Current
Operations
REPORT

THE EMPLOYMENT OF AIR BY THE THAIS AND KOREANS IN SEA (U)

30 OCTOBER 1970

HQ PACAF

Directorate, Tactical Evaluation
CHECO Division

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS PACIFIC AIR FORCES
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96553

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF

PROJECT CHECO REPORTS

The counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare environment of Southeast Asia has resulted in the employment of USAF airpower to meet a multitude of requirements. The varied applications of airpower have involved the full spectrum of USAF aerospace vehicles, support equipment, and manpower. As a result, there has been an accumulation of operational data and experiences that, as a priority, must be collected, documented, and analyzed as to current and future impact upon USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine.

Fortunately, the value of collecting and documenting our SEA experiences was recognized at an early date. In 1962, Hq USAF directed CINCPACAF to establish an activity that would be primarily responsive to Air Staff requirements and direction, and would provide timely and analytical studies of USAF combat operations in SEA.

Project CHECO, an acronym for Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations, was established to meet this Air Staff requirement. Managed by Hq PACAF, with elements at Hq 7AF and 7AF/13AF, Project CHECO provides a scholarly, "on-going" historical examination, documentation, and reporting on USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine in PACOM. This CHECO report is part of the overall documentation and examination which is being accomplished. Along with the other CHECO publications, this is an authentic source for an assessment of the effectiveness of USAF airpower in PACOM.

RO[illegible] CAMP[illegible], Major General, USAF
Chief of Staff

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS PACIFIC AIR FORCES
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FOR THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF

Maurice L. Griffith

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW

Thailand's chief contribution to air activities in Vietnam was in providing 45 Air Force personnel to man Vietnamese and USAF transport aircraft--an area in which crew shortages were chronic. In lesser numbers, forward air controllers were also provided. For the Allies, the Thai pilots and crew members meant a welcome augmentation of personnel, while the Thais for their part viewed their own contribution as more than a mere gesture in favor of the anti-Communist effort. For them, these activities were an opportunity to gain war-zone experience.

The training of Thais was largely neglected, however, until, in 1970, the winding down of the war produced shortages in the more highly skilled categories of USAF personnel, such as transport aircraft crewmen. These shortages signalled the need for training and upgrading. Similar circumstances led the USAF to realize that certain Thai personnel being used solely as interpreters for U.S. forward air controllers (FACs) could be trained to be FACs themselves.

Though Thai Army commanders tended to be afraid to call in Allied tactical air power extemporaneously to support their troops during an engagement, they had no such reluctance where preplanned air strikes were concerned. At the same time, however, more precise methods of establishing the locations of targets would have increased the usefulness of many of these strikes.

In the Vietnam War, Thailand's principal contribution was on the ground where it consisted of a division of Army troops. The professional performance of her Air Force personnel was, nonetheless, highly praised by their USAF colleagues and constituted one of the bright spots in the saga of Thai participation in the Vietnamese War.

Korea, with its 50,000 men, provided the second largest expeditionary force after that of the United States in helping the South Vietnamese Government defeat the aggression disguised as insurrection by its author in Hanoi. Perhaps because of the Koreans' large numbers of ground troops, they relied very little upon support from tactical air. The apparent success of their vigorous, often harsh, methods further convinced the Koreans that reliance upon themselves alone was sufficient. Like the Thais, they had no aircraft in Vietnam to speak of, and these few were used only for liaison. The story of their involvement in the air war can, therefore, be told in a few pages.

CHAPTER II

GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE THAI INTERVENTION

Historically, Thailand has followed a course of neutrality and accommodation with the most powerful of her neighbors at any given time. When, therefore, she made the decision to participate in the Vietnam conflict, her action was welcomed by the U.S. Government and COMUSMACV.[1/]

In 1964 the Royal Thai Air Force sent a small contingent of transport personnel to augment the Vietnamese Air Force and provided temporary jet aircraft transition training in Thailand for some 25 Vietnamese pilots. Two years later, the Thai aviation detachment in RVN was enlarged to 27 men, at the same time that a 200-man naval detachment, with boats, was dispatched to that beleaguered country.[2/]

Soon afterwards, a commitment of much greater magnitude was made by the Thai government, in the form of the Queen's Cobra Regiment, comprising more than 2,200 men. In mid-1967 it arrived in Saigon to spend an orientation period with the U.S. 9th Infantry Division, after which it was assigned a sector to protect the eastern approaches to Saigon. By early 1969, Thai Army strength in Vietnam was increased to over 11,000 men, organized into a division built up to two brigades. The Black Panther Division, as it was called, was metamorphosed into the Black Leopard Division in 1970, in order to prevent its having the same name as a well-known militant black-power group in the U.S. The division was under the operational control of the U.S. II Field Force.[3/]

CHAPTER III

THE THAI TRANSPORT FLIGHT IN SOUTH VIETNAM

The first Thais to join the Allied effort in Vietnam were 16 officers and men from a transport squadron who were sent to augment the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) C-47 crews in September 1964. Shortages in transport crews were chronic in the VNAF and were expected to continue through 1972. In 1964, however, this situation was particularly acute, as a result of the VNAF's having received more transport aircraft under the U.S. Military Assistance Program (MAP) than it had crews to man them.[4/]

