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AIRPOWER DEPLOYMENTS IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL POLICY

1958 - 1963 (v)

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IX. South Vietnam Operations--1961-63

Issue

(U) When the Kennedy administration took office in January 1961, the United States faced four major crises--Cuba, the Congo, Laos, and Vietnam. Each represented the effort of international communism to exploit the instabilities of underdeveloped regions, and each represented a breaching of the cold war truce lines that had emerged since the conclusion of World War II. Success of the Communists in these four areas was the result of an aggressive program to foster insurgency.

(U) In a speech before the Soviet Communist Party in Moscow on 6 January 1961, Nikita Khrushchev declared "wars of liberation" both inevitable and desirable. By wars of liberation, the leader of the USSR meant coordinated acts of subversion and covert aggression for the express purpose of installing Communist governments among the newly formed nations of the world--those going through a period of transition. The United States was determined that these nations would work out their own destiny, free of intimidation from members of the Communist Bloc.

Response

(S) Initial Air Force action in support of the national objective was to activate early in April 1961 the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla. Its mission was to train personnel in World War II-type aircraft, provide advanced training to friendly foreign air force personnel, and improve conventional-weapon tactics and techniques of employment for

counterinsurgency operations. The squadron possessed SC-47, B-26, and T-28B aircraft, and by 1 July it was fully manned with 125 officers and 235 airmen. The unit was to be operationally ready by 8 September 1961.

(S) Communist successes in Southeast Asia during the summer of 1961 led to a decision by the Secretary of Defense on 5 September to establish a command in South Vietnam under the Chief, MAAG, as a laboratory to develop organizations and procedures for counterinsurgency operations. The decision met with enthusiasm within the Air Force, which recognized in it an opportunity to utilize the talents of the now operational 4400th CCTS. On 19 September the Secretary of the Air Force recommended that an element of the 4400th be assigned as a unit of the experimental command. JCS concurred in the recommendation, and on 12 October affirmation came from "the highest governmental level."

(S) The detachment deployed in November 1961 with 8 T-28's, 4 RB-26's, 4 SC-47's, and 151 personnel. The unit, nicknamed Farm Gate, operated from Bien Hoa airfield, approximately 28 miles from Saigon. On 6 December, Farm Gate was authorized to participate in operations against the Viet Cong if at least one Vietnamese crewmember was aboard each strike aircraft. First operational flights occurred during the week of 18 December 1961, and by 7 January 1962, the unit had flown 59 strike, photo reconnaissance, troop and supply drop, and transport support missions. In December 1961, Mule Train, a TAC C-123 assault transport squadron of 16 aircraft from the 464th Troop Carrier Wing deployed to Vietnam to provide air logistic support. In the same month an experiment in defoliation of the jungles got under way when Ranch Hand, six spray-equipped C-123's from the 464th TCW, moved into the area. PACAF deployed four RF-101's from theater resources to Don Muang, Thailand, where as

Able Mable they performed photo reconnaissance over all of Southeast Asia.

(4) Air operations in South Vietnam continued to expand during 1962. The 2d ADVON, an advance headquarters of Thirteenth Air Force, was established in April and redesignated the 2d Air Division in September. ^{NOV 61} All USAF activities in South Vietnam except the MAAG-AF Division came under the operational control of this headquarters. ⁶²

(5) By the last half of the year, requirements dictated sustained day-to-day air operations. Vietnamese National Air Force and Farm Gate aircraft averaged 233 operational sorties per week. Approximately 120 of these were strike missions. This sustained effort exceeded Farm Gate resources and there was fear that, as the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) increased the scope of its program, there would be a progressive deterioration of capability. Citing these greatly increased requirements, PACAF in September recommended to CINCPAC that Farm Gate be augmented by 17 aircraft (5 T-28's, 10 B-26's, and 2-C47's). Two B-26's had been added to the original complement earlier and four U-10B's in August. In November, CINCPAC added another B-26 to the proposal and forwarded it to JCS. JCS agreed on 4 December and so recommended to the Secretary of Defense, who gave his approval on 31 December to augment Farm Gate with 117 personnel and 18 aircraft. Total Farm Gate strength, as of 1 June 1963, was 13 T-28's, 18 B-26's, 6 SC-47's, 4 U-10B's and approximately 300 personnel.

