

USAF Personnel Rotation in Southeast Asia (A Chronology)

1961 through 1968

By

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and

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"Yeah, Lt. Dingelberry, your first mission was a rough one. But look on the bright side . . . now you only have 99 more to go!"

--Airman Magazine, December 1968

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Foreword

The following is a chronological compilation of various quotes from numerous Air Force unit histories and oral history interviews concerning the tour length and rotation policy of the United States Air Force (USAF) during the early stages and buildup of the Vietnam War, until it was stabilized in 1968.

These entries are quoted verbatim from the source documents which allow the reader to “hear” the unit representatives of the 1960s speak from their view point at a time when the outcome of the war was still a great unknown. Therefore, to keep the urgent and immediacy of the situation alive for the reader, the first person and present tense style is kept intact as much as possible.

The situation in Southeast Asia (SEA) progressed and enlarged slowly. When given more tasks, the USAF added personnel deployed from their home stations on Temporary Duty (TDY) to the few permanent assigned USAF personnel in Vietnam (who were allowed to be accompanied by their families). As the tasks were few, USAF leadership believed that only a few were needed, since the war seemed to be of limited scope and duration. As more objectives were leveled upon the USAF, more and more combat operations were handled by TDY aircrews. This was viewed as an opportunity to provide as much combat experience to as many aircrew members as possible. However, when the war expanded, it became obvious that only Permanent Change of Station (PCS) personnel could continue combat operations at the required increased tempo. With whole units being sent to Vietnam for an indefinite period, the combat tour rotation policy went through four distinct phases:

Phase I (1961-August 1964): TDY personnel used to conduct combat operations.

Phase II (August 1964-January 1966): PCS personnel tours established, lasting anywhere from 12 to 18 months. 100 combat missions outside of South Vietnam (missions to Laos and North Vietnam) established as a milestone to release aircrew members from their combat tour.

Phase III (Feb 1966-November 1967): Rotation policy codified, and contemplation of extending tours arose to meet the ever expanding requirement of the war. Missions to Laos eliminated as “out of country missions” and no longer counted in the reduction of combat tours. TDY aircrew status and combat tour credit was also settled at this time. However, a shortage of pilots, coupled with early tour completions, hampered unit effectiveness. TDY credit by aircrews deploying to Vietnam was also modified.

Phase IV (November 1967-June 1968): Involuntary second tours to Vietnam started for support personnel and the rotation policy was finally settled by making all personnel remain in theater for a full 12 months, regardless of the nature of their combat missions.

USAF Personnel Rotation in Southeast Asia (A Chronology)¹

I was constantly amazed at the lack of combat fatigue in these pilots. I believe that motivation is the most important underlying factor preventing fatigue. They are fighter pilots and this is their job. A quote from a fighter pilot will better explain it: 'I am a fighter pilot and dropping bombs and napalm and shooting the guns is what I have been trained to do. This is my hay day.'

--Captain Robert M. Scoville, Medical Doctor,
3rd Tactical Fighter Wing, 22 May 1966 through 1
March 1967

26 August 1961 Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower) granted Under Secretary of the Air Force temporary authority to involuntarily extend tours of duty for selected Air Force personnel (Lieutenant Colonels and below) for periods up through 12 months beyond normal overseas tour lengths.²

January-June 1962 Tactical Air Command (TAC) Rotation for Thailand: We proposed to TAC that the 478th Tactical Fighter Squadron and 728th Air Control & Warning Squadron personnel deployed to Thailand be rotated each 120 days. One-fourth of ground personnel and aircrews to be rotated each month. TAC has not responded. However, it is believed that TAC's position will be to request relief from supporting rotation or that units rotate as a complete entity.³

Extension of temporary duty (TDY) Personnel: Permission was granted Thirteenth Air Force and 2nd Air Division advanced echelon (ADVON) to extend TDY personnel in South Vietnam pending arrival of permanent change of station (PCS) replacements (under the code name of Steampipe II). This was done to preclude short TDY's. Extension authority was limited to the extent that period of TDY would not exceed 179 days.⁴

Tour Lengths, General: A review of tour lengths at all Pacific Air Force (PACAF) locations is presently in process. Major commands have been directed to review current tours with a view towards establishing tours which are compatible with environmental

¹ A wealth of primary source documents for the debate on combat tours in SEA from subordinate units up to the USAF Chief of Staff's office can be found at the Air Force Historical Research Agency (hereafter as: AFHRA) under the AFHRA Call Number K717.217-2, 1965-1968, "Special Project Book I, 1 Jul 68, Combat Tour Policy Files 1965-1968." All sources noted in this study are found at the AFHRA. All PACAF histories are found in the AFHRA Call Number series of K-717, as are Air Division (K-AD-#) and wing (K-WG-#) histories. Some items are also found in the AFHRA Subject Files under "Combat Crew Rotation, WWII, Korea, Vietnam." For an excellent summary of USAF manpower policy during the Vietnam time frame, see "Air Force Officers Personnel Policy Development, 1944-1974," by Vance O. Mitchell, Air Force History and Museums Program, USAF, 1996, pages 242-257.

² Hist, DCS/Personnel, 1 Jan-31 Dec 1961, Vol. 4, pg 4.

³ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1962, Vol. III, A-1 Rpt.

⁴ Ibid.

and other factors utilized to fix tour lengths. We are aware of several desired tour length changes which will be consolidated with the command-wide package approximately 20 March and submitted to USAF for approval.⁵

Tour Lengths, Philippines: In response to a comment made in the Chief of Staff's visit report to Southeast Asia, a request was submitted by PACAF to Headquarters USAF requesting an extension to the Clark Air Base, Philippine Islands, accompanied tour length. The current accompanied tour of 24 months does not allow the required degree of continuity desired. A 30-month accompanied tour was requested. USAF's reaction to our request has not been received.⁶

Tour Lengths, South Vietnam: After considerable effort by PACAF to revise the current tour length for Viet Nam (30 Months accompanied, 18 Months unaccompanied) to an acceptable period for PACAF personnel, the Commander In Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) forwarded a recommendation to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) requesting approval of 24 month accompanied and 15 months unaccompanied in Saigon and 12 month unaccompanied outside the Metropolitan Area. The PACAF recommendation for unaccompanied tours outside Saigon was 13 months. USAF has been advised of the PACAF position and recommendation made by CINCPAC.⁷

The current tour in South Vietnam of 24 months accompanied and 15 months unaccompanied in Saigon, and 12 months for all other locations has created a morale problem due to the necessity of housing personnel working outside Saigon City in hotels in Saigon. In recognition of this problem, CINCPAC has requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff approval of a 12-month unaccompanied tour throughout all Vietnam. PACAF has sent a follow-up wire to Headquarters USAF requesting support of CINCPAC's position. No JCS or USAF action received to date.⁸

27 March 1962 USAF sent the following message concerning tour lengths in South Vietnam: "The standard overseas tour for Vietnam is as follows:

With Dependents	24 months
All others	12 months (except Saigon)
	15 months (Saigon)

The increased overseas tour for Vietnam contained in Change S, Air Force Manual 35-11, 12 Feb 1962, is rescinded. Personnel will not be required to serve this longer tour. Rotation dates (Date Eligible for Return from Overseas--DEROS) will be adjusted in accordance with the shorter tours contained herein."⁹

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

April 1962 The current tour lengths in Southeast Asia (SEA) are 24 months married accompanied or single, 15 months unaccompanied in Saigon and 12 months unaccompanied outside Saigon. This creates confusion and a morale problem where people work side-by-side but live in different areas and have different tour lengths should be 24 and 12 months respectively.¹⁰

8 June 1962 CINCPAC imposed strength ceilings on deployments to Thailand. This necessitated stringent controls on each unit. Additional requirements were met by reduction in other functions within the same unit.¹¹ The subject of rotation of personnel deployed to Thailand became sensitive because of speculation in the press concerning Army units. PACAF proposed a 90-day phased rotation period to CINCPAC for PACAF TDY personnel. This proposal was based on:

- a. Maintaining unit effectiveness.
- b. Moral problem of personnel separated from families.
- c. Effect of adjusted DEROS on normal rotations from the theater.
- d. Indoctrinating a maximum number of personnel on Thailand and the benefit of deployment experience.

CINCPAC has not responded to the proposal as of 30 June. However, we plan to rotate one-third of deployed personnel in early July. Individuals to be rotated in early July will be those who have a prior TDY tour in SEA.¹²

July-December 1962 Tactical Air Command (TAC) Rotation for Thailand: Our proposal to TAC that the 478th Tactical Fighter Squadron and 728th Aircraft Control & Warning (AC&W) Squadron personnel be rotated each 120 days has not been finalized. The Commander In Chief of United States Strike Command (CINCSTRIKE) has requested return to the Continental United States (CONUS) of the 478th Tactical Fighter Squadron. CINCPAC and JC approval may be forthcoming thereby negated requirements to rotate that unit. TAC has objected to support of the 728th Air Control & Warning Squadron because of limited resources and jeopardy to 412L testing program (an air weapons control system via a semi-automatic radar connecting aircraft and ground controllers). USAF queried PACAF as to why PACAF could not support the Control and Reporting Center (CRC) from 5th Tactical Control Group resources. PACAF therefore reviewed for USAF and TAC the PACAF position on the entire AC&W picture in SEA.¹³

Rotation of Personnel, Thailand: Based on CINCPAC policy guidance, a rotation policy was established for Air Force TDY support personnel in Thailand. The key features of the rotation policy were:

- a. Personnel will be rotated after completing 90-120 days TDY.
- b. For purpose of maintaining unit effectiveness approximately 1/4 to 1/3 of personnel will be rotated monthly.