Later, as more Thai Air Force people were sent to Vietnam, some were attached to a USAF C-123 unit. In late 1970, the total number of Thais serving with the Victory Flight, as their Vietnam transport operation was designated, had grown from the original 16 to 45. The Thais' reasons for being in Vietnam had by then become clearer: First, they provided the symbolic presence of yet another Free World country--albeit only at the urging and with the financial support of the U.S.--alongside the Republic of Vietnam, the U.S. itself, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and South Korea; and second, Thailand had found a way to get experience under combat conditions for its military forces--experience that might be needed later for the defense of Thailand against external attack or for fighting the Communist insurgency within Thailand itself.[5/]

FLYING WITH THE VNAF

It is apparent that when they first contemplated sending personnel to Vietnam, the Thais had entertained a radically different concept of their role from that of the Vietnamese with whom they flew. The VNAF crews saw the Thais merely as supernumeraries. At no time were Thai crews given a C-47 for a mission without Vietnamese aboard, and in fact, the aircraft commander was always a Vietnamese. No matter what the relative levels of experience, the Thai pilot was automatically relegated to the position of co-pilot. For this and other reasons, the Thais complained that the Vietnamese were displaying an unwarranted attitude of superiority. For their part, the Thais tended to see themselves as advisors to the Vietnamese, with a more sophisticated approach to military flying.[6/] USAF people who worked with the Thais reported that the latter appeared to believe that once the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam, Thai military personnel would remain to advise the Vietnamese in certain capacities.[7/]

Of the 45 Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) personnel in the Victory Flight in 1970, three pilots and five flight engineers flew with the Vietnamese in the VNAF C-47s; while nine pilots, seven flight engineers, and three loadmasters were flying C-123Ks with the USAF 19th Tactical Airlift Squadron (TAS)--which, like the VNAF's C-47-equipped 415th Squadron, was located at Tan Son Nhut. (The other members of the flight had jobs on the ground in intelligence, communications, flight engineering, loading, and operations, though many of them also performed flight duties.) At

any given time, the balance of Thai personnel was split almost equally between officers and enlisted men. The navigators in the flight had originally flown with the USAF C-123s, principally to gain experience in troop drops. When the 19th TAS stopped making personnel drops in 1969, the navigators went over to the VNAF C-47s for one year, but they returned to the 19th in late 1970, when the latter resumed supply and troop drops. Qualification in this type of precision navigation was greatly sought after by the Thai navigators. The Victory Flight's Commander, Deputy Commander, and Operations Officer flew with both the VNAF and USAF. However, in the Victory Flight there was never any inflexible policy concerning who would fly with whom.[8/]

When discussing the subject with Americans, at least, the Thais claimed not to like flying with the VNAF, saying that the latter's flight criteria "did not come up to Thai-U.S. standards." Although the general attitude of the Vietnamese, coupled with their prohibition against Thai pilots' moving up to the left seat, may have been the real reasons, Thai officers asserted that their distaste was rather due to lack of safety procedures, neglect of checklists, and general piloting practices.[9/] On the other hand, there were reportedly few Thais who served more than a fraction of their one-year tours without learning to speak Vietnamese fluently--both languages belonging to the Sino-Tibetan group, but being no more closely related in actuality than, say, English and ~~German.~~ Bulgarian Unfortunately, the same could not be said of their fluency in English

after several months or even a year in RVN--a rather serious shortcoming, about which more will be said later. It was most likely that the Thais' ability to speak Vietnamese was attributable in greater measure to their off-duty associations than it was to contacts with their VNAF colleagues, since the crew members who flew with the VNAF C-47s averaged less than half the number of monthly flying hours of those who flew with the USAF (20 vs. 50), and numerically the C-47 Thais comprised only 20 percent of the entire Victory Flight.[10/]

FLYING WITH THE USAF

Flying with the 19th TAS was an altogether different experience for the Thais. The VNAF C-47s rarely landed at bases other than the principal ones, which were usually large, well developed, and located outside contested combat areas. The C-123Ks of the 19th TAS gave the Thai crews true combat experience, "landing on short, unimproved runways and using steep approaches to avoid enemy fire," in the words of one of the Thai pilots.[11/] The C-47 missions were, in the main, run-of-the-mill administrative flights, though there were also troop movements. Unquestionably, the C-123 mission was the more dangerous and gave more complete war-zone flying experience. Frequently, the C-123s took hits, and two Thais of the Victory Flight were, in fact, killed in crashes (though it was never established that the two Providers were lost as the result of hostile fire).[12/] Their mission was to provide airlift to fire bases and forward operating fields, as well as for unit moves and passenger missions between main operating bases.

Although the Thai crews were often assigned to the regular aircraft of the 19th TAS, three of the 19th's C-123s carried the insigne of the RTAF--a red, white, and black roundel, with the words "Royal Thai Air Force" written in English and Thai characters--on both sides of the aircraft. These airframes, however, did not belong to the RTAF, but were USAF C-123s carried on the unit equipment list (UEL) of the 19th TAS, for reasons to be explained later.