(6) A second TAC C-123 squadron--Sawbuck II--deployed from Pope AFB, N.C., on 31 May 1962 to Tan San Nhut, South Vietnam. This addition brought the air-lift strength of Mule Train/Sawbuck to 32 C-123's and a combined personnel strength of 427. Aircrews rotated approximately every six months, but the limited number of qualified C-123 aircrews available in TAC for rotation created difficulties. Consequently, Hq USAF levied quotas on other ZI commands to

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furnish pilots, copilots, navigators, and engineers. These personnel were placed on TDY to South Vietnam after completing flight training at Pope AFB. In May 1963 a third C-123 squadron--Sawbuck VII--deployed to Da Nang, South Vietnam, to meet the ever-growing demand for airlift support to the South Vietnamese and American forces. As of 1 June, the Mule Train/Sawbuck forces included 48 C-123's and almost 600 aircrew and maintenance personnel.

(5) The initial Ranch Hand defoliation operations were sufficiently successful to continue the project. One C-123 crashed and the three-man crew was killed on 2 February 1962 while conducting a low-level training mission about 25 miles from Saigon. In May 1962 the Air Force ordered another Ranch Hand C-123 to Iran to combat a locust plague. Completing the mission, the aircraft proceeded to Afghanistan, where it performed a similar task, and then returned to the United States. The remaining Ranch Hand aircraft continued to operate in South Vietnam. Spraying operations against six targets in the latter months of 1962 produced a 95-percent effectiveness against mangrove forests, with complete defoliation within 10 days. As of 31 December 1962, the detachment consisted of three C-123's, plus crews and maintenance personnel.

(5) The major problem facing the detached 464th Troop Carrier Wing units was maintenance. Technical personnel were spread so thin that the wing's re-training program was seriously hampered, both at home and at the TDY sites.

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XI. Cuban Crisis--1962Issue

(S) On 14 October 1962 a Strategic Air Command U-2 reconnaissance plane detected the existence of Soviet ballistic missiles in Cuba. However, the Air Force had already taken many preparatory steps because of the deteriorating relationship with Cuba--highlighted in the summer of 1962 by the shipment of several thousand Soviet military personnel and vast stores of war materiel. Between April and October 1962, Air Force agencies had discussed and documented materiel requirements in support of CINCLANT's Oplans 312, 314, and 316 and taken measures to preposition quantities of war readiness materiel (WRM) at Homestead and MacDill AFB's in Florida and other sites in the southeastern United States. MATS airlift capability was reviewed, operational rates accelerated, and C-124 formation drop training stepped up in response to Oplan 316, which visualized an invasion of the Cuban island. Air surveillance of Cuba increased and, by 26 September, resulted in the identification and location of 11 Soviet SA-2 sites, various MIG aircraft, Russian electronic equipment, and other military gear. Thus, the advent of the crisis--triggered by perhaps the most important USAF reconnaissance flight in American history--found the Air Force in a somewhat advanced posture of readiness.

Response

(S) The day following the discovery of the ballistic missiles, the Secretary of Defense met with the Service Secretaries; JCS held a special

meeting; and CINCAFLANT (Commander, TAC) dispatched instructions on prepositioning aircraft, materiel, and personnel at MacDill, Homestead, and McCoy AFB's and at Key West NAS. The Air Staff set priorities for implementing parts of the USAF Short Range Requirements Plan, and the USAF War Plan was revised accordingly. Logistical support was excellent. By 19 October all requirements, with minor exceptions which did not affect operational capability, were in place. Almost 7,000 tons of materiel had been airlifted, some from as far away as the Philippines and Turkey.

~~(S)~~ On 22 October President Kennedy informed the nation of the situation and established a quarantine of Cuba. SAC implemented a one-eighth airborne alert of the B-52 force and dispersed 183 B-47's to 33 (later 32) civilian and military airfields, completing the move on the following day. ADC dispersed 161 aircraft to 16 bases in less than seven hours. During the President's speech, 22 interceptors were airborne as a precautionary measure against some rash action from Cuba. Prior to the crisis, USAF air defense forces in the southeast consisted of 4 F-102's, 6 RC-121's, and 2 F-101's. By the 22nd, Florida bases contained 32 F-106's, 36 F-102's, 6 TF-102's, and 8 F-101's. Deployment of the Oplan 312 tactical strike force--prepared for an air strike on Cuba--began on 22 October. Within two days 560 aircraft were dispersed and 163 were in place at their home stations. Of the total, 471 TAC aircraft were in Florida, 459 operationally ready. USAF airlift was increased to support the combat forces. Beginning 17 October, MATS flew 54 missions to airlift approximately 800 tons of equipment into the area. In a four-day period, beginning 21 October, MATS airlifted 3,600 Marines and 3,200 tons of equipment into Guantanamo, Cuba, and the southeastern United States.