¹⁰ Rpt of Chief of Staff's Visit to South Vietnam, Apr 1962 (K526.153-1, 16-20 Apr 1962).

¹¹ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1962, Vol. III, A-1 Rpt.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Hist, PACAF, Jul-Dec 1962, Vol. II, A-1 Rpt.

c. Personnel being replaced will depart promptly after indoctrination of replacements to comply with strength ceilings.

d. Volunteers for extension of TDY may be extended to a maximum tour of 179 days with concurrence of local commander and parent unit.¹⁴

South Vietnam Returnees: Headquarters USAF requested that returnees from South Vietnam be specifically identified so that they may receive priority consideration for their choice of CONUS assignments. A total of 289 South Vietnam returnees were identified for rotation during the following months:¹⁵

December 1962 – 102

January 1963 – 102

February 1963 – 73

March 1963 – 12

16 July 1962 USAF approved our request for tour length at Laoang and Lubang, Philippine Islands, as “with dependents” not applicable and 12 months for “all others.” Headquarters Thirteenth Air Force was directed to phase out personnel currently assigned to those sites in a manner insuring that no individual whose tour started before the change will still be there after completion of tour by a member whose tour starts after the change.¹⁶

March 1963 The JCS and Secretary of Defense approved an immediate PCS air augmentation in the USAF air effort in the Republic of Vietnam. Immediately afterward, this headquarters received urgent out-of-cycle manning requirements for approximately 350 rated officers to augment and replace officers presently performing TDY in Vietnam. These officers will perform duty in C-123, T-28, and C-47 and other type aircraft and will receive appropriate training TDY enroute overseas. Levy action is presently being taken to fill these requirements.¹⁷

6 April 1963 The Department of Defense (DoD) issued a new directive, Number 1315.7, concerning overseas duty tours of military personnel. The principal change made by the directives the authorization of individual military services to reduce to not less than 12 months the overseas tours of personnel who have dependents entitle to be present at overseas stations and who voluntarily serve unaccompanied tours. Additionally, the directive authorizes individual services to extend tours up to 48 months at all locations currently having an accompanied tour of 36 months. USAF has advised that no change in the current overseas tour length for Air Force personnel are contemplated as result of the new DoD directive.¹⁸

August 1964 Directly after the Gulf of Tonkin Crisis, the 36th Tactical Fighter Squadron was ordered to deploy to Korat Air Base, Thailand. The “tour of duty” in

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Hist, DCS/Personnel HQ USAF, Jan-Jun 1963, p. 56.

¹⁸ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1963, Vol. II, A-1 Rpt.

Japan was 36 months. The “tour of duty” in Vietnam was 12 months. Air Force Manual 39-11 provided an authorization of 4 days for 1 day credit for personnel deployed to short tour areas in excess of 60 days. Example of the formula:

$36 \text{ (tour Japan)} \times 4 \text{ (months in SEA)} \text{ divided by } 12 \text{ (tour SEA)} = 12 \text{ months}$
($36-12=28$ month tour of duty in combination of SEA and Japan time).¹⁹

January – June 1965 TDY B-57 crewmen of the 13th Bombardment Squadron were rotated at the approximate ratio of two weeks at Bien Hoa followed by one week at Clark Air Base, Philippines (where their unit and dependents were permanently based).²⁰

September 1965 PACAF dispatched a message supporting an increase in SEA tour length from 12 to 18 months for support personnel and 12 months for combatants. A Chief of Staff Air Force 14 September 1965 message proposed a conference at Randolph AFB on 4 October 1965 with representatives from PACAF, TAC, and HQ USAF to discuss combat tour length in SEA. Items to be discussed are:²¹

- a. Optimum number of sorties by type aircraft which could be equated to an equitable tour length for aircrew members. Consideration will be given to whether or not combat tours, if considered appropriate, should be applied across the board or only to aircrew members engaged in out of country strikes, etc.
- b. Current policies provide representatives from the Director of Personnel and the Director of Operations.

November 1965 Part I of a USAF Chief of Staff message gave the decision regarding combat tours for SEA. The SEA tour for aircrews will be twelve months. Crew members who complete 100 out-of-country combat missions may be released earlier provided there are no requirements for their services in a non-mission flying capacity. Further action is being taken to obtain additional combat sortie recognition for aircrews who fly in and out of country missions and a special pick-up criteria for rescue aircrews.²²

A HQ USAF message has been received regarding aircrew combat tours in SEA. The SEA tour for aircrews will be 12 months. Crew members who complete 100 out-of-country combat missions may be released earlier provided there is no requirement for their services in non-mission flying capacity. Forward air controller slots will be filled with operational ready tactical fighter pilots to the maximum extent possible. Tactical fighter and reconnaissance units in SEA will be manned at a 1.5 to 1 aircrew ratio to aircraft ratio. To achieve this manning of CONUS and PACAF tactical aircraft and reconnaissance units not operating in SEA may be reduced to 1.0 to 1.0 aircrew to aircraft ratio. In line with the above, a message has been dispatched to HQ USAF

¹⁹ Hist, 41st Air Division, Jul-Dec 1964, Vol. I, pgs. 77-78.

²⁰ Hist, 405th Fighter Wing, Jan-Jun 1965, p. 264.

²¹ Hist, PACAF, Jul-Dec 1965, Vol. 3, DP, Sep 65 (see AFPMREBI 79398, 14 Sep 1965 msg.).

²² Hist, PACAF, Jul-Dec 1965, Vol. III, Part 2, Nov 1965 (see AFCCS ALMAJCOM 2071/65 msg).

(Personal to General Stone from General Harris) outlining our requirements to attain the 1.5 aircrew ratio for tactical fighter and reconnaissance units in SEA.²³

3 November 1965 The SEA tour for aircrews was established as 12 months. Crew members who completed 100 out-of-country combat missions could be released earlier providing there was no requirement for their services in a non-mission flying capacity. This policy was not retroactive prior to this date. The definition of an out-of-country mission was: "A fraged and completed combat mission into the airspace over the land mass of North Vietnam or Laos...."²⁴

2 December 1965 General Stone was briefed at Headquarters PACAF on the recommendations for modification of the present combat tour policy. Verbal agreement was reached on the following points:²⁵

- a. Combat aircrews be authorized to count towards completion of a combat tour, all out-country sorties flown or all combat time accrued since 1 February 1965.
- b. Support personnel be authorized to count towards completion of a combat tour, all SEA time (TDY or PCS) accrued since 1 February 1965.
- c. Aircrew (non-SEA) volunteers complete combat tour in SEA in TDY status after completion of normal overseas tour. Only individuals who have approximately three months or less to complete combat tour be assigned.

Further study was requested on adjusting the tour for aircrews flying in- and out-country missions. It was suggested that Laos missions be counted as in-country missions since the hostile lost statistics approximate in-country losses. Our recommendation for aircrews flying in-country and out-country combat missions was:²⁶

- a. For every 15 out-country missions, reduce tour by one month but no more than three months reduction.
- b. Tour would be not less than nine months

18 December 1965 Interim instructions were passed to SEA Consolidated Base Personnel Offices (CBPO's) for the reporting of SEA aircrews who are expected to complete 100 out-of-country sorties during the February through April 1966 time period. This action has been taken to insure that we have a firm policy in effect for rotation and replacement personnel pending further clarification of SEA aircrew tour criteria. The first report is due here not later than 4 January 1966 and monthly thereafter.²⁷

²³ Hist, PACAF, Jul-Dec 1965, Vol. III, Part 2, Dir of Pers., Nov 1965.

²⁴ Msg, 2AD (DPPO 51638) 191020Z Jan 1966, to 3rd TFW, et al, Subj: Combat Tours for Southeast Asia." Sup Doc 92 "The U.S. Air Force Build-Up in Thailand, 1966, Vol I, pp. 256-262."

²⁵ Hist, PACAF, Jul-Dec 1965, Vol. III, Dir of Pers. Rpt, Dec 1965.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hist, PACAF, Jul-Dec 1965, Vol. III, Dir of Pers. Rpt, pgs 4-5.

30 December 1965 To establish an Air Staff policy on rotation and replacement of aircrew personnel, Headquarters USAF requested considerable data in the form of a special report (see 18 December 1965 entry). The report, consolidated through field input, was submitted to the Military Personnel Center on 30-31 December 1965, categorized as follows:²⁸

Category A: No credit given for out-country sorties on previous tours; no credit given for time spent in SEA on previous tours (TDY or PCS).

Category B: Full credit given for out-country sorties on previous tours; full credit given for time spent TDY or PCS on previous tours.