Thai crew members were brought into the USAF transport fleet in mid-1967 to ease an existing pilot shortage. Known at that time as the 19th Air Commando Squadron, the 19th TAS later became the 19th Special Operations Squadron, before finally acquiring the designation it bore in 1970: the 19th Tactical Airlift Squadron.[13/] Its parent wing was headquartered at Phan Rang AB. The Thais sent in 1967 and 1968 were from an RTAF C-123B squadron in Thailand, some of them being highly qualified, and even including a few instructor pilots in their number. In flying the 19th TAS aircraft, they had only to get used to the added jet engines of the K-model. The rest of what they learned had to do with mission techniques.[14/] Later, as the one-year tours exhausted all available RTAF C-123 crew members, men began arriving from the RTAF's C-47 squadron, and more training was required to qualify them. The RTAF, in these cases, merely gave them a short course in one of its C-123s that made them marginal co-pilots before sending them to Vietnam. In late 1970, real C-123 crews began to arrive from Thailand once more; for, in the meantime, the U.S. and the RTAF had been continuing

to turn out trained C-123 crews. Throughout, the men sent had already received combat training in Thailand, a few of them having even operated aircraft in areas of insurgency in Thailand and Laos.[15/]

Typically, the mixed crew of a 19th TAS C-123 included a USAF aircraft commander and flight engineer, with an RTAF co-pilot and loadmaster.[16/] By mid-1970, however, two of the Thai pilots had been upgraded to aircraft commander and were flying in the left seat. Later, one of this pair was upgraded even further to instructor pilot. As a result, when one of these two flew, he was in most cases giving orders to a USAF co-pilot to his right, in contradistinction to the VNAF C-47 situation. The American co-pilot, moreover, was learning from the Thai aircraft commander, especially the instructor pilot, inasmuch as 50 per cent of the 19th's pilots were young and fresh from pilot training, totally inexperienced in combat. In mid-1970 the only pilots receiving instruction from the Thai instructor pilot were American. At the same time, there were four Thai flight engineer instructors and one loadmaster teaching Thai and U.S. personnel with less experience.[17/] (See Figure 1.)

Before joining the Victory Flight, the Thais had learned the rudiments of English, as had all RTAF flying personnel. Senior USAF flight crew members unanimously--if ungrammatically--reported that they "catch on quick" and were "excellent pilots."[18/] Nevertheless, their English was, in more than one case, poor when they arrived, and not much better when they left. This lack of fluency, more than anything else, prevented the 19th TAS

portion of the Victory Flight program from being more effective than it was. For years this weak link, a lack of time on the part of USAF personnel, along with their unexpressed feeling that the air war was primarily an American project, combined to consign training programs--Thai, Vietnamese, and other--to a low-priority status. It was, in fact, not until 1970 that they were given serious attention. The 19th TAS commander in 1970 said that the basic reason for the change was the U.S. program to wind down its military activities in Vietnam. This program resulted in crew shortages which required the Thais to move forward into real operating positions.[19/]

THE PRESTIGE INVOLVED

The Thais were quite pleased at this turn of events. Where, in the past, upgrading had been a remote goal, often found unattainable, by mid-1970 they were starting to log more flying hours, and upgrading was coming faster. (Even so, the most highly skilled pilot in 1970's Victory Flight could not qualify as an instructor pilot, because of his lack of fluency in English. He could speak the international language of control well enough to handle conversations with towers and passing aircraft, and certainly enough for operating in Thailand, but not well enough to be upgraded in a USAF squadron by an American instructor.) Not surprisingly, morale in the flight soared. The Thai crewmen were no longer merely the tokens of a symbolic presence but had become valued airmen--needed, and worthy of the serious training required to upgrade them to a more useful role. For RTAF pilots and loadmasters, to be qualified by the USAF was an

USAF airmen load a Thai C-123 at a forward airfield in Vietnam.
FIGURE 1

intensely desired, prestigious goal--a feather in their cap which made them the envy of the other pilots back home and marked them for promotion at Bangkok headquarters.[20] When half the flight rotated from Vietnam every six months, they were met by the RTAF Chief of Staff himself. This was one of the real reasons for the Thai markings on the three airframes. The prestige of the crews and the glory of the occasion could hardly have been sustained if they had had to fly home in foreign aircraft. Another reason for the insigne on each aircraft was to give visual evidence that the RTAF was in Vietnam.[21]

Nevertheless, they *were* USAF aircraft, and this fact unintentionally provided one more source of Thai impatience. Being USAF airframes, they legally had to have at least one USAF crew member aboard. Unfortunately, the Thais could not escape the impression, even though false, that they were regarded as not being "big enough boys" to fly by themselves--even when the aircraft was in charge of the same Thai instructor pilot who was giving instruction to American pilots in the squadron.[22] Further reasons for a U.S. presence aboard were the language difficulty (flying in a fluent English language environment) and the awkward international situation that could result from an accident.

As for the first reason, it was true that VNAF pilots did not all speak fluent English either, but the majority of them had been flying in the environment of post-1965 Vietnam for a longer time than was possible under the Thais' standard one-year tour. Respecting the second reason

given by the 834th AD, the airplanes of the 19th TAS carried both U.S. and Vietnamese passengers, often civilian. The prospect of a U.S. aircraft with a Thai insigne and a Thai crew crashing and perhaps killing Vietnamese civilians was considered to contain too much potential for diplomatic embarrassment for the USAF to risk its occurring.[23/] Far less grave, though none the less embarrassing, were the not infrequent and unmuted slurring remarks of American passengers who made no effort to conceal their disdain when they saw a Thai pilot walking forward to the cockpit before takeoff.[24/]

