DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON DC 20330-1000

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

24 September 2007

Air Force Declassification Office
1720 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330-1720

Kurt Priessman
900 Ross Street, Apt 1304
Vernon, Texas 76384

Dear Mr. Priessman,

Enclosed please find the releasable extract of the CHECO Report "Base Defense in Thailand, 18 Feb 1973. Keep in mind we have removed information requiring review by the Air Force Office of Special Investigation (AFOSI).

We have also forwarded your FOIA 2007-0066 to our Headquarters FOIA Office (HAF/IMIO), 1000 Air Force Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20330-1000 for official processing and subsequent referral to AFOSI.

Please let me know if you have any questions 703-604-4700.

Sara MacLeod
Air Force Declassification Office

Enclosed
Releasable Extract

RELEASABLE EXTRACT
of
"Base Defense in Thailand"
21 Sep 2007 AFDO

PROJECT SMU

CHECO

SOUTHEAST ASIA

REPORT

BASE DEFENSE IN THAILAND

DO NOT DESTROY

RELEASABLE EXTRACT
of
"Base Defense in Thailand"
21 Sep 2007 AFDO

Contemporary
Historical
Examination of
Current
Operations
REPORT

BASE DEFENSE IN THAILAND

[redacted]

HQ PACAF

Directorate of Operations Analysis
CHECO/CORONA HARVEST DIVISION

Prepared by:
MAJ BARNETTE
CAPT BARROW
18 FEB 73
Project CHECO 7th AF, CDC

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

PROJECT CHECO REPORTS

The counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare environment of Southeast Asia has resulted in USAF airpower being employed to meet a multitude of requirements. These varied applications have involved the full spectrum of USAF aerospace vehicles, support equipment, and manpower. As a result, operational data and experiences have accumulated which should be collected, documented, and analyzed for current and future impact upon USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine.

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

Project CHECO, an acronym for Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations, was established to meet the Air Staff directive. Managed by Hq PACAF, with elements in Southeast Asia, Project CHECO provides a scholarly "on-going" historical examination, documentation, and reporting on USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine in PACOM. This CHECO report is part of the overall documentation and examination which is being accomplished. It is an authentic source for an assessment of the effectiveness of USAF airpower in PACOM when used in proper context. The reader must view the study in relation to the events and circumstances at the time of its preparation--recognizing that it was prepared on a contemporary basis which restricted perspective and that the author's research was limited to records available within his local headquarters area.

Robert E. Hiller
ROBERT E. HILLER
Director of Operations Analysis
DCS/Operations

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

REPLY TO ATTN OF: DOAD

18 February 1973

SUBJECT: Project CHECO Report, "Base Defense in Thailand"

TO: SEE DISTRIBUTION PAGE

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2. This letter does not contain classified information and may be declassified if attachment is removed from it.

FOR THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF

Alfred A. Picinich

ALFRED A. PICINICH, Colonel, USAF
Chief, CHECO/CORONA HARVEST Division
Directorate of Operations Analysis
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1 Atch
Proj CHECO Rprt, (S/NF),
18 Feb 73

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PHYSICAL DEFENSES AND LIMITATIONS

Introduction

An effective base physical defense environment has as its goal four objectives: the detection, detention, and destruction of the enemy; and, of greatest importance, the preservation of vital resources while accomplishing the preceding objectives.

This chapter briefly considers four aspects of physical defenses as they existed in Thailand from 1968 to 1972. First, it examines active defense systems designed to aid personnel in the detection, containment, and response to an enemy intrusion. Then, the chapter details passive defense measures designed to protect personnel and vital resources during an attack. It explores the limitations imposed by natural conditions as well as political and economic constraints on the use of defensive devices. Finally, it briefly discusses some of the specific difficulties and achievements. No effort is made to duplicate concepts discussed in PACAFM 207-25.

Two CHECO reports on base defense concepts and measures in the Republic of Vietnam provide additional information.[123/]

~~Active and Passive Defense Measures~~

The first "ring of defense" within the bounds of USAF responsibility was the base perimeter, usually composed of fence lines and other integrated

defenses, all designed to expose the enemy to an increased risk of observation and detection. No base considered itself secure because of an impenetrable perimeter, for as one Chief of Security Police stated: "Fences only keep honest people and cattle out, they don't stop determined sapper squads."[124/]

Perimeter lines at most bases consisted of various combinations of rolls of concertina wire, "tangle-foot" barbed-wire barriers, and, occasionally, chain-link fences. Some bases placed trip-flares among the fences. These had wires which, when distrubed, would trigger the flare. (The figures on the following pages illustrate some of the typical perimeter defense concepts.) All bases (except Takhli RTAFB) had generally adequate lighting on the perimeter fences and several had NF-2 Light-All units to provide additional illumination as backup or in critical areas. Most of the bases had Xenon lights with the capability of lighting several hundred meters with either infrared or visible light; however, not a single base was able to fully utilize these units, either because of maintenance difficulties or insufficient manning. Most installations also had various night observation devices (NODs) such as starlight scopes or the more expensive tower-mounted NODs. Unfortunately, no base had sufficient numbers of these devices to permit visual observation of the entire base perimeter. To further aid in observation, herbicides were employed to assist in the difficult task of vegetation control. Use of these agents was limited by such factors as the ROE and supply problems.

Passive defenses for RAM attacks, such as revetments for aircraft and personnel shelters, differed widely. Aircraft dispersal, another effective passive protection measure, was limited by the severe restrictions on available ramp parking space. POL and MMS areas were likewise provided with what few revetments and whatever dispersal space was possible under the circumstances. Another example of the varied responses of defense planners was "stand-off" fencing. Designed to shield defensive bunkers from an RPG attack, this concept of defense initiated in early 1972 by 7/13AF SP had yet to be fully implemented at base level by June. Indeed, several bases had hardly begun the project.[135/]

A series of reports from the bases to COMUSMACTHAI detailed the multi-million dollar impact of upgrading the physical defenses of USAF/Thai bases since 1968. Also, the first attack caused defense planners to realize that adequate base protection required much more than a few armed sentries with rifles walking posts after dark behind a three strand barbed-wire fence.[136/] However, a fully standardized base defense posture had not yet been attained by mid-1972.

Limitations

Geographic constraints provided many problems in the USAF base defense posture in Thailand. Contiguous population centers at many of the bases severely limited opportunities for both observation and effective counterfire. Further, tropical vegetation aided by seasonal monsoon rains grew almost faster than it could be controlled. Dense jungles were rated as the greatest threat to the defenses at U-Tapao.[137/] Other natural features such as streams

and drainage ditches, known as "klongs," provided concealment and thus were natural points of entry for enemy sappers. Most bases relied on extra illumination to counter the threat in those areas. The extent to which vegetation has been cleared is graphically illustrated in the case of NKP. The photograph of that base on the following page shows the extent of vegetation inside the base perimeters in the early days of construction when the airfield was carved out of virgin jungle. An interesting comparison between NKP 1966 and NKP 1972 can be made by reference to the picture of that base that appears earlier in this report. (See Figure 6.)

Other constraints were imposed by various economic and political considerations. There was a relative scarcity of resources and money which forced defense planners to establish priorities in the areas of the base they were able to defend in depth. Thus POL and MMS areas had to compete with aircraft, which past experience had shown were more lucrative targets.

Local USAF base commanders' emphasis on defense often varied. For example, prior to the June 1972 attack, the base commander of Ubon RTAFB directed that a triple concertina barrier be removed from an area between aircraft revetments and the base perimeter, just 100 meters beyond. The directive ordering the removal of the fence was part of a current "base beautification" effort. This very area became the penetration point for the sapper attack.[138/] Occasionally, higher command also diverted defense resources to areas with higher threat estimates. Barbed-tape, considered the most effective anti-penetration barrier available for use along

perimeters,[139] was scheduled for installation at U-Tapao RTNAF in late 1971. In November, PACAF directed that the tape be held for possible diversion to vulnerable Vietnam bases.[140] Four days after the January 1972 attack, 13AF directed that the tape still at U-Tapao RTNAF be employed in that base's defense.[141] Thirteenth Air Force further indicated that the tape sent to Vietnam would either be replaced or redirected back to U-Tapao.[142]

Construction projects, such as fence barriers, defensive bunkers, and observation towers, frequently had to await the completion of higher-priority civil engineering work orders. The response to this difficulty often was an enormous SP self-help effort. Probably well over 50 percent of all defensive structures in Thailand were constructed solely by security police personnel. Higher headquarters, while commending such vigorous efforts, cautioned the field not to rely exclusively on self-help but to utilize regular Air Force supply and civil engineering channels whenever possible.[143]

The U.S. Embassy's ROE also provided several limitations on physical defenses. The original 1968 ROE prohibited the use of flareships. This was changed in 1969, and flare drops and the use of 81mm mortars were approved for illumination as long as the "trash" didn't impact outside the base. Soil sterilization and herbicide use was also approved in 1969, but these were subject to extensive coordination with local RTG authorities and final permission from the Embassy. They could only be used on areas within the perimeter and under no circumstances could the vegetation control agents be used to clear areas of observation to fire off-base.[144] This lengthy

process, and the inability to go beyond the fences, significantly limited the use of those agents at many bases.[145]

The 1969 ROE required advance approval of the Ambassador for all "new weapons" introduced into Thailand.[146] This rule was used to limit the previously-discussed, command-detonated pop-up mines. The Embassy limited their installation to the launcher tubes. The actual mines and detonation circuitry could not be installed until a "Yellow" (or higher) Security Alert Condition was in effect. This stricture led CINCPACAF to cancel the planned use of such mines when several efforts to secure fewer limitations from the Embassy proved unsuccessful.[147] Finally, in May 1972, PACAF permission was obtained to undertake a limited test of the mines at U-Tapao, subject to the ROE restrictions. CINCPACAF then requested that Headquarters USAF seek greater freedom in their use and directed that no further bases would be armed until the ROE were modified.[148]

Base Analysis

Korat RTAFB. Vegetation control was a serious problem at this base in 1972, especially in the critical RTAF area near the end of the runway. The dense growth offered opportunity for concealment in the area contiguous to the unrevetted KC-135 parking ramp. Further, vegetation was thick in many sectors of the concertina wire on the perimeter. The base had received Embassy permission to use herbicides and had just begun that program in June.

This section was not defended in-depth, but fencing and some bunkers were present. More active defense of this sector was planned after July.

The POL area was in a corner of the base next to the town. Several of the fuel storage tanks were less than 100 feet from civilian housing. The MMS areas, both off-base, were very small and vulnerable to attack. The interior munitions were revetted, but the openings to several of the revetments faced the fence, greatly limiting the effectiveness of that protection against a RPG attack.

The flight line area was well revetted, but there was little use of wire fencing to give depth to the close-in defenses.[162/]

U-Tapao RTNAF. Unlike Udorn and Ubon, which suffered from too little battle space, U-Tapao defenses were almost engulfed by territory. Such a massive amount of real estate forced dilution of both people and resources committed to the defense effort. That dilution contributed to the weaknesses demonstrated in January 1972. However, by June, the defense concepts were altered and the main line of resistance was planned around the middle defensive positions. Construction of physical barriers in this region and installation of lighting still lagged. A BPS was scheduled to ring the close-in aircraft area defenses, the MMS area, and the POL site. Pop-up mines had also been approved for those areas.

The base had another unusual problem. There was a Thai village located on the base inside the perimeter. This created difficulties, especially in pilferage control.

[redacted]

Vegetation control was all but impossible over the entire reservation. Vegetation control was further hindered by the inability of the base to get herbicides through supply channels during the entire first half of 1972.

Despite the eighteen and one-half miles of perimeter, U-Tapao possessed only six NODs, and of those, only two were operative. The typical vehicle maintenance difficulties also existed.

Essentially, U-Tapao's defenses were being restructured in mid-1972 in response to the lessons learned during the January attack. The plans had been made and the defense forces were occupied in constructing the physical barriers to prevent another penetration attempt by the enemy.[163/]

[redacted]

A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHORSHIP

At the time this CHECO Report was written, Captain James R. Barrow was assigned to the Faculty of the United States Air Force Academy as an Associate Professor of Law. After completing undergraduate training in Political Science at the University of Hawaii, he received his Air Force commission in 1964 as a Distinguished Military Graduate of AFROTC program. He received his legal education and a Juris Doctor Degree with Honors from the Tulane University of Louisiana in 1966. Since then he has served as Assistant Staff Judge Advocate and Staff Judge Advocate of a SEA base. His current assignment to the Department of Law at the Academy came in 1969. Captain Barrow is a Judge Advocate, a certified trial and defense counsel, and has been designated a Military Judge by the Judge Advocate General of the Air Force.

Under the TDY augmentee program to Project CHECO, officers occasionally finish the research and a draft, but are unable to complete the report due to time limitations. In this instance, Major Benjamin H. Barnette, Jr., currently a permanent member of the CHECO staff, assumed the task of putting the study in final form and of ensuring its coordination. Major Barnette is a senior navigator and a recent Distinguished Graduate of the Air Command and Staff College (ACSC), and holds a Master of Science degree in Counseling and Guidance from Troy State University. Prior to attending ACSC, Major Barnette spent several years as a navigator in the Military Airlift Command (MAC) and served in various capacities in the personnel career field, including a tour on the DCS/Personnel staff at Hq MAC.