Category C: Full credit given for out-country sorties on previous tours; no credit for time served in SEA on previous tours.

Category D: Full credit given for out-country sorties since 31 January 1965. no credit given for sorties or time served prior to 31 January 1965.

Category E: Full credit given for out-country sorties since 31 January 1965 and no credit for prior time spent in SEA.

Based on information provided in this report, following are basic planning factors for the rotation of aircrew personnel:²⁹

- a. Aircrews assigned to units outside of SEA will rotate on normal DEROS.
- b. Within SEA, aircrews flying total in-country sorties will serve 12 months; those flying total out-country sorties will complete 100 sorties in approximately seven months; and those flying both in and out country sorties will be allowed one month curtailment on a 12 month tour for each 20 out-country sorties.

Present planning shows the following in and out country utilization for types of aircraft indicated:³⁰

<u>Type aircraft</u>	<u>No. of Squadrons</u>	<u>In/Out Country</u>	<u>Estimated Tour Length (Months)</u>
F-4C	6	80% in; 20% out	10
F-4C	4	100% out	7
F-105	5	100% out	7
F-100	5	85% in; 15% out	11
RF-101	1	60% in; 40% out	9
RF-4C	1	50% in; 50% out	9
RB-66	9 aircraft at Takhli AB, Thailand	100% out	7
RB-66	4 aircraft at Tan Son Nhut AB	100% in	12
RB-66	6 aircraft at Tan Son Nhut AB	100% in	12

Assignments for Officers Completing Combat Crew Tours. In order to expedite end assignments for officers completing combat crew tours in SEA, we are working outside the normal system. We have requested that the Military Personnel Center (MPC) furnish end assignments by electrical transmission. The MPC has also been advised that

²⁸ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1966, Vol. III, Part 2, DP Rpt.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

CINCPACAF is personally interested in the manner in which completing combat tour returnees are handled.³¹

Adjustment of Tours in SEA. To implement the USAF policy concerning credit for previous time in SEA, a message has been dispatched to Thirteenth Air Force and 2nd Air Division which requested data required to adjust the DEROS of all officers now assigned PCS to SEA affected by the new USAF policy. The following actions must be taken by this (PACAF) headquarters:³²

- a. Adjust the DEROS of all officers affected by the policy.
- b. Change the availability month of affected officers.
- c. Forecast those officers whose adjusted DEROS will fall between present date and 31 August 1966.
- d. Submit out-of-cycle requisitions for replacements.

Headquarters USAF had directed PACAF to submit to the MPC a four month projection by month of SEA aircrew returnees based on time/mission in SEA. The report is required monthly and must be submitted in a format prescribed by Headquarters USAF. In order to meet the reporting requirement, the PACAF Aircrew Status Report was adjusted and instructions dispatched to SEA CBPO's in order that the two reports might be prepared in conjunction with each other.³³

14 January 1966 A message was dispatched to Major General Greene from the Director of Personnel relating to combat tour credit for Laos sorties. Statistics revealed that losses for Laos sorties are only slightly greater than in South Vietnam. Consequently, it was recommended that combat sorties flown into Laos no longer be considered as "out-of-country" sorties. Effective date was recommended as 1 February 1966 after which Laos sorties would be considered the same as "in-country." Also, it was requested that announcement should indicate flexibility of policy to take into consideration changing risk factors.³⁴

22 January 1966 The USAF decision on PCS tours in SEA was relayed to PACAF sub-commands providing clarification and administrative instructions and directed Commanders to insure that all aircrew members fully understand. Highlights of this decision were:

- a. Effective 1 February 1966, out-of-country mission definition is limited to those flown over North Vietnam (subject to future change as the situation may direct).
- b. Established 1 November 1961 as "credit start" date for mission and time count and provided administrative instructions for obtaining and recording relevant information.
- c. Elimination of Laos for out-of-country credit. To keep faith with crews, CINCPACAF requested that the effective date not be retroactive. This recommendation was included in USAF decision.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1966, Vol. III, Part 2, DPP Hist Rpt for Jan 1966.

d. For aircrews only. Aircrews who perform missions in the following categories in SEA may have their PCS tours in SEA adjusted as follows:

1. Credit for out-of-country combat missions. The combat tour established for out-of-country combat missions will be credited by the number of such missions flown in SEA prior to the present PCS tour but subsequent to 1 November 1961.

2. Out-of-Country combat missions flown intermittently with In-Country missions. Aircrews flying both in-country and out-of-country missions may have their SEA PCS tour of 12 months curtailed one month for each 20 out-of-country missions flown (credit for prior combat missions provided in paragraph 8d(1) above also applies).

3. Out-of-country combat missions flown in TDY status only. Aircrews flying out-of-country combat missions in SEA in a TDY status will be considered to have completed a combat tour in SEA upon completing the required 100 combat missions. However, if the TDY to SEA is performed from another overseas location, the individual's overseas tour (DEROS) will not be adjusted on the basis of completing the combat tour. Adjustments of DEROS for periods of TDY in excess of 59 consecutive days will continue as currently provided in AFM's 35-11 and 39-11.

4. In-country combat missions flown in TDY status only. Aircrews who complete 12 months total time in TDY status in increments of 30 days or more since 1 November 1961 flying in-country missions will be considered to have completed a combat tour in SEA. (Transport aircrews flying from friendly areas into and out of RVN will receive credit only if they remain in RVN for 30 days continuous TDY flying in-country missions). If the TDY to SEA is performed from other overseas locations, the individual's overseas tours (DEROS) will not be adjusted on the basis of completing the combat tour. Adjustment of DEROS for periods of TDY in excess of 59 consecutive days will continue as currently authorized.

e. For other than aircrew. Personnel who complete 12 months in SEA in a TDY status in increments of 30 days or more since 1 November 1961 will be credited with completion of a SEA tour. For personnel who perform TDY in SEA from other overseas areas, the individual's overseas tour (DEROS) will not be adjusted. Adjustment of DEROS for periods in excess of 59 consecutive days will continue as currently authorized.

f. For all. Personnel will receive credit for all previous periods of TDY in SEA since 1 November 1961 which were in increments of 30 days or more. Normally, personnel will not be assigned to SEA in PCS status if their accrued SEA credits will not permit the individual to serve at least one half of the tour, i.e., six months or 50 out-of-country missions. However, this does not preclude the individual from returning in a TDY status to complete the full 12 months or 100 out-of-country missions, as the case may be.

g. When the second dislocation allowance (DLA) will accrue as the result of PCS under the above provisions, authority for second DLA approval is delegated to major air command. This authority will not be delegated below major air command.

h. USAF decision in no way precludes personnel volunteering for additional service in SEA.³⁵

³⁵ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1966, Vol. III, Part 2, DP Rpts (see AFCVC message to ALMAJCOM 421/66/66, "USAF decision on adjustment of PCS tours in SEA").

1 February 1966 The definition of out-of-country missions was changed to those flown over North Vietnam only as of 1 February 1966. Missions flown under the previous criteria were credited toward current tours. It was provided that each 20 out-of-country missions would curtail one month from the 12 month tour.³⁶

2 February 1966 At Homestead Air Force Base, Florida, the news of the new policy of 22 January 1966 was quickly disseminated. After receiving the TAC message, the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing published a letter explaining the new policy for everyone concerned. The letter repeats everything in the 22 January 1966 entry, above.³⁷

12 February 1966 By this time the Directorate of Personnel of PACAF made the following observations about combat crew rotation in SEA:³⁸

The aircrew/aircraft ratio for SEA-based tactical fighter and reconnaissance squadron should be increased from 1.25 to 1.5.

During the January through March 1966 time frame, 29 F-105 aircrews and 10 F-4C pilots were programmed for rotation (completing 100 out-of-country sorties).

Between 31 December 1965 and 6 January 1966, five F-105 squadrons in SEA flew 572 combat sorties in Laos, all credited “out-of-country sorties.”

There was an anticipated shortage of F-105 pilots in early 1966; therefore, PACAF requested Fifth Air Force to supply F-105 aircrews on a TDY basis to SEA to make up the shortfall.

HQ USAF attempted to formulate a firm policy regarding rotation and replacement of aircrew personnel. PACAF aided by submitting data.

Attempts were made to speed the reassignment of SEA aircrews who had completed their tours.

March 1966 There was a critical manning problem with F-105 crewmen in Thailand, due to the limitation of 100 out-of-country missions in a tour of duty. Fifth Air Force sent some TDY crews to Thailand for 59 days each, to alleviate the problem. Meanwhile, Headquarters Military Airlift Command (MAC) believed that the combat tour policy was inequitable as far as transport crewmen was concerned.³⁹

The 357th Tactical Fighter Squadron created its own way to keep the unit pilots fresh: “In order to keep the pilots alert, Colonel Skeen insisted that at the end of 20 days combat

³⁶ Msg, CINCPACAF (DP 03881), 250443Z Jan 1966, to 5th AF, et al, Subj: Adjustment of PCS Tours in SEA, Sup Doc 93 in “The U.S. Air Force Build-Up in Thailand, 1966, Vol I, pp. 256-262.”