As the 19th TAS stood back in the waning months of 1970 and reviewed the Thais' progress to date, it was pleased to find that their accomplishments were many. The Thais, for their part, were in most respects eminently satisfied with their experience in Vietnam and looked forward with confidence to the dawning era of Vietnamization--whether it meant an expanded role in providing assistance to the VNAF or their deployment back to Thailand.[25/]

CHAPTER IV

THE THAI FAC MISSION

The responsibility for controlling and advising the use of tactical air in support of the Thai troops in RVN rested with the USAF 504th Tactical Air Support Group, which was the parent organization for all U.S. FAC and ALO units. At Long Thanh in Bien Hoa Province, where the Thai Army division was headquartered, there was a USAF tactical air control party (TACP) headed by a lieutenant colonel from the 504th. (In American circles, incidentally, the airfield at Long Thanh was better known by the name which the U.S. Army had given it: Camp Bearcat.) Among the problems which these U.S. FACs and liaison officers encountered in dealing with the Thai ground commanders were the latter's relative inexperience in the utilization of air power as it was employed by the Americans in Vietnam, and the difficulty of communicating with them.

From the arrival of the Thai troops in Vietnam in late 1967 up to the first months of 1970, the practice had been for the ground commander to radio the FAC aircraft in his native tongue, providing the information on troop locations and support that he desired. A Thai interpreter in the back seat of the aircraft would then translate this into English for the American FAC. In early 1970, however, there came a break with tradition and the accepted, inefficient way of doing things. The chief USAF liaison officer of that period, observing that the interpreters supplied him were invariably Thai pilots--often men with more than 3,000 flying hours under

their belts, many of these hours in fighters, withal--obtained permission to institute a program to convert these interpreters into active FACs. After all, as he had gradually come to realize, few USAF FACs had as much flying experience; therefore, it seemed a waste of manpower not to get them directly into the forward air control business.

The first two interpreters to try it, both Thai Air Force majors, were sent on an experimental basis to Bien Hoa for a month of intensive training--first in classrooms, then in the air--by the 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron, which supplied the FACs and TACP for the Thai Army at Bearcat. In the classroom, they were taught aircraft familiarization, air strike procedures, and basic orientation. In the air, an OV-10 was used in air strike control training to simulate the strike aircraft for five to seven sorties before the Thais graduated to the control of actual combat strikes by jet aircraft. The first two majors met all the 19th TASS standards for qualification as FACs, and the training of Thais then became a continuing program.[26/]

The Thai FACs, according to a USAF FAC who flew with them, had "eyes like hawks" when reconnoitering visually and when keeping enemy and friendly troops in view during a strike. This visual acuity came from their familiarity with the terrain and vegetation of Southeast Asia. Also, perhaps--though there is no way of substantiating it--it may have been aided by their past flying experience in propeller-driven aircraft, which, in Thailand, flew over shorter distances and, therefore, at lower altitudes

over the terrain, giving the pilots a better view of the ground than that obtained by the average USAF pilot, who flew in a jet at high altitudes, more often than not.

An example was given by the chief U.S. ALO in late 1970:[27]

> *The other day we were flying over some jungle, and the Thai with me said there were several trails coming together down there. I looked, but I wasn't sure I saw anything at all. We got back and he had the army send a patrol in there. Sure enough, they found a storage area and killed six VC.*

The other attributes necessary for the would-be FAC--the skill to pilot the associated aircraft (in this case, the O-2), an adequate knowledge of English ~~coolness under stress~~, judgment, and courage--were also found in the first Thais turned out as FACs by the 19th TASS. Furthermore, their accuracy in marking targets with smoke rockets was an object of admiration on the part of their American colleagues.[28]

The USAF FACs continued to fly with them in the O-2, taking turns calling in USAF, VNAF, and RAAF fighter aircraft, but as one described the situation, "Now, when we're flying support for Thai ground troops, it's almost a holiday for me. I sit there and usually get bored, but I try to make myself helpful just by keeping a watch to the front and making sure we don't collide with another bird." Circumscribed by Washington ukases similar to those affecting the transport squadron mentioned earlier, the Thai FACs were not allowed to fly alone, because the airframes were owned

by the USAF. Furthermore, understanding the chatter and slang of the aircraft radio remained a problem. When the Thai FAC missed a point in a jet fighter's English conversation, the American was there to clarify it over the intercom.[29] Just as basic to this decision was the concern that if a Thai FAC were to ~~request~~ put in a VNAF strike which killed or injured ARVN troops, the resulting "short-round" investigation might implicate and embarrass the USAF. Americans believed that because of the nationalities involved in such a case, the USAF's judgment and sense of responsibility could be impugned, however unjustly.[30]

The first two Thai FACs to be qualified became ALOs at Bearcat later in 1970 before returning to Thailand. By late 1970, ten slots had been authorized at Bearcat for Thai FACs and ALOs, but only seven officers actually were assigned and just five were in training. Finished, U.S.-certified FACs were turned out regularly by a 19th TASS standardization/evaluation board. When Thai troops needed tactical air support from the USAF, RAAF, or VNAF, the man controlling the aircraft was more often than not a Thai himself.

