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90th Congress
1st Session

COMMITTEE PRINT

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INVESTIGATION OF
THE PREPAREDNESS PROGRAM

REPORT BY
PREPAREDNESS INVESTIGATING
SUBCOMMITTEE

OF THE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE

UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF

S. Res. 71

(90th Cong., 1st Sess.)

ON

U.S. AIR FORCE TACTICAL AIR OPERATIONS IN
SOUTHEAST ASIA



Printed for the use of the Committee on Armed Services

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

76-433

WASHINGTON : 1967

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INVESTIGATION OF
THE PREPAREDNESS PROGRAM

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

U.S. SENATE PREPAREDNESS
INVESTIGATING SUBCOMMITTEE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
March 22, 1967.

HON. RICHARD B. RUSSELL,
*Chairman, Committee on Armed Services,
U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C.*

MY DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: There is transmitted herewith a report by the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, appointed under Senate Resolution 71 of the first session of the 90th Congress, on the status of the U.S. Army forces in South Vietnam. This report deals with U.S. Air Force tactical air operations in southeast Asia.

This is the second of six reports dealing with the overall status of our military forces committed to the war in Vietnam. This report and the subsequent reports to be transmitted shortly are based primarily on the findings of four members of the subcommittee staff who visited South Vietnam during the last 2 weeks of October 1966. I believe it is important to emphasize, as we do several times in the body of our report, that our findings are based on the situation as it existed at that time except where otherwise indicated.

This report was sent to the Department of Defense for security review early in February 1967. Subsequently, the subcommittee received a number of unsolicited comments from the Defense Department. In the interest of fairness, we have inserted all Department of Defense comments, together with the subcommittee replies thereto, with the exception of a few comments eliminated by mutual agreement.

I will transmit the remaining reports to you in the very near future.

Respectfully,

JOHN STENNIS,
*Chairman,
Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee.*

CONTENTS

	Page
I. Introduction.....	1
II. Background.....	1
III. Aircraft requirements and air operations.....	2
(a) Variety of aircraft required.....	2
(b) Strike aircraft.....	2
(c) Reconnaissance aircraft.....	3
(d) Air operations over North Vietnam.....	4
(e) Air operations in South Vietnam.....	5
IV. Aircrews and support personnel.....	6
V. Aircraft spare parts.....	6
VI. Summary and conclusions.....	7
Appendix "A".....	11

U.S. AIR FORCE TACTICAL AIR OPERATIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

I. INTRODUCTION

This is the second of a series of reports by the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee as a result of visits to and firsthand inspections in South Vietnam and the Pacific area by subcommittee members and staff during October, November, and December 1966. This report addresses itself to U.S. Air Force tactical air operations in the Southeast Asia theater, and, except where otherwise indicated, the facts and figures stated relate to the situation as it existed at the time of the staff's visit in October 1966.

After having been unanimously approved by the subcommittee, this report was submitted to the Department of Defense for security review and the deletion of classified information. As a result, the Defense Department submitted a number of comments on the report. Although these comments were not solicited, the subcommittee was, of course, entirely willing to consider any matters which might conceivably strengthen the report.

All of the comments were discussed in detail with Air Force representatives and a few were disposed of as a result of these discussions. In the interest of fairness we have included in the body of the report all comments which were not so disposed of. Following the Defense comments, we have, where appropriate, inserted the subcommittee's responses. In addition to the comments directed to specific portions of the report, the Department of Defense submitted a few "general comments." These are attached as appendix A to the report, and the subcommittee's responses to the comments have been inserted as appropriate.

II. BACKGROUND

The tactical air warfare in Southeast Asia has made increasingly heavy demands upon available manpower and material resources. The strain on available resources was discussed in a report issued by the subcommittee in July 1966.¹ Since that time demands for aircrews, support personnel, and aircraft have continued to escalate and the strain on available resources has become even greater, particularly on other Air Force units in the Pacific.

Defense comment: The Air Force provides resources to the SEA theater from its worldwide assets, not just from within PACAF. PACAF units not committed to SEA provide only their fair share.

With respect to the "strain" on available Air Force resources and "particularly on other Air Force units in the Pacific," it should be recognized that Air Force units are stationed in the Pacific for the express purpose of being able to respond immediately to aggression in that area. Consequently, in accordance with existing contingency plans, some of the initial units committed to SEA came from those permanently assigned to the Pacific Air Force. These units are being withdrawn from SEA, reconstituted in PACAF and replaced from other Air Force assets.