³⁷ Ltr, 31TFW/DPC to Distribution “C”, “SEA Tours,” 2 Feb 1966, found in Hist, 31TFW Jul 1966-Mar 1967, Vol. II, Document 4, referring to DPPL-G 79218, dated 25 January 1966, msg.

³⁸ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1966, Vol. III, Part 2, DP Rpts.

³⁹ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1966, Vol. III, Part 2, DP Rpts, “DPO Hist Rpt for March 1966.”

flying each flight take five days for rest and relaxation (R&R). This R&R was quite effective, and the operation was conducted by having a flight fly the first and fifth session [each day] just prior to going on R&R.”⁴⁰

11 April 1966 News of the change in rotation policy that had been decided on 22 January 1966 is made public. The Alabama Journal (in Montgomery) made it part of their front page coverage of the Vietnam War:⁴¹

In Washington it was announced the Air Force is limiting its fliers to 100 missions against targets in North Viet Nam during any one tour of duty in the war zone. No limit applies to the number of missions that can be flown against communist targets in South Viet Nam. The new policy went into effect in January, the Air Force said. The navy and Marines said they are placing no limits on the number of missions their pilots and aircrews can fly either in North Viet Nam or South Viet Nam.

Hazards Cited

The Air Force apparently is making a distinction because of the hazard from antiaircraft guns and missiles in North Viet Nam as compared with a lesser opposition from communist units in South Viet Nam where most Red antiaircraft fire comes from nothing much heavier than machine guns. The new Air Force policy provides that its pilots and air crews are assigned to the Viet Nam war for a period of 12 months or 100 combat missions over North Viet Nam. It was estimated that at the current level of operations an Air Force pilot can complete his 100 missions in about 7 months, at which time he would be reassigned to duties outside Viet Nam. If a pilot is dividing his time between strikes against communists in both South Viet Nam and North Viet Nam, his tour of duty will be reduced by one month for every 20 missions that take him over North Viet Nam.

Same As Korea War

The 100 mission limit is identical to the one in effect for air crews during the Korean War. In World War II, bomber pilots and crews were obligated to do 25 missions at the beginning. Later, this was increased to 35 missions and then to 50. Fighter pilots had to meet 50 mission quotas before they were relieved. The Navy, in saying there is no mission limit for its pilots operating against North Viet Nam, noted that its fighter bombers rotate in and out of the combat area with their carriers. Since carriers are on station off Viet Nam for approximately six to nine months, Navy and Marine pilots aboard these vessels benefit from a shorter combat tour than their Air Force and Army brothers.

Marine Corps Policy

The Marine Corps policy for all of its men, fliers or otherwise, calls for a 13-month tour overseas, counting departure from the United States and return. No special credits are given for Marine pilots who are sent into North Viet Nam. Army pilots, flying either helicopters or light planes used mainly for observation and artillery spotting, remain entirely in South Viet Nam. Like infantry men and anybody else in Army uniform, they are retained in the country for 12-month tours before returning home to the United States.

13 April 1966 In a message from General Stone to General Harris, it was suggested to use out-of-country combat pilots in Forward Air Controller (FAC) positions

⁴⁰ Hist, 357th TFS, Jan-Mar 1966, found in Hist, 355th TFW Jan-Jun 1966, Vol. II, Tab 24.

⁴¹ Newspaper, Alabama Journal, 11 April 1966, page 1 “U.S. Cuts Back On Viet Ammo.”

prior to completion of their 100 out-of-country missions. General Harris responded that he did not believe the recommendation to extend pilot retainability by placing out-country combat pilots into FAC positions was a practical or desirable proposal. Based on current combat tour experience, the proposal would generally only provide for three months, at the most, four months, in FAC duty. Training requirement to include O-1 Birdog checkouts with grounds school, tactical air control center (TACC), tactical air control party (TACP), direct air support center (DASC), tactical air support squadron (TASS) indoctrination, terrain familiarity, air traffic procedures and familiarity with USA or ARVN forces would require diversion of limited aircraft resources and a minimum of one month before a FAC could be fully effective. Instability would occur in AFAC program as well as in fighter units and could be detrimental to combat mission accomplishment. Further, he did not believe that this assignment procedure was compatible with the spirit of the present 100 out-country combat tour policy which was intended to limit pilot exposure to risk. In view of the relatively recent implementation (November 1965) of 100 out-country combat tour and the added restriction effective 1 February 1966, any additional change at this time which would cause pilots to incur longer periods of risks in SEA would have serious impact on morale.⁴²

May 1966 Six months after the combat tour policy was established, the first crew member to complete 100 out-of-country combat missions finished their tours. This apparently had a beneficial effect on morale as evidenced in a historical report from Korat Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand: "...The month was marked by many 100 missions parties. We all shared in the joy of seeing our fiends complete their tour..."⁴³

3 May 1966 HQ USAF advised all major air commands (MAJCOMs) by message that in order to insure equitable treatment within the officer force, it was essential that the maximum number of officers be available to meet the increasing needs of the Air Force in remote and isolated tour areas. Although HQ USAF had not withdrawn PACAF's authority to voluntarily extend tours to a maximum of 48 months, they indicated that routine approval of extensions beyond 36 months is not compatible with Air Force requirements. It was desired that MAJCOMs extension authority be exercised judiciously and sparingly. In view of the above, extensions in PACAF will only be approved when:

1. The services of a particular officer are required to meet urgent military requirements.
2. Additional overseas retainability is required in order to provide necessary degree of continuity in a particular unit or function.
3. An undue personal hardship was involved.
4. PACAF is experiencing difficulty in obtaining qualified replacement for a certain skill, e.g., F-105 pilots.

⁴² Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1966, Vol. III, Part 2, DP Rpts, "DPP Hist Rpt, 16 May 1966."

⁴³ Rpt, Historical Data Record, 421st Tactical Fighter Squadron, Korat AB, Thai, 1-31 May 1966, included in the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing history for May 1966.

The information contained in the first paragraph of this entry will be provided to all personnel activities in PACAF. They will also be advised that a PACAF policy on extension of overseas tours is forthcoming.⁴⁴

14 June 1966 USAF announced a policy change had been approved which directs the award of a new ODS and gives credit for a completed SEA tour when an individual has completed a total of 12 months in SEA, either PCS or TDY in increments of 30 days or more, or any combination thereof since 1 November 1961. All Consolidated Base Personnel Offices (CBPO's) and subcommands were informed.⁴⁵

15 June 1966 HQ USAF advised PACAF that they will not accept applications from officers for consecutive overseas tours that contain limiting conditions other than geographical location. For example, F-4C rear seat pilots (AFSC [Air Force Specialty Code] 1115R—Pilot, Tactical Fighter, Pilot, Systems Operator) continue to apply for a consecutive overseas tour to Europe only if they can perform duty in AFSC 1115F (Pilot, Tactical Fighter, F-4). Although some training in the CONUS can be provided, it cannot be guaranteed. Therefore, applications for COTs (consecutive overseas tours) will not be accepted if duty in officer's present AFSC is not acceptable to him.⁴⁶

21 June 1966 Military Personnel Center confirmed that criteria is firm and that they would not equate in-country transport missions flown during a short period of TDY with those flown by PCS crews on longer periods of TDY. PACAF passed the information to the 315th Air Division, Thirteenth and Fifth Air Forces, and appropriate operational units on 21 June 1966, stating that the Military Personnel Center did not concur with authorizing credit for TDY periods of less than 30 days. PACAF recommended that units insure that approved recognition for C-130 aircrews for SEA combat missions is documented in Field Personnel Records, with particular attention to: 1) Vietnam Service Medal; 2) Recording of combat participation; 3) Combat awards and/or decorations; and 4) Entry in remarks section of AF Form 7 and 11 regarding cumulative days TDY in Vietnam of less than 30 consecutive days, and the period covered. This last entry will be computed only once; at completion of overseas tour.⁴⁷

27 June 1966 Captain Virgil O. McCollum III was debriefed on this day, and he said the following:⁴⁸

“Another problem area I wish to discuss is FAC (forward air controller) rotation in the field and to other FAC related jobs. I feel that FAC's should be rotated at approximately the 6-month point in their tour either to a different area in the field or to FAC related jobs in the Tactical Air Control Center, Direct Air Support Center, or Tactical Air Support Squadron. Granted, it takes a period of time (approximately one month in my opinion) for a FAC to become effective in an area. But, I feel that in 6 to 8 months most FAC's

⁴⁴ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1966, Vol. III, Part 2, DPO Rpt, 15 Jun 1966.

⁴⁵ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1966, Vol. III, Part 2, DPA Hist Rpt, 14 Jun 1966.

⁴⁶ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1966, Vol. III, Part 2, DPO Rpt, 15 Jun 1966.

⁴⁷ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1966, Vol. III, Part 2, DPP Rpt, 20 Jul 1966 (see ALMAJCOM 421/66 msg; and DPP 04366 msg).