The principal beneficiary of the new system was not to be found in Vietnam (though Thai morale and air-to-ground communications were improved there), but in Thailand itself, where the RTAF and the U.S. Military Assistance Command were trying to build up a Thai FAC capability. At Sattahip, southeast of Bangkok, the RTAF had a FAC squadron equipped with O-1s and U-10s. The FACs and ALOs trained in Vietnam, with a year's combat

experience in controlling air strikes and advising ground commanders, were earmarked to serve at Sattahip as instructors to train other Thai pilots to become qualified FACs.[31/] By October 1970 three were U.S.-qualified and had returned to Thailand.[32/]

CHAPTER V

USE OF AIR POWER BY THE THAIS

The Thai area of operations was used by the Viet Cong primarily as a source of food and clothing. Although it was far from being free of VC, the enemy activity level was low, possibly as a result of constant harassment by Thai troops and Allied air strikes. What VC there were kept on the move. USAF ALOs found that preplanned air strikes were more readily accepted by Thai army headquarters than close tactical air support of troops. For the latter, helicopter and fixed-wing gunships were preferred, and requests for fighter-bombers were rare.[33/]

A former chief ALO at Bearcat said that most Thai ground commanders did not consider close air support a necessity during an engagement. They tended to request it only after contact had been broken off and friendly troops were a "safe distance" away from the strike. In contact with the enemy, they called upon gunships, not artillery or tactical air. Much of the liaison officer's job was to attempt to educate the ground commanders on the usefulness of fighters, properly used with the appropriate ordnance.[34/]

The Thai Army division headquarters requested one preplanned strike every day, automatically, as a matter of regular practice. Since the division's two brigade headquarters were also located at Bearcat, none of these requests originated in the field, although the intelligence upon which they were based frequently did. Actually, it seemed to Americans

in the tactical air-control party that the Thais were accepting the preplanned strikes out of typical Thai politeness. In their minds, the daily strike was something the Americans, not they, wanted. The USAF ALO at Bearcat in late 1970 said:[35]

> *Before, it was as if they hardly took an interest in them at all. It was a U.S. thing, and so they said, in effect, "Yes, sure, we need the strike." But when I would ask them where they wanted it put, they would smilingly answer, "Anywhere you want!" Of course, sometimes we took advantage of the extreme politeness of the Thais--when we needed something done. They're always too polite to turn you down on anything.*

The selection of suggested targets for preplanned air strikes was performed in the majority of cases by the FACs' visual reconnoitering but increasingly also through the Thai Army's reliable, above-average intelligence network, which used reports from Vietnamese agents in hamlets, and from Thai patrols. Because the location of the targets was expressed in practically all cases by six-digit coordinates, however, rather than by visually identifiable characteristics of the place, there was perforce a certain percentage of "treebusters." Inaccuracies in plotting and passing along the coordinates further affected the precision of the system. The chief ALO in 1970 recommended that FACs be allowed to work with helicopter "hunter-killer" teams to find--and better identify--targets.

Thai headquarters not only relied heavily on FACs to locate targets but also upon the division ALO to help select the best ones. Thai G-3

Air relied upon the U.S. ALO's recommendations in evaluating the targets' significance, the safe distances for friendly blocking forces, and the kind of ordnance suitable for the type and hardness of the targets.

Toward the end of 1970, according to the ALO, the Thais were beginning to establish their target priorities and evaluate target intelligence with more thought and independence--a trend which was attributable in part to prodding by the ALO and in part to II Field Force's insistence after August that if the justifications for preplanned strikes weren't sufficiently valid, the strike aircraft would not be supplied. The day of the routine daily strike was over.[36/]

In the Thais' area, which consisted largely of cultivated land and grassy fields bordering thick jungle and rubber plantations, the targets uncovered by visual reconnaissance alone were usually small base camps and supply caches. The FACs monitored the movements of the local Vietnamese peasants, woodcutters, and plantation workers and the activity on the trails. Thai intelligence provided its input, and from these two sources G-3 Air, generally with the ALOs' advice, established priorities, which were passed on to the FACs. Aircraft and ordnance available at the time of the strike determined what position on the priority list the target would be assigned. Wherever possible, known or suspected enemy locations got the number one priority, but during one 30-day period in early 1970, which was not atypical for that period, over 80 per cent of the targets proposed were fixed ones, such as bunkers and fortified

storage caches.[37] In September 1970, II Field Force made the priority systems of its different operating areas obsolete by informing the commanders that only known enemy locations, landing-zone preparations, and prestrikes would henceforth be accepted for preplanned strikes, under normal circumstances.

Because the Thais--like the Vietnamese, at first, and the Koreans--did not make full use of tactical air, one of the ALOs' major tasks was educating them in its use. The chief ALO said, "Most Thais wouldn't have used tac air at all, if we weren't here, except for rescue or communications CAP or finding paths out of the jungle for ground troops who are disoriented."[38]

Since one of the two Thai brigades rotated every six months, with new commanders and FACs coming in, the education process was a continuing one. It was an uphill education, in a sense, because not only was there something to be taught, but the pupil also had to be convinced it was worth learning. Being unfamiliar with the use of tac air, the Thais accepted things at face value. For instance, as part of the education program, the U.S. Army and Air Force put on bombing and napalm demonstrations, placing the Thai observers ~~just~~ three kilometers away. At this distance the flash seems blinding and the very ground shakes. The sequel to this unnerving experience was that thereafter the Thai commanders were invariably to be found pulling their troops back to distances of approximately three kilometers before calling in air strikes. Only reluctantly and slowly did they develop

confidence enough to allow aircraft to work close to the troops.[39]