(S) The turning point of the crisis occurred on 28 October when Premier Khrushchev agreed to withdraw the ballistic missiles. By this time, the Single Integrated Operations Plan (SIOP) forces included 1,576 aircraft and 382 missiles. There were 52 B-52's on airborne alert. The SAC force ready for immediate execution included 1,361 strike aircraft generated, with 739 under positive control; 170 missiles, including 6 Minutemen; and 1,822 weapons. On 26 October CONAD had a total of 1,066 aircraft in combat-ready condition. Of these, 220 ADC aircraft from 31 fighter-interceptor squadrons were dispersed on 19 bases. One hundred and fifty-four ADC interceptors were stationed in Florida. CINCLANT, on 28 October, reported 745 aircraft available in Florida. Of these, 612 were Air Force (TAC); 584 operationally ready. Both SAC and TAC were flying reconnaissance missions over and around Cuba, and MATS and SAC searched the seas in the blockade zone. On the morning of the 28th, 24 reserve troop carrier squadrons, 6 aerial port squadrons, and 7 wing headquarters--a total of 14,000 men--were recalled to active duty.

(S) SAC's immediate execution capability reached a peak on 4 November. It included 1,479 strike aircraft, 182 ICBM's, 2,952 weapons, and 1,003 tankers. By 15 November, adjustments were necessary to prevent degradation of crew proficiency and inventory. On 21 November SAC lowered its defense condition (DEFCON) status to 3 and terminated the one-eighth airborne alert. Three days later, SAC returned to its normal posture--DEFCON 4--and recalled the dispersed B-47 force.

(S) Similarly, JCS on 31 October approved a reduction of CONAD's dispersed air defense force to 143 aircraft, in order to recycle weapons

and improve maintenance of aircraft. On 18 November CONAD returned its dispersed planes to their home bases and reestablished the normal one-third alert posture. As of 20 November, CONAD was on DEFCON 5 with the exception of the 32nd Region (southeastern U.S.) which maintained a DEFCON 3 status.

(S) TAC also faced the degradation-of-capability problem. At the end of October CINCAFLANT forces included 574 aircraft. To exercise the force and maintain crew proficiency, CINCAFLANT on 2 November directed that 20 percent of the aircraft fly daily, and on 8 November a reorganized strike posture was formulated. Of the 563 USAF aircraft still in Florida, 328 were placed on ready alert status to form the first two waves of an initial strike. The remaining 235 planes were released for local flying and maintenance, subject to recall within four hours. On 20 November the President announced the lifting of the quarantine in response to a Soviet agreement to remove IL-28 bombers. Low-level reconnaissance confirmed the dismantling of these aircraft on 24 November. In succeeding days all TAC aircraft and crews returned to their home stations with the exception of a small force of fighter, tanker, and reconnaissance aircraft maintained at Key West NAS and McCoy AFB.

(U) The major function of AFLC was to support the combat forces, primarily by prepositioning and maintaining war consumables. As of 24 November, AFLC had moved 17,000 tons, LOGAIR carried 1,975 tons, commercial surface lines transported 167,845 tons, and commercial airlines shifted 23 tons. By 30 November, AFLC had obligated \$28,374,000 in funds for support of the Cuban crisis.

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(S) During the crisis, MATS deployed 3,943 personnel in support of emergency requirements and provided an additional 367 for TAC augmentation. As of 10 November, 517 MATS and 563 TAC aircraft were available to support existing operational requirements.

Problems

(S) The Air Force response to the Cuban crisis was outstanding. Problems and deficiencies, however, were revealed in materiel, communications, personnel, and airlift areas. Sufficient information was lacking on the status of reserve forces, and there was inadequate coordination and knowledge of the related war plans of the several major commands. Despite these obstacles, the Air Force mustered its strategic and tactical strength within hours and was ready to meet any contingency.

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