⁴⁸ Extract, Debriefing Report, Capt Virgil O. McCollum III, 27 Jun 1966, pg. 4, AFHRA Call No. K717.0414-4, 1961-1966, Vol. 2, Supporting Documents, Part I.

become much less effective then during their first few months. I've watched many FAC's, including myself, "slow down" after spending 6 to 8 months in the area. They tend to place less emphasis in visual reconnaissance. A FAC actually get tired of looking at the same area day after day and loses effectiveness due to this. However, if a FAC is rotated to another area, he is re-interested in the mission and area due to new location, new procedures and new people to work with. Also, some areas are much more dangerous, less secure, and busier than others. Therefore, some FAC's work in extremely adverse conditions for an entire tour while others live and work in the relatively safety of a mostly pacified sector for the entire tour. In addition, there are many jobs that should be filled by experienced FAC's during the last few months of their tours. For example, a field FAC would be exceptionally well qualified for numerous TACC and DASC jobs such as duty officer, new FAC briefing officer, etc. Also the TASS squadron offer jobs for experienced FAC's such as instructor pilots, standardization officer and I even feel the TASS operations officer should be FAC rotated from the field. By rotating FAC's to different sectors after 6 months, I believe it will definitely improve effectiveness and morale. And, by filling DASC, TASC, and TASS jobs with field FAC's it will improve over-all effectiveness or air support. This would put field experienced people in FAC related jobs. The experienced FAC is better qualified in these areas than is the man just arrived in country destined for the job. How can a man with little or no FAC experience brief new FAC's on good, safe procedures or instruct a new FAC on procedures to be followed in the actual combat situation? I feel that too many people are filling jobs they are not best qualified to fill and not serving one day of actual combat."

30 June 1966 PACAF notified Seventh and Thirteenth Air Forces, 315th Air Division, and Deputy Commander of the 7/13th Air Force that the factors utilized in the original combat tour study as well as new considerations were being continually reviewed at PACAF headquarters. Also, that complete statistical analysis will be made with sorties and losses computed through 30 June 1966. CINCPACAF position will be established based on this analysis and recommendations for any change in policy will be made to USAF if appropriate. Units will be apprised of the results of the July 1966 analysis.⁴⁹

The 552nd Airborne Early Warning Control Wing (Air Defense Command, or ADC) requested ADC that the policy for SEA PCS tour adjustment be reconsidered to include the Gulf of Tonkin above the 17th Parallel (North) in the definition of out-of-country combat missions in order to preclude a disproportionate amount of time in SEA for BIG EYE personnel selected for a subsequent SEA PCS tour. ADC forwarded the correspondence to the Military Personnel Center recommending approval in that it would insure equitable treatment of all personnel in the combat zone. The Military Personnel Center forwarded the correspondence to PACAF for their comments and/or concurrence. In response PACAF non-concurred with ADC's and the 552nd's recommendation. PACAF reasoned that exposure to hostile fire was based on degree, and duration was not the determining factor in establishing the SEA combat tour. The criteria used were based on actual aircrew losses during exposure to hostile fire. Actual losses are defined as missing in action, detained, or killed. PACAF recognized that BIG EYE aircrews were

⁴⁹ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1966, Vol. III, Part 2, DPP Rpt, 20 Jul 1966.

subject to increased risk when operating at 19-00 North; however, to date they had not experienced any aircraft or aircrew losses.⁵⁰

August 1966 PACAF's proposed revision to the combat tour for SEA was briefed to Brigadier General W.D. Dunham, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Seventh Air Force, and Colonel W.H. Holt, 355th Tactical Fighter Wing commander. General acceptance was received from both officers, with the comments that programmed crew manning must be obtained and sortie rates controlled in order to satisfy those aircrews flying combat when a tour based on time is used. Colonel Holt stated that several aircrews were being medically evacuated after being recovered on rescue pickups. Discussion on this subject has been held with PACAF Command Surgeon personnel. Medical reports will be reviewed, analyzed and a report will be available 15-17 August. If the number of aircrews lost through medical evacuation is significant, a factor will be added to the present attrition rate which is used to determine annual training and replacement requirements.⁵¹

A message to General Momyer from General Moore advised the following Seventh Air Force staff position has been formulated:⁵²

1. Aircrews flying Strike/Armed Recce/Photo Recce missions in Laos/NVN will be on an eight-month tour. There will be no maximum mission requirements in NVN.
2. All other aircrews are on a 12-month tour.
3. Aircrews flying Strike/Armed Recce/Photo Recce missions in Republic of Vietnam/Laos/North Vietnam will receive on-month tour reduction for each 20 such missions flown in North Vietnam. Tour reduction credit will not exceed four months or a minimum eight-month tour.

PACAF advised that an eight-month tour will generally equate to 75 Strike/Armed Recce/Photo Recce missions in North Vietnam for all primary aircrews who qualify for this tour. Computation based on aircrew ratio of 1.5 (should be reached during September 1966 for above type mission aircrews) generated sortie rate in Laos/North Vietnam of .8 to .9 and eight-month flying average of 60/40 mission split between North Vietnam and Laos.

It was stipulated also that the time criteria was selected over missions in order to reduce significance of counter and no-counter missions and to establish a more definite training and assignment program. Implementation date is recommended as of 1 September. All aircrews arriving after 31 August would be on tour policy stated above. All aircrews presently assigned and those who report with previous mission credit could complete their combat tour based on criteria established in January 1966 or above policy. Headquarters USAF will also be advised that if any significant changes in aircrew losses occur, adjustments will be requested. Comments were requested on the proposed combat

⁵⁰ Ibid (see AFCVC ALMAJCOM 421/66/66, 22 January 1966, and AFCCS ALMAJCOM 2071/65, 2 Nov 1965).

⁵¹ Hist, PACAF, Jan-Jun 1966, Vol. III, Part 2, DPP Hist. Rpt, 20 Sep 1966.

⁵² Ibid.

tour changes in order to get an early decision and implementation date from the Air Staff.⁵³

10 August 1966 At the end of his tour in Vietnam, Colonel Monroe S. Sams, the Commander of the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing, noted the following in his End Of Tour Report:⁵⁴

“The programming of pilot replacements has never caught up with the requirement in the past eight months. Although this subject has resulted in many messages back and forth between this organization and higher headquarters, a lasting solution has not been found to date. During the period January through April 1966, assigned pilot strength ran consistently at 75 per cent. During May the percentage dropped to 55 per cent. The situation improved to 82 pr cent during June with the arrival of the 13th and 34th Tactical Fighter Squadrons. It was necessary to rely heavily on TDY pilots during the first six-months of the year and this resource was not always constant. Some members of the wing operations staff were checked out locally in the F-105 and flew combat missions. This degraded the effectiveness of the wing operations staffing in an effort to maintain the combat effort. Even so, many pilots were called on to fly two missions per day. Crews on hand should go to 96 percent. Based on present strength, known projected gains and losses, plus an estimated attrition factor of five pilots per month, the wing will reach a total of 111 pilots assigned as of 31 August 1966. This includes squadron commanders, operations officers, and wing standardization-evaluation pilots. The total wing authorization for AFSC 1115E (Pilot, Tactical Fighter, F-105) is 117. From 1 September on, our projected strength drops rapidly until December. Average end of month projected strengths through January are as follows:

30 September 1965	100 (85%)
31 October 1965	94 (80%)
30 November 1965	82 (70%)
31 December 1965	103 (86%)
31 January 1966	93 (80%)

Although an exact average monthly replacement strength figure cannot be programmed due to variations in weather, types of missions, and combat losses, experience indicates the following:

- a. The average pilot completes a tour in 7 months.
- b. The wing has an authorized strength of 117 AFSC 1115E.
- c. Approximately 17 pilots per month will complete a combat tour. In addition, our average pilot losses have been running 5 per month based on all squadron operations.
- d. Average pilot input of 22 per month is required once full manning is achieved.”

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Extract, End of Tour Report of Col Monroe S. Sams, 388th TFW/CC, covering 21 Aug 1965-10 Aug 1966, pp. 15-16, AFHRA Call No.: K717.0414-4, 1961-1966, Vol. 3).

25 August 1966 A proposal was made concerning aircrew tours which, if implemented, could have adversely affected morale. In view of the shortage of trained fighter pilots in the Air Force and the over-burdened training schools, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, in August, requested that action be taken to retain crew members who completed their 100 combat missions in staff positions until they completed the 12-month tour. Also, the qualified staff officers displaced should then be assigned cockpit positions. He recognized that: "Implementation of the above actions may cause some degree of turbulence among the staffs in Southeast Asia. I believe this disadvantage would be out-weighed by the following advantages:

- a. Staff and tactical air control system positions will be manned by more people with recent combat experience.
- b. More officers will have the experience of flying combat missions.
- c. There should be a substantial reduction in your requisitions for fighter qualified staff officers and some reduction in replacement pilots for combat duty. Let me know any difficulties you have in implementing the above..."⁵⁵

30 August 1966 Air Force Manual 36-11 is published, and states: "Current tour of duty for all Air Force personnel in Viet Nam is 12 months."⁵⁶

27 September 1966 A good number of difficulties were encountered, as pointed out by an ad hoc committee composed of senior officer representing operations, plans, and personal activities of the Seventh and Thirteenth Air Forces: "The assignment of aircrew members to non-combat staff positions would increase rather than alleviate the problem of providing aircrew members for duty in SEA. Aircrew members affected by this program are in prime weapon systems, such as the F-4C, where there is an urgent requirement for their skills in CONUS and United States Air Forces in Europe (USAFE). Crew members in weapon system such as the F-105 relieve qualified rated staff officers in CONUS for return to rated duties in required areas, the retention of rated resources in SEA after completion of a combat tour would not contribute toward the improvement of resources in prime weapon systems."⁵⁷

10 October 1966 CINCPACAF signed a message to Military Personnel Center (MPC) recommending the following tour policy be established, effective 1 January 1967.⁵⁸

- a. Aircrews flying strike/Armed Recce/Photo Recce missions complete minimum six-month tour and 75 missions, NVN (North Viet Nam). Aircrews completing 75 NVN missions prior to six-month would complete remainder of six-months period flying other than NVN Strike/Armed Recce/Photo Recce missions. Aircrews not completing 75 NVN missions within six months would remain in SEA until completion of 75 NVN missions not to exceed 12 months.