Nevertheless, the ALOs' education programs eventually had their effect. Unfortunately, many commanders were close to their rotation date before this effect manifested itself in a fuller use of air. The Thai division ALO said in October 1970:

> *You take the 2d Brigade. They've been here nine months now, and they actually are asking for pre-strikes to clear an area before they go in. They never used to do this before. The commander always used to send his own troops in when the enemy was contacted, too. Now he lets tac air do the job.*

The same ALO said that his only remaining problem was that the Thai division and brigade staffs did not include him often enough in the planning for operations. They drew up their plans and simply left one hour-and-a-half, for instance, in the schedule for "tactical air," nothing more specific. The ALO had the impression that they were fulfilling a ritualistic obligation more than anything else. The Thais' apparent predilection for secretiveness in planning their sweeps may have had its origin in an old rivalry between their Army and Air Force, according to this ALO.[40]

Considering the number of enemy troops known to be in the Thai Army's operating area, the activity they displayed and the number of attacks they launched were [redacted] low. One of the reasons for this anomaly may well have been the effects of tactical air power on the enemy's offensive capability. A specific example of the enemy's being kept off balance in

this way was the case of the 274th VC Regiment's headquarters, which had to be frequently moved to avoid Thai Army sweeps and the associated air strikes. The constant construction of new base camps may have kept the enemy too busy for offensive actions, inasmuch as his primary job became the gathering of food and clothing and ultimately survival. It made for a relatively static military situation in the Thai operational area, and for correspondingly less air activity.[41/]

CHAPTER VI

GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE ROK INTERVENTION

When in 1964 President Johnson made an appeal for "more flags" in Vietnam, the Republic of Korea (ROK) responded quickly, sending a small group of karate instructors and a mobile hospital. In March of 1965 a "Dove Unit" was sent, composed of an engineer battalion with a civic-action mission. Meanwhile, negotiations that would enable Korea to send a combat brigade of Marines and a two-regiment Army division in October 1965 were underway with the U.S. After working out additional military and financial agreements with the U.S., South Korea found that it was able to dispatch another Army division and supplementary troops for the other units during the summer of 1966, bringing the total Korean military in Vietnam to almost 50,000 men. Thus, Korea, after the United States only, supplied the largest Free World military force assisting the South Vietnamese in staying the advance of Communism.[42/]

While the Marine brigade was made a sort of roving "trouble-shooter" in the northern neck of RVN, the two Army divisions were given the responsibility for securing two long coastal areas in Military Region II. By 1968 General Westmoreland was able to report to President Johnson that "within the area assigned to the Korean forces, the enemy has been progressively destroyed--not only combat units but political and subversive infrastructure as well."[43/] The Army divisions eventually were able to link their two sectors and, in coordination with Vietnamese and U.S. forces, to provide security for the greater part of Military Region II's

strategic coastal area.[44/]

In vastly smaller numbers, the ROK Navy and Air Force were also present in Vietnam. The Koreans had few aircraft there, and even almost all of these were owned by the Army. Tactical air support, including FAC-ing, in their operational area was supplied by the U.S., the RVN, and Australia. In mid-1970, the ROK Air Force had three C-54s in Vietnam that were used wholly for administrative flights, and three other C-54s which shuttled back and forth between Vietnam and South Korea, mainly transporting wounded and sick solders. The ROK Army, on the other hand, had the following 1970 aircraft inventory in RVN: 20 O-1s, one U-21, two U-6s, and nine UH-1 helicopters. These too were used almost entirely for liaison and administrative flights, only occasionally performing missions like artillery spotting.[45/]

At the time the largest part of Korea's expeditionary forces came to Vietnam in 1965 and 1966, most of the O-1s were brought with them. The other Army aircraft were acquired in Vietnam from U.S. sources. The Air Force transport aircraft originally used were C-46s, but in 1969 and 1970 these were replaced by C-54s.[46/]

CHAPTER VII

KOREAN ARMY USE OF AIR

The Republic of Korea's Army was highly independent in Vietnam. This independence was evinced not only by its relative disinterest in tactical air support but also by the fact that it did not agree to come under MACV's operational control. It conducted its own military programs along the coast, roughly between Qui Nhon and Phan Rang in Military Region II, within only broad parameters agreed upon periodically by Korea, the U.S., and the Republic of Vietnam. The two Korean Army divisions did not (and in fact found it difficult to) request many immediate air strikes during engagements and they looked upon preplanned strikes as primarily a form of harassment. During one six-month period in 1970, the 9th ROK Infantry Division was not able to confirm a single man killed by the hundreds of strikes it had requested during that time, while, for their part, U.S. FACs assigned to that area considered "most preplanned missions to be 'treebusters.'"[47/]

The processing of immediate air requests was cumbersome in the extreme. There were no ALOs in the field below regiment level, nor at the same time were there usually any English-speaking personnel in the battalions and company-size units. The FAC's or ALO's only contact with the field commanders was through the division and regiment staffs. As the chief 9th Division ALO in 1970 put it, "Improvement in the employment of air support could be made if the language barrier could be bridged. . . .

For this reason, ground commanders are reluctant to call for air support when in close TIC situations, because they feel they cannot control its application."[48]

The chief ALO for the other major Korean Army unit, the Capital Division, said in 1970 that an additional problem in close air support came from an unfamiliarity with tactical aircraft, what they could do, and the munitions with which they could do it. In some cases, the ALO was able to carry out a campaign of education which led to an increased use of air by the Korean commanders.