117. (C) Interview and day/night tour of facilities by author and Captain Brian Y. Shiroyama, Operations Officer, 635 SPS, U-Tapao RTNAF, 20-21 Jun 72. (Hereafter cited: U-Tapao Inspection); (U) Msg, subj: "Security of Installations Occupied by U.S. Forces in Thailand," 635 SPS to COMUSMACTHAI, 290330Z May 72. (Hereafter cited: U-Tapao Security Msg); (C) Interview, Major James E. Strayer, Chief of Security Police, 635 SPS, U-Tapao RTNAF, 21 Jun 72. (Hereafter cited: Maj Strayer U-Tapao Interview)

118. (S) Msg, subj: "Insurgent Situation in Thailand," 635 SPS to 7/13AF/SP, 080700Z Jul 72.

119. (C) Ibid.; (C) Maj Strayer U-Tapao Interview; (C) U-Tapao Inspection.

120. (C) Maj Strayer U-Tapao Interview.

121. (C) U-Tapao Inspection

122. (C) Maj Strayer U-Tapao Interview.

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123. (S) CHECO Report, RVN 65-68 Base Defense; (C) CHECO Report, Local Base Defense in RVN, January 1969-June 1971, Hq PACAF, 14 Sep 71. (Hereafter cited: CHECO Report: RVN 69-71 Base Defense)

124. (C) Maj Barger NKP Interview.

125. (U) Contract Proposal, subj: "A Proposal to USDAF/AFSC for Installation and Maintenance of Sensor Array," Westinghouse Corp to Dept of Defense, undated, 70; (C) Report, subj: "Safe Look/Have Levy" 56 SPS to Air Base Defense Program Office, Hanscom Field, AFSC, 28 May 72.

126. (C) NKP Inspection.

127. (U) PACAFM 207-25.

128. (C) Maj Strayer U-Tapao Interview; (C) L/C Foy Ubon Interview.

129. (C) Ibid.; (C) Capt Smith Takhli Interview.

130. (C) Embassy 1970 ROE.

131. (C) Msg, subj: "A/E 25P-1 Pop-Up Mines," 7/13AF to 635 SPS, 300030Z Nov 70; (C) Msg, subj: "Employment Instructions," 13AF to 635 SPS, 110100Z Jan 71.

132. (C) Msg, subj: "A/E 25P-1 Pop-Up Mines," CINCPACAF to Chief of Staff, USAF, 130050Z May 72.

133. (C) Embassy 1970 ROE; (U) MACTHAI Reg 500-5 ROE.

134. (C) U-Tapao Inspection; (C) Maj Medsker Ubon Interview; (C) Maj Barger NKP Interview.

135. (U) Msg, subj: "Interim Change to PACAFM 207-25: Stand-Off Fencing," CINCPACAF to 13AF/IGS, 242016Z Mar 72.

136. (C) Korat Security Msg; (C) NKP Security Msg; (C) Ubon Security Msg; (C) Udorn Security Msg; (C) U-Tapao Security Msg.

137. (C) Maj Strayer U-Tapao Interview.

138. (C) L/C Foy Ubon Interview.

139. (U) Msg, subj: "30 Inch Barbed Tape," AFLC, Hanscom Field to CINCPACAF/IGS, 081557Z Nov 71.

140. (U) Msg, subj: "30 Inch Barbed Tape," CINCPACAF to 13AF/IGS, 032307Z Nov 71; (U) Msg, subj: "30 Inch Barbed Tape," 13AF/IGS to 635 SPS, 100206Z Nov 71.

141. (U) Msg, subj: "General Purpose Tape Barbed Obstacle," 13AF to CINCPACAF/IGS and 635 SPS, 140740Z Jan 72.

142. (U) Msg, subj: "30 Inch Barbed Tape," 13AF/IGS to 635 SPS, 020400Z Feb 72.

143. (C) Ltr, subj: "Base Defense/Security Programs," Director, Security Police, 7/13AF/SP to all base Chiefs of Security Police, 28 May 72.

144. (C) Embassy 1968 ROE; (C) Embassy 1969 ROE.

145. (C) Maj Strayer U-Tapao Interview.

146. (C) Embassy 1969 ROE.

147. (S) Msg, subj: "A/E 25P-1 Pop-Up Mines," CINCPACAF to 13AF, 250810Z Apr 72; (C) Msg, subj: "A/E 25P-1 Pop-Up Mines," 13AF to 7/13AF/SP, 250810Z Apr 72.