⁵⁵ Msg, PACAF (VC 07781), 250154Z Aug 1966, to 7AF and 13AF, Personal Gen Momyer, Gen Wilson from Moore, Sup Doc 94 "The U.S. Air Force Build-Up in Thailand, 1966, Vol I, pp. 256-262."

⁵⁶ AFM 36-11, 30 Aug 1966, p. 66, on file at Air University Library Authority Library.

⁵⁷ Msg, 7AF (DP 55217), 271018Z Sep 1966, to AIG 7295, Subj: Utilization of Aircrews in SEA, "The U.S. Air Force Build-Up in Thailand, 1966, Vol I, pp. 256-262."

⁵⁸ Hist, PACAF, 1 Jul-31 Dec 1966, Vol. III, Hist Rpt of DPP for Oct 1966.

b. All other SEA aircrews complete 12 month combat tour regardless of where missions flown or aircraft based. PACAF will eliminate adjustment of one month off for every 20 out-of-country missions flown effective 1 November 1966.

c. All aircrews presently assigned would receive combat tour adjustment through 31 October based on present policy of 20 missions credit per month. Aircrews who report subsequent to 31 October with previous mission/TDY credit would receive appropriate tour adjustments.

11 October 1966 The Seventh Air Force proposed another change to the combat tour policy. In October the shortage of aircrew resources prompted the discontinuance of allowing one month off the PCS tour for every 20 North Vietnam missions flown. After 31 October 1966, the criteria for completing a tour would be 100 North Vietnam combat missions or 12 months in SEA. It was recommended that Thirteenth Air Force adopt the same policy.⁵⁹

26 October 1966 CINCPACAF modified the 11 October 1966 proposal in a message to the Air Force Chief of Staff, to pertain to only aircrews not flying strike, armed or photo reconnaissance missions over North Vietnam.⁶⁰

12 November 1966 A message from USAF establishes a change to the original USAF policy of crediting TDY time spent in SEA. Original policy stipulated that personnel would be credited for TDY performed in SEA only if time spent was for 30 continuous days or more. Change in policy now allows credit for time of 15 continuous days or more. Change is a result of our efforts to obtain added recognition of our C-130 aircrews that spend “short-bust” periods of TDY in SEA from other PACAF area. This information has been passed by message to all subcommands for information and dissemination. In our disseminating message, we advised that all units should establish appropriate personnel procedures in accounting for periods of TDY (15 continuous days or more) and reiterated previous instructions on documentation from individuals.⁶¹

16 December 1966 After an intensive study by Headquarters USAF on the 26 October 1966 CINCPACAF proposal, the Chief of Staff desired that there be no changes in the current SEA tour policies at this time.⁶²

The January-June 1966 history of the 355th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Korat Royal Thai Air Base describes combat crew moral in terms which may well summarize the situation in all of Thailand during 1966:

⁵⁹ Msg, 7AF (C 00665), 110644Z Oct 1966, to AIG 7295, et al, Subj: Combat Tour in SEA, “The U.S. Air Force Build-Up in Thailand, 1966, Vol I, pp. 256-262.”

⁶⁰ Msg, CINCPACAF (VC 05068), 260331Z Oct 1966, to CSAF, Subj: Combat Tours for Southeast Asia.” Sup Doc 95 “The U.S. Air Force Build-Up in Thailand, 1966, Vol I, pp. 256-262.”

⁶¹ Hist, PACAF, Jul-Dec 1966, Vol. III, DPP Hist Rpt, Nov 1966 (see AFCVC ALMAJCOM 2096/66/66, 12 November 1966 msg.).

⁶² Msg, CINCPACAF (DPP 65243), 160420Z Dec 1966, to 5AF, et al, Subj: Combat Tour Policy, “The U.S. Air Force Build-Up in Thailand, 1966, Vol I, pp. 256-262.”

The moral of aircrew members was considered to be marginally satisfactory. This was due to the lack of adequate air conditioned crew quarters for proper rest between missions. It was also felt that the crews flying out of Thailand into North Vietnam were carrying the bulk of the load of the war in Vietnam and where [sic] not receiving proper recognition. Another item that caused considerable concern to the aircrews was the fact that R&R leaves were not authorized for them and they were more subject to being shot down than the pilots in South Vietnam. All they were authorized was a five day permissive TDY and this meant that they had to take the lowest priority for military flights in and out of country. Finally, it was felt that 100 missions weren't being adjusted properly. The way the system worked was that the only missions that counted toward the 100 were the ones flown over North Vietnam. The ones over Laos were not counted and it was felt this was unjust because aircraft [were] just as subject to being shot down there as over North Vietnam.⁶³

23 January 1967 Statement of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara before a Joint Session of the Senate Armed Service Committee and the Senate Subcommittee on Department of Defense Appropriations on the Fiscal Year 1968-1972 Defense Program and 1968 Defense Budget, January 23, 1967:⁶⁴

“In order to limit any individual’s exposure to the hazards of combat, we have established a standard tour of twelve months for most military personnel serving in the war zone. In the case of land-based aircraft crews whose missions take them over North Vietnam, a shorter tour policy is followed, based on the number of sorties actually flown, which at the recent activity rates had been averaging about six to seven months. Crews flying missions in South Vietnam, where the hazards are less severe, serve a twelve-month tour. Navy personnel afloat or assigned to construction battalions are rotated with their ship or unit: 7th Fleet ships are deployed, on the average, for a seven-month period during which they rotate in and out of the combat area, depending on specific operational requirements; naval construction battalions rotate on a six- to eight-month schedule. In order to avoid repetitive tours in Vietnam, 50,000 additional positions have been authorized for the Army and 3,000 for the Marine Corps, specifically to sustain an adequate rotation base. The general policy for all Services is that no individual, except those who volunteer, will be reassigned to a second tour in Vietnam until all others available in the same specialty and grade have served an initial tour. In order to expand the rotation base for pilots we have greatly increased our flying training programs, as I described earlier in this statement.”

20 March 1967 A news release concerning Pilot Utilization Policies and SEA Aircrew Tours was forwarded to the service news media. Unfortunately, some abbreviated versions were printed in a few newspapers, which gave rise to many questions about pilot tours in SEA. Therefore, the complete news release was sent out to all major commands on 28 April 1967.

⁶³ Hist, 355th TFW, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1966, “Combat Crews,” pgs. 86-87.

⁶⁴ Statement found in AFHRA Call No. K160.041-12, 23 Jan 1967, pp. 177-178.

10 April 1967 Lieutenant Colonel Leighton R. Palmerton, commander of the 614th Tactical Fighter Squadron, in his end of tour report, stated:⁶⁵

“The single greatest problem to a commander in Southeast Asia is the short tour of one year. I don’t advocate a lengthening of the tour, but it does create a perpetual training and orientation program. With pilots, the difficulties of this policy have been severely compounded by an incessant shifting of people from one duty assignment to another. A pilot will remain within the unit for a few months and become proficient in the mission, only to be reassigned elsewhere and replaced by a new man. This creates havoc with flight stability, Officer Efficiency Reports, and additional duty assignments.”

28 April 1967 In an open letter about pilot assignment policies (see 20 March 1967 entry), Headquarters USAF stated:⁶⁶

“The basic tour in Southeast Asia is 12 months. Pilots may rotate after completing 100 out-of-country missions if there is no further requirement for their services in a non-mission flying capacity. Permanent Change of Station (PCS) tours in SEA will be adjusted for all previous TDY in SEA of 15 days or more since 1 November 1961 and out-of-country missions flown since 1 November 1961. Pilots flying mixed missions may have their PCS tour reduced by one month for each 20 out –of-country missions flown, at the discretion of the oversea commander. Pilots who have completed 181 or more days TDY in SEA or have flown 51 or more out-of-country missions will not be selected for PCS for SEA, but may be returned to SEA on TDY to complete the full 12 months or 100 out-of-country missions.”