For example, in early 1970 there was a Korean regimental commander who absolutely refused to allow 20 mm. strafing close to his troops. Since he knew the ALO well, however, he finally permitted a limited demonstration of the cannon's accuracy and, of it, became an avid user thereafter. Part of the trouble, it turned out, was that the officer had only seen 20 mm. ammunition sprayed around in area coverage before; he had not been aware of its capacity for pin-point accuracy and its employment close to friendly troops. It was yet another example showing that generalizations about Free World use of air must be made with caution. In many cases, use of air varied widely from commander to commander, even as one replaced the other in the same unit after rotation. Its use for troops in contact seemed often to depend on the personality of the ALO and the degree of confidence and harmony that existed between the ground commander and him.[49]

When in the course of performing visual reconnaissance a FAC spotted a target that was not fixed and warranted being struck, he had to radio his request for an immediate strike to the Korean division headquarters, where G-3 Air studied it. If approved, the request was processed, cleared, and then relayed to II DASC for further approval and transmittal.[50/]

In the case of preplanned air strikes, Korean commanders tended to look upon them as a means of harassment that prevented the enemy from forming large groups. While they were forced to remain on the move and kept broken up into small units, the Communist troops were less likely to be able to mount large-scale attacks. The ALO attached to the Capital Division said, "Air strikes on targets described as small base camps have resulted in secondary explosions occurring with some regularity. The ROKs do believe that the threat of such strikes does contribute in coercing the enemy into operating as small units." The ALO attached to the 9th Division said:

> *Targets are usually based on agent reports or IR. . . . Occasionally, a preplanned strike produces obvious results (a cave or bunker destroyed, a secondary explosion or fire), but mostly the results are unobserved. Little or no follow-up BDA is obtained from the ROK ground forces. No confirmed KBA have been reported in the past six months.*

He added, however, that it could be

> *. . . assumed /that/ the daily preplanned air strikes cause the enemy to move constantly and preclude their mustering any large force for serious attacks on friendly installations.*

The impression is gained overall that notwithstanding the USAF Air Liaison Officer's enthusiastic regard for preplanned air strikes, there was no correspondingly great interest on the part of ROK commanders. On the other hand, since the possibility of having them every day was offered to these commanders, they did not turn them down. After all, they were something "free" that might not be available later, when needed.[51]

In the Capital Division's area during the first half of 1970, the only information available to the FACs directing air strikes was a six-digit coordinate in "over 99 per cent" of the cases. Therefore, on less than one per cent of the strikes did they have information which enabled them to "positively identify the exact location of the target. These [were] primarily FAC-located targets obtained through VR." With the 9th Division, the situation was not much different: 85 to 90 per cent of the strikes were lacking any identifying information other than the six-digit coordinates. The ALO explained:

> *This is true because two-thirds of our FACs are forced to operate from locations remote from Regimental and Divisional TACPs and TOCs. Only limited information beyond coordinates and abbreviated descriptions can be passed to the*

airborne FAC, even via secure voice, which will help pinpoint the target. FAC judgement is highly important in selecting the exact position to place the ordnance.

In the Capital Division's area, for which figures were available for a 30-day period in 1970, half of the preplanned targets were based on a single source of intelligence, comprising one of the following: agents, visual air reconnaissance, enemy prisoners, infrared sensors, "people sniffers," and, rarely, air photo reconnaissance. It was because these targets were derived from a single intelligence source and were expressed solely in terms of coordinates on a map that the 9th Division ALO said he and the other FACs there considered "most preplanned missions to be treebusters."[52/]

At the same time, the accuracy of the fighter pilots in delivering ordnance where they were told to deliver it was never brought into question, nor was there any doubt about the usefulness of bombings intended to clear landing zones for assault helicopters and to soften up larger areas in preparation for Korean ground offensives. All of those consulted agreed that there was little waste involved in these missions and that they were better served by tactical air than by artillery. In both divisions, missions of this type topped the priority lists, which were as follows in mid-1970: Capital Division--landing-zone preparation, enemy base camps, known enemy troop locations, combat air cover for

ground operations, and suspected enemy locations; 9th Division--landing-zone preparation, area assault preparation, known enemy locations, and suspected enemy locations. The selection was made at division level each day, with heavy reliance on the USAF ALO's advice.

To give an example of the use of air, for which figures were available, during a 9th Division operation against the enemy in March 1970, 54 allied air strikes were made during the two-week period of the sweep. The bomb damage assessment was as follows: seven caves destroyed; eight trails cut; one boat destroyed; one crop-producing area damaged; four secondary explosions; 11 sustained fires; and an estimated seven persons killed by air. As the chief ALO commented, "The above observed results of close air support strikes during this major battle indicate that little was accomplished for the amount of ordnance expended."[53/]

In sum, tactical air power appeared to be a less important factor in the ROK's area of operation than it was in U.S. areas. Even so, their area was well pacified and low in enemy activity. The reasons for this success most likely lay in the fact that, as General William C. Westmoreland remarked in 1968, the Koreans are "dangerous adversaries. . . . They are masters at the patient collection of intelligence and the violent and effective exploitation of that intelligence once they have it in hand."[54/] Their methods reportedly did not make active pro-Allied sympathizers in the population so much as they discouraged aid to the enemy through fear. The Koreans' reliance on vigorous, sometimes harsh,

methods of pacification may have accounted for their ability to eschew reliance on air power, yet obtain unarguable military successes.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER II

1. (U) Report on Operations in South Vietnam, Jan 64 - Jun 68, by Gen W. C. Westmoreland, COMUSMACV. (Hereafter cited: Westmoreland Report.)