¹ "U.S. Air Force Tactical Air Operations and Readiness," report by Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1966.

For example, on the (deleted) tactical fighter aircraft authorized PACAF, by September 1967, (deleted) aircraft will be reconstituted at permanent (other than SEA) bases with PACAF.

Subcommittee response: The Subcommittee report does not deal with the commitment of initial units to SEA from the Pacific Air Force. The report is concerned with the extent to which such units were drawn upon during calendar year 1966. We welcome the information that the tactical fighter aircraft authorized PACAF will be substantially reconstituted by September, 1967. We hope this schedule is realistic and attainable.

The primary Air Force units responsible for the conduct of tactical air operations in Southeast Asia are the 7th and 13th Air Forces. The 5th Air Force, which has little direct responsibility to SEA, has contributed a considerable portion of its manpower and material resources to the SEA effort.

The 7th Air Force in Vietnam has the responsibility for the operational control of all Air Force tactical air operations in the Vietnam war. Additionally, 7th Air Force is charged with responsibility for the air defense of South Vietnam, tactical airlift, communications, rescue, weather, and other support activities. The 13th Air Force is charged with the administrative and logistic support responsibility for operations in Southeast Asia. Additionally, it has a large air defense role and the responsibility for maintaining forces for possible contingencies. The 5th Air Force, similarly has a sizable air defense role and the responsibility to support contingency operations (deleted).

The U.S. Air Force has responded to the demands of Southeast Asia in a highly commendable fashion. The continually increasing requirements in the combat area have been gradually met by drawing upon the total resources available to the Air Force, and at the expense of degrading the manpower and material resources of other Air Force units.

Defense comment: These actions have resulted in some, but not unacceptable, reduction in material and manpower outside the Southeast Asia theater of operations.

Subcommittee response: An adequate and effective rebuttal to this comment exists in classified documentary information in the possession of the Subcommittee. For greater detail, see the Subcommittee's response to the general comments on the report by the Department of Defense (Appendix "A").

III. AIRCRAFT REQUIREMENTS AND AIR OPERATIONS

(a) *Variety of aircraft required*

In order to fulfill its mission, the 7th Air Force requires a complex mixture of aircraft types. In all, it controls about 30 types of aircraft in varying numbers of each type. In broad categories, these include strike, reconnaissance, liaison, airlift, and rescue aircraft.² Aircraft requirements in South Vietnam vary according to the mission to be accomplished. Such missions include strike, air defense, joint air-ground operations, reconnaissance, airlift, defoliation, psychological warfare, and search and rescue.

(b) *Strike aircraft*

The bulk of the strike aircraft forces are made up of fighter aircraft which include primarily the F-100, F-105, and F-4 fighters. As mentioned in the subcommittee report, July 7, 1966, the F-4 is the only fighter currently in production for the Air Force. These fighter

² Op. cit., see pp. 3 to 5 for detailed discussion of aircraft types and operational functions.

aircraft are required in all areas of combat. They are needed in South Vietnam for strike, air defense, and joint air-ground operations; and they are required in continually rising numbers for airstrikes against targets in North Vietnam.

Defense comment: The F-4 is not the only fighter that is currently in production for the Air Force, unless the context is limited to aircraft thus far committed to SEA. The F-111 is also in production, with equipping of units scheduled to commence this year.

Subcommittee response: The Subcommittee is not persuaded that it is entirely accurate to describe the F-111, which is still in the development phase and experiencing problems, as being "in production" either in October, 1966, or February, 1967.

The following extract is pertinent on this point:

"A total of 23 research and development aircraft were ordered originally. Five of these were F-111B's and 18 were F-111A's. In addition, four Navy production airplanes and one Air Force production airplane from the FY-66 buy will now be used as test aircraft by the Navy. Eleven Air Force production aircraft from the FY-66 buy will be used for additional tests by the Air Force."³

As the tempo of operations increased throughout 1966, it became necessary to increase continually the allowance for aircraft, especially for fighter aircraft. As aircraft allowances were increased, in many instances the assigned aircraft fell below the allowances for varying periods of time. The deficits were filled to a large extent from aircraft resources of other Pacific commands. In some instances aircraft were transferred to Southeast Asia with a corresponding reduction of the allowance for losing command. Other deficits were filled by the temporary assignment of aircraft and aircrews from other Pacific commands.

Defense comment: Aircraft assigned to SEA are naturally below SEA aircraft allowances during the time that is required to transfer aircraft to SEA after the decision is made. Only in part, and not in whole, have these allowances been filled by levies on other PACAF units.

Subcommittee response: None.

(c) *Reconnaissance aircraft*

As mentioned in the subcommittee report in July 1966, reconnaissance aircraft include primarily the RB-57E, RB-66B, RF-101, and RF-4C aircraft. The RF-4C is the only reconnaissance aircraft currently in production. Since the issuance of the subcommittee report, the requirement for reconnaissance aircraft in Southeast Asia, both for in-country and out-country operations, has risen as rapidly as the demand for fighter aircraft.

The reconnaissance forces have performed their function as commendably as any other unit. They have done so with somewhat limited forces, heavy aircraft losses, and increasingly heavy demands for the

³ U.S. Senate, *Military Procurement Authorizations For Fiscal Year 1968*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1967, p. 391. See also pp. 380-400.

intelligence input essential to the successful planning and execution of both ground and tactical air operations. Combined RF-101/RF-4 loss rates are comparable to those of other systems.

As in the case of fighter aircraft, assigned aircraft have lagged behind increased allowances for aircraft. Similarly, many of the deficits have been made up by the assignment of aircraft from other Pacific commands.

Defense comment: The number of assigned aircraft is less than the aircraft allowance during the time required to relocate the aircraft to SEA after the allowance is raised. Resources for fulfilling these increased authorizations have been drawn from USAF assets worldwide.

Subcommittee response: None.

(d) Air operations over North Vietnam

Air operations over North Vietnam demonstrate most vividly some of the complexities, problems, and frustrations attendant with the Vietnamese conflict. The tactical air forces must operate these under separate, special, and variable rules of engagement. Weather is often a limiting factor in planned operations. The aircraft must operate against a defensive network of surface-to-air missiles and anti-aircraft weapons that have become increasingly sophisticated and prevalent. The continually increasing size and modernization of North Vietnamese MIG force must, of course, be added to the total threat.

The most lucrative military targets in North Vietnam are, naturally, the most heavily defended. The aircraft mixture must be configured to the nature and degree of the threat surrounding each approved target. For example, a strike against a target heavily defended by missiles and anti-aircraft weapons involves a complex and varied mixture of aircraft.

The selection of targets to be struck in North Vietnam is still controlled in large measure from Washington. The striking forces must operate outside of certain prohibited areas and to the exclusion of specific targets. Certain targets are approved for each strike series. They are listed as JCS targets and approval to strike is issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to CINCPAC, CINCPACAF, and in turn to 7th Air Force. Once a target has been placed on the JCS approved list, it can be re-struck without JCS approval, unless a prohibition has been reimposed.

Recommendations are made periodically by 7th Air Force through channels for approval to strike certain specified targets. However, they must first appear on the JCS approved lists before they can be struck. (Deleted) lucrative military targets within prohibited areas have been recommended without success.

The increasing scale of operations over North Vietnam, massive accumulations of anti-aircraft weapons systems, limiting and restrictive rules of engagement, and target restrictions have all been contributing factors in continually rising aircraft losses. The restrictions imposed by weather and the assignment of strike missions to Navy aircraft have kept Air Force fighter losses from being even higher. In spite of this, the worldwide inventory of Air Force fighter aircraft continued through September 1966, to be drawn down as a result of attrition and combat losses in Southeast Asia. Although actual aircraft losses have increased, the rate of attrition in terms of sorties flown, has declined.

Defense comment: The following table shows the number of tactical fighters (F-4, F-100, F-104, F-105, and F-111), assigned or programmed to be assigned to tactical fighter units (UE):

Fiscal year 1965.....	¹ 1, 581
Fiscal year 1966.....	1, 476
Fiscal year 1967.....	1, 602
Fiscal year 1968.....	1, 650

¹ Including 66 F-101's which have subsequently been converted to reconnaissance aircraft.

As the table indicates there was a slight decline of tactical fighters in tactical units through fiscal year 1966. This trend will be reversed this year, however, as the number of aircraft in tactical units will increase significantly.

Subcommittee response: None.

(e) *Air operations in South Vietnam*

As previously mentioned, tactical air operations in South Vietnam embrace the missions of strike, air defense, joint air-ground operations, reconnaissance, airlift, defoliation, psychological warfare, and search and rescue. The air defense forces include fighter aircraft and surface-to-air missiles.

The joint air-ground operations require the greatest single effort in South Vietnam in terms of manpower, coordination, and mixture of aircraft. An elaborate, responsive, and highly effective system has been established to meet the needs of these operations.

Ground units at division, regiment, sector, and province levels are supported by forward air controllers (FAC's) and air liaison officers (ALO's). These officers require special in-country training and are assigned specific areas in which they operate constantly. They constitute the key element between the ground forces and the response of strike and support aircraft.

The aircraft primarily used by the ALO's and FAC's is the O-1. Through much of 1966 the availability of this aircraft lagged behind the requirement. Reportedly, additional O-1 aircraft were to be delivered. Beyond this, the tactical air forces in southeast Asia look forward to the O-2 and the follow-on OV-10 aircraft. The more modern observation aircraft could be used to very good advantage in southeast Asia.

Defense comment: The Unit Equipment (UE) authorization for O-1 aircraft increased from 120 in March 1966 to 245 in May 1966 and to 250 in December 1966. The O-1s were received from the Army and modified as rapidly as possible. All AFAC authorizations will be met by September of this year.

Subcommittee response: None.

Airlift resources in Southeast Asia include the C-123, C-130, CH-3C, and C-7A aircraft. Airlift requirements rose sharply during 1966, and they are calculated to continue to rise in 1967. In October 1966 it was estimated that total airlift requirements in South Vietnam alone would rise to a total of about 120,000 tons by June 1967. This would require the use of virtually all C-130 aircraft in the Pacific, leaving few, if any, available for essential interisland airlift.

Defense comment: A more recent airlift study conducted within PACOM reflecting the latest planning factors indicates the airlift requirements in South Vietnam will rise to a total of 90,000 tons per month by June 1967. This would require the use of approximately (deleted) C-130 aircraft in addition to the available C-123s and C-7As, leaving approximately (deleted) C-130s available for essential inter-island airlift. The CH-3Cs are used in support of special missions and are not programmed against common user requirements.

Subcommittee response: As the foregoing comment shows, the revision of the estimate from about 120,000 tons per month to 90,000 tons resulted from a study made subsequent to the staff's visit.

The special air warfare forces, which have been employed in Southeast Asia longer than any other tactical-type forces, have continued to answer the demands posed by new and unique problems in tactical air warfare. The varied mix of aircraft in the special air warfare program include the F-5 and A-1E for close air support; the UC-123 for flare-drop and defoliation missions; the C-47 and U-10 for leaflet drops and broadcasts; and the AC-47 for defense of outposts and villages at night.

The defoliation program has been an essential and successful operation. The operation was expanded during 1966 and additional aircraft have been requested. Similarly, the program for leaflet drops and aerial broadcasts has been enlarged and is considered successful. Additional aircraft have been requested for an expanded program.

IV. AIRCREWS AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL

As the aircraft allowances in Southeast Asia were increased, the requirements for pilots, aircrews, and support personnel increased accordingly. While it has been the policy of the Air Force that all Southeast Asia units be manned at 100 percent in all specialties, it has not been accomplished in a number of specialties. Personnel shortages have been relieved partially by permanent or temporary duty assignments of personnel from other Pacific commands

Defense comment: The USAF SEA manning, objective is 100% of required personnel at all times. Personnel are assigned to coincide with the arrival of equipment and supporting facilities. During periods of build-up, the assignment of personnel and delivery of equipment, by necessity, lag behind the approval of increased authorizations. Temporary shortages have been relieved by assigning skilled personnel on temporary duty when possible, and are solved by subsequent personnel reassignments from worldwide resources. The manning objectives have been achieved.

Subcommittee response: None.

One of the most acute personnel manning problems for the 13th Air Force, the administrative and logistic command for Southeast Asia, has been in the air crew area, specifically for the F-105 and F-4C aircraft. The F-4C air crew shortage has been overcome. Personnel additions