30 June 1967 Lieutenant Colonel William A. Schauer, Jr., in his end of tour report stated:⁶⁷

“One particular item of major interest to all aircrews is the changing tour length criterion. With the increased crew ratio of 1.5 to 1 [one and a half pilots to every one aircraft], it was obvious that tour would lengthen and that there were inequities in the overall system due to the geographic location of Cam Ranh Bay. A possible solution would be to initiate a program to relocate aircrews after certain periods of time. Initial assignments to Cam Ranh Bay for theatre indoctrination and familiarization would be a starter. After three or four months of primarily in-country flying, a move to Da Nang is next in order for night-owl experience. After an equal time here a move to Ubon to utilize all the skill and knowledge gained is last in order. This plan would insure that all F-4C aircrew would be afforded an equal chance at all types of missions and insure broader experiences, plus an equal share of in-out country missions. Thus, tours in SEA, for F-4C aircrews at least, would be stabilized at between 9 and 12 months.”

⁶⁵ Extract, End of Tour Rpt, LtCol Leighton R. Palmerton, 10 Apr 1967, AFHRA Call No. K740.131, 21 Jul 1966-10 Apr 1967.

⁶⁶ Ltr, HQ USAF (AFPMREB) to MAJ Air Commands, “Open Letter Outlining Pilot Assignment Policies to All Air Force Pilots,” 28 Apr 1967 (AFHRA Reference Subject File, “Combat Crew Rotation, WWII, Korea, Vietnam”).

⁶⁷ Extract, End of Tour Rpt, LtCol William A. Schauer, Jr., 30 Jun 1967, AFHRA Call No. K740.131, Schauer.

13 October 1967 The magazine, The Inspector General Brief (TIG Brief) noted in its issue on this date that “The objective of the program is to support SEA operations and avoid, as long as possible, second SEA tours.”⁶⁸

30 November 1967 Secondary involuntary tours to SEA now became a fact of life for the Air Force personnel system, and this required an explanation to Air Force members. The following USAF Military Personnel Center news release explaining the new realities of the personnel assignment situation for Southeast Asia:⁶⁹

“The Air Force is anticipating a requirement to return a limited number of support personnel in a few occupational specialties to SEA beginning in the spring of 1968. These specialties are munitions maintenance (461X0), construction equipment (551X1), and air freight/passenger (605XX).

It is Air Force policy to prevent the return of any member to SEA for a second involuntary tour until other similarly qualified personnel have served a tour. During the past year the Air Force has been able to do this by making extensive assignment policy changes and through retraining efforts and these measures have considerably delayed the advent of second tours.

In order to meet future Southeast Asia manpower requirements equitably, the Air Force is implementing the following personnel rotation policies: Tour lengths of stabilized duty positions will be reduced and officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO's) without a previous SEA tour will be reassigned from these positions to SEA as required. Implementation will be on a coordinated and orderly basis with curtailments of tours in increments of one year or less.

SEA returnees will be utilized to the maximum extent possible as replacements for officers withdrawn from stabilized duty positions.

SEA returnee NCO's will be utilized as replacements for NCO's withdrawn from stabilized duty positions.

Through the actions above, the Air Force will be able to meet its SEA requirements until late in calendar year 1968 or early in 1969 in the three most immediately critical officer specialties (intelligence, civil engineering, transportation), and in all but three of the most critical NCO specialties (Munitions Maintenance (461X0), construction equipment operator (551X1), and air freight/passenger (605XX). Second tours can be expected in other specialties for the period beyond December 1968.

⁶⁸ TIG Brief, Vol. XIX No. 20, 13 Oct 1967, p. 5, “Critical Resources for Short Overseas Tours,” and refers to Air Force Manual 36-11.

⁶⁹ Ltr, HQ 3800th ABW/BPMC to various units at Maxwell AFB, AL, “Revised Personnel Assignment Policy,” 30 Nov 1967, quoting original USAFMPC news release (AFHRA Reference Subject File, “Combat Crew Rotation, WWII, Korea, Vietnam”).

It is presently estimated that aircrew positions in SEA can be filled through 1968 without involuntary second tours.

Commanders have been asked to establish vigorous programs to encourage voluntary service in SEA, particularly in the critically manned specialties. To lessen the impact of involuntary second tours in SEA, an attempt will be made to send airmen who served their last tour in Vietnam to Thailand, unless they volunteer for additional Vietnam duty.

There will be a continuous review of policies which defer personnel otherwise eligible for SEA in an effort to reduce the number of personnel excused or deferred from assignment.”

December 1967 Lieutenant General Kenneth L. Tallman, speaking about his time when he was assigned to HQ USAF as Assistant for Colonel Assignments under the Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel in 1967, remembered the peculiar situations the combat tour lengths caused his office.

Q: That was the height of the Vietnam buildup. Did that present any unusual problems in manning the colonel force?

A: Oh, yes, many; many, many unusual problems. It was a real challenge running Colonel Assignments, especially because of the Vietnam situation. There were certain policies that had evolved or been developed at the onset of the war with regard to assignments that dictated how you would manage the colonel force.

For instance, one of the policies the Air Force had was that nobody would be sent back to Southeast Asia involuntarily until every similarly qualified individual at that rank and an opportunity to serve. This policy meant that unless somebody volunteered for a second tour, if you ran short of a certain qualified individual to serve over there like a base commander, you had to take other colonels and put them in training situations in the States or even in other theaters of operation to qualify them to go over to Southeast Asia to serve as base commanders, wing commanders, specialists, and maintenance officers. The requirements for wing Director of Operations, Wing Commanders, Wing Vice-Commanders, and the numerous staff requirements at Seventh Air Force and in Military Assistance Command—Vietnam (MACV) required us to really manipulate the colonel force. When I use the word “manipulate,” I mean we had to move colonels around to provide them a limited amount of training to qualify them to go over to Southeast Asia. This policy of one tour was one of the things.

Nobody knew how long the war was going on; it became less and less popular. I will say there was never any shortage of volunteer combat fliers. I was always inspired by the fact that most of the colonels we dealt with and the lieutenant colonels who got promoted to colonel were quick to volunteer their services; some of them volunteered for second tours. This was encouraging, but it still was at the foundation of everything we did in Colonel’s Assignments. For 3 years I really fought the battle of Southeast Asia all over again insofar as personnel manning was concerned.

At the same time that I said Southeast Asia influenced everything, I had to be careful not to decimate TAC, for instance, or the SAC combat wings in order to man Southeast Asia. I had to look for people who hadn't been in primary flying assignments for a long time and reintroduce them to combat aircraft systems.

The factor of safety of flight became a consideration because it is tough for a guy well on in his years to start being a fighter pilot all over again. We had other weapon systems involved in Southeast Asia.⁷⁰

17 January 1968 The Air Force Times explains the new policy about second tours to Vietnam:⁷¹

“When an AFman volunteers to return to Southeast Asia, his new tour length will depend on how long he was there before. For some, this means the longer they spent in SEA before, the shorter their return visit will be. But sometimes it works just the other way.

If a man has accumulated less than six months SEA time, for example, he can volunteer to go back and serve out only the balance of a one-year normal tour or stay longer if he wishes.

If he is already credited with more than six months in SEA, however, he can only volunteer for another full-year tour.

Complicated? Not really. The rule is based on AF's policies on crediting past SEA time and picking men to go back. Most men on permanent change of station (PCS) assignment to SEA go for a full remote tour—one year. AF won't pick them to return until it runs out of other men in the same skill and grade who have been once.

There are also many men around who had less than one year in SEA in past years when AF was manning the war mostly with men on temporary duty (TDY). Air Force credits these TDY periods and short PCS visits if they (1) were in increments of 15 days or more, and (2) were served after Nov. 1, 1961.

“Credit” for past time in SEA can mean different things, depending on the amount of it an AF man has. For example:

A man with less than 180 days in SEA can be returned as a non-volunteer either TDY or PCS. His past SEA time will be credited to shorten his tour. If he spent two months there earlier, he will go back for only 10 [months].

A man with less than 180 days credit can volunteer for return and go back either for the balance of a one-year tour or for a full year or more (by extending his stay voluntarily).

⁷⁰ Oral history Interview, LtGen Kenneth L. Tallman, AFHRA Call #: K239.0512-1626.

⁷¹ Article, Air Force Times, 17 Jan 1968.

A man with 181 days or more credit (but not a full year in SEA) cannot be sent back involuntarily on PCS. But he can be returned TDY to serve the remainder of the one-year tour.

The volunteer with 181 days or more past SEA credit can only go back for a full on-year tour. It would not be worthwhile for AF to PCS a man back to Vietnam when he had 10 months past credit and could only stay for two months.

In no case does it make any difference whether the man's first PCS or TDY was as a volunteer or non-volunteer. As Air Force Times explained [in its] last issue, a man is no more vulnerable for involuntary return if his first visit was voluntary. Nor is he any more apt to be picked to return as a volunteer if his past tour was as a non-volunteer.

For aircrewmembers, there is yet another wrinkle to the SEA credit situation. They are allowed credit for either (1) a full year in SEA or (2) 100 missions into North Vietnam. Like parts of a year, parts of the 100 missions can be counted, so some fliers are sent back only to fly the rest of their missions. A pilot with 25 missions under his belt, for example, can be returned to make up the other 75.