2. (U) Interview, Lt Col Barrie Gillman, Public Relations Officer, Royal Australian Army, Aust. Forces, Viet., 15 Jun 70.

3. (U) Westmoreland Report.

CHAPTER III

4. (C) Interview, Maj Jay B. Day, 19th TAS, Liaison Officer with Thai Victory Flight, w/Mr. J. T. Bear, 9 Sep 70. (Hereafter cited: Day Interview.)

5. (C) Interview, Maj Thongnant Anant, Cmdr, Thai Victory Flight, w/Mr. J. T. Bear, 9 Sep 70. (Hereafter cited: Anant Interview.)

6. (C) Day Interview.

7. (C) Interview, Lt Col W. J. Gibson, Cmdr, 19th TAS, w/Mr. J. T. Bear, 8 Sep 70. (Hereafter cited: Gibson Interview.)

8. (C) Day Interview.

9. (C) Anant Interview.

10. (C) Ibid.

11. (U) Interview, Capt Boonao Visawat, Thai Victory Flight, w/Vietnam Airlifter, 834AD Unit Newspaper, 15 Jun 70.

12. (C) Day Interview.

13. (S) CHECO Report "Tactical Airlift Operations," 30 Jun 69. Portion extracted "Confidential" only.

14. (C) Day Interview.

15. (C) Anant Interview.

16. (C) Gibson Interview.

17. (C) Day Interview; (U) Interview, Maj Robert Lamb, IP, 19th TAS, 15 Aug 70.

18. (C) Gibson Interview.

19. (C) Anant Interview.

20. (C) Day Interview.

21. (C) Interview, Maj Peter Marchant, IO, 834AD, w/Mr. J. T. Bear, 12 Sep 70. (Hereafter cited: Marchant Interview.)

22. (C) Day Interview.

23. (C) Marchant Interview.

24. (C) Day Interview.

25. (C) Ibid; (C) Anant Interview.

CHAPTER IV

26. (U) Interview, Lt Col Donald L. Olson, Thai Division ALO, w/7AF News, 24 June 1970. (Hereafter cited: Olson Interview.)

27. (C) Interview, Lt Col W. E. Milam, Chief ALO, Thai Black Leopard Division, w/Mr. J. T. Bear, 11 Oct 70. (Hereafter cited: Milam Interview.)

28. (U) Olson Interview.

29. (U) Ibid.

30. (C) Interview, Maj Robert M. Duda, Hq 7AF (TACWFB), former Thai brigade ALO, w/Mr. J. T. Bear, 31 Aug 70.

31. (C) Ibid.

32. (C) Milam Interview.

CHAPTER V

33. (C) Ltr, USAF ALO, RTAV, to II FFV ALO, 10 May 70, Subj: Project CHECO Study.

34. (C) Ibid.

35. (C) Milam Interview.

36. (C) Ibid.

37. (C) Olson Interview.

38. (C) Milam Interview.

39. (C) Ibid.

40. (C) Ibid.

41. (C) Olson Interview.

CHAPTER VI

42. (U) Westmoreland Report.

43. (U) Ibid.

44. (U) Ibid.

45. (U) Interview, Lt Col John Bennett, Public Relations Officer, 29 Sep 70. Royal Australian Army, Australian Forces, Vietnam, w/Mr. J. T. Bear.

46. (U) Interview, Lt Cmdr J. Lancaster, USN, Free World Military Assistance Office, MACV, Liaison Officer, to ROKFV, w/Mr. J. T. Bear, 29 Sep 70.

CHAPTER VII

47. (C) Ltr, ALO, 9th ROK Inf Div, to ALO, FWF, II DASC, Subj: Project CHECO Study, 9 May 70.

48. (C) Ibid.

49. (C) Ltr, ALO, ROK CAP DIV, to II DASC (ALO, FWF), Subj: Project CHECO Study, undated.

50. (C) Ibid.

51. (C) Interview, Lt Col Clent Houston, ALO, ROK Capital Div, with Maj Leo Johnson, 7AF (DOAC), 30 June 70.

52. (C) Ltr, ALO, 9th ROK Inf Div, to ALO, FWF, II DASC, Subj: Project CHECO Study, 9 May 70.

53. (C) Ibid.

54. (U) Westmoreland Report.

GLOSSARY

ALO	Air Liaison Officer
ARVN	Army of Republic of Vietnam
BDA	Bomb Damage Assessment
CAP	Combat Air Patrol; Combined Action Platoon
COMUSMACV	Commander United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
FAC	Forward Air Controllers
IR	Infrared; Intelligence Report
KBA	Killed by Air
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MAP	Military Assistance Program
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
ROK	Republic of Korea
RTAF	Royal Thai Air Force
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
TACP	Tactical Air Control Party
TAS	Tactical Airlift Squadron
TASS	Tactical Air Support Squadron
TIC	Troops in Contact
TOC	Tactical Operations Center
VC	Viet Cong
VNAF	Vietnamese Air Force