But the one who applies for return after he already has 75 missions will expect to fly another full combat tour. The principle is the same as the half-tour rule for number of months.

As AF recently reminded pilots, however, the mission rule does not mean all fliers will be returned after exactly 100 missions. Some can be held for the remainder of their year to fly in non-combat aircraft or fill staff jobs. So far, AF has not held many for such duties, but the number will probably increase in the future.”

27 January 1968 The Air Force Chief of Staff sent out two messages on this day. The first dealt with the tightening budgetary constraints for personnel requests. “For example—though the war effort will not be reduced—the FY 1969 budget will yield less people than in FY 1968—with no additional funding expected. The import of these facts is clear—manpower resources will remain acutely short until the SEA conflict ends or withdrawals for its support are replaced. *In short, the belt-tightening must continue. And unless workloads are more urgent than SEA needs, they must take a back seat for the present—unless they can be taken care of by reprogramming resources from less important functions.*”⁷²

Despite the overriding personnel demands of SEA, USAF policy stressed that SEA service would be spread as equitably and fairly as possible. Several management actions were taken to prevent a second involuntary assignment of aircrew members to SEA until all available aircrews had served one tour. In the second message of the day, the Chief of Staff announced that: “Aircrews may be given weapon system assignments in SEA—or upon returning from SEA—which are different from their primary specialties or current

⁷² Msg, AFCCS [Air Force Chief of Staff] 407, 27 Jan 1968, quoted in TIG Brief magazine, Vol. XX, No. 4, 1 Mar 1968, (AFHRA Reference Subject File, “Combat Crew Rotation, WWII, Korea, Vietnam”).

experience. Cross training entailed will defer second SEA tours, afford combat experience to all USAF aircrews, and develop an aircrew resource marked by operational training in more than one major command weapons system. Some officers will return from SEA to their old command and to aircraft they flew before. This will cut training costs.”⁷³

Aircrew officers—especially those overseas—were expected to understand these facts regarding assignments: No assignment would be made without considering the officer’s flying qualifications and stated preference, various MAJCOM manning levels, requirements by specific weapon system, training available at time of officer’s rotation, staff requirements for various types of experience, the officer’s retainability (i.e., date of separation or retirement), officer’s advanced degrees, and other factors.⁷⁴

As the Chief’s message emphasized: *It is apparent that under the above policy an officer may be given an assignment that does not match his current individual preference. Notwithstanding, he will reap many long-range career broadening and development benefits. In addition, the diversified experience will prove to be of inestimable value to the Air Force.*”⁷⁵

20 June 1968 The final change of aircrew rotation was announced. Previously, the 12-month tour for aircrew personnel in SEA could be curtailed once a crewmember had completed 100 out-of-country combat missions—provided he was not needed in a non-combat rated position for the remainder of the tour. This “counter” policy was designed to control the amount of exposure of aircrews flying in high risk missions. CINCPACAF and Seventh Air Force Commander both concurred that risk exposure could be controlled, and become more equitable, under a standard tour for all combat aircrew members. In this regard, aircrew personnel departing the CONUS on or after 1 July 1968 would not be entitled to the reduced tour concept on the basis of combat missions flown before/during the PCS tour. Instead, they would have to serve a full one-year tour, unless eligible for curtailment by virtue of previous duty in SEA. However, crewmembers headed for SEA on or before 30 June 1968 would serve their tours under the previous “counter” policy. For administrative purposes, out-of-country combat mission will continue to be recorded in accordance with Air Force Manuals 30-3 and 36-11.⁷⁶

⁷³ Msg, AFCCS [Air Force Chief of Staff] 408, “Aircrew Assignments,” 27 Jan 1968, quoted in TIG Brief magazine, Vol. XX, No. 4, 1 Mar 1968, (AFHRA Reference Subject File, “Combat Crew Rotation, WWII, Korea, Vietnam”).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Hist, 432TRW, Jul-Sep 1963, Vol. I, Supporting Document 4: Msg, CINCPACAF to AIG 7294, “Change to SEA Aircrew Tour Policy,” 270147Z Jun 1968; Supporting Document 6: Ltr, HQ 7 AF/CS to 834 Air Div, All Wings and Group RVN and Thailand, “Change in SEA Aircrew Tour Policy,” 24 Jun 1968; and Supporting Document 5: 432nd Tact. Recon. Wing/CPBO-ASGN to various attached units, “Change in SEA Tour Policy for Aircrew Members,” 24 Jun 1968 (AFHRA Call No. K-WG-432, Jul-Sep 1968, Vol. I).

17 July 1969 A letter from General McConnell, USAF Chief of Staff, implementing the personnel program known as “Palace Cobra II” was published and distributed to all aircrew personnel for their information:

1. A number of management actions have been directed to insure that in so far as is possible aircrew members are not involuntarily assigned for a second SEA tour before all available aircrews have rotated through one tour. I have asked that aircrew assignments, worldwide, be made to support this concept. As a result of this policy, and to meet requirements of all commands, aircrews have received weapon system assignments in SEA, or upon returning from SEA, different from their primary specialty or current experience. The resultant cross training has delayed second SEA tours, provided an opportunity for combat experience to all USAF aircrews, and developed a resource of aircrews with operational training in more than one major command weapons system. In some cases, officers have been returned to their former CONUS command for assignment to aircraft previously flown. This is done to minimize training costs. To date, no aircrew members have been sent, involuntarily, to SEA for a second tour. However, 50.2 percent of the total pilot resources, Lt Col and below, have completed a SEA tour. Therefore, more austere management actions have been directed to delay as long as possible involuntary second SEA tours.

2. Aircrew officers, those overseas in particular, should understand that assignments are made only after an assignment officer has considered flying qualifications and stated preferences of the officer, manning levels in the various commands, specific weapon system requirements, training available at the time of rotation, staff requirements for experience of various types, retainability of the officer in so far as date of separation or retirement is concerned, advanced degrees held, and other factors. It is recognized that assignments may not be entirely consistent with current individual preferences; however, many long range career broadening and development benefits will be accrued by the officer concerned. In addition, this diversification of experience will be of incalculable value to the Air Force.⁷⁷

Postscript

In an interview in 1985, Major General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Jr., recalled his time as the commander of the 390th Fighter Squadron at Da Nang Air Base, South Vietnam (October 1966 through June 1967):

Q: You mentioned about the four majors that came and how they had air discipline and were well-trained pilots. But is not the proof of the pudding more to put the ordnance on the target, and were they capable of doing that in the same degree as the other guys you had in there?

⁷⁷ Hist, 314th TAW, Jul-Sep 1969, Pages 11-13, (AFHRA Call No. K-WG-314-HI, Jul-Sep 69, Vol. 1, IRIS 455401). This letter was not included as a supporting document to the history cited, but was quoted in full on the pages noted.

A: No, they weren't as effective as the pilot that had done this day in and day out in TAC—what we used to refer to as the TAC Old Guard. The TAC Old Guard was rotating out of that war at a fairly fast rate, and they hadn't begun to come back on second tours yet. These ATC guys were effective, particularly as flight commanders. They were good leaders; they were good officers, but they didn't get the same bomb results. Yes, I agree with you. The name of the game is to get the ordnance on the target. The longer they stayed with it, the better off they would be; but with a 100-mission policy, by the time a guy is really effective and knows what he is doing and his chances of getting shot down are probably lower in one sense although higher in an exposure sense, they rotated home.

Q: That begs another question. What did you think of the 100-mission policy on the effectiveness of the actual fighting units?

A: I think it was deleterious to the effectiveness. There were always rumors that it was going to change. Missions in combat are very tough to make equitable. I can see that. I don't know what else they could have done. It was an effort to get everybody involved in the war. I remember General McConnell, when he spoke to our wing, said he had dedicated himself to breaking up the SAC, TAC, MAC, ATC [Strategic Air Command, Tactical Air Command, Military Airlift Command, Air Training Command] cliques. He wanted everybody cross-trained, cross-fertilized. That war presented a great opportunity to do this. By and large, it happened, but the farther you get away from it, of course, you go right back into specialization again.

Then I saw another trend. You know the R&R [rest and relaxation] policy encouraged people to spend their bucks on R&R in Honolulu, Hawaii. The guys that met their wives mid-tour in Hawaii came back and, in several instances in my squadron, got shot down. They went through all the trauma of the good-by again. I knew when they came back, they were preoccupied, so I instituted a couple of squadron policies because of unfortunate shoot-downs.

Once a guy reached 90 missions in my squadron, I took him out of Package 6 [deep penetrations into North Vietnam]. I had him fly out his missions in the lower part of North Vietnam; no more Package 6 missions; and the kids that went to Hawaii and met their families in Hawaii mid-tour, I started them on sort of a retraining—as far as difficulty and threat went—again. That compounds a scheduling officer's problems. He's got all those variables to work in, and it was not all that popular with the squadron staff, but I think probably the pilots appreciated it.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Oral History Interview, Maj Gen Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Jr., (USAF, Ret.), 19-22 Dec 1985 (AFHRA Call No. K239.0512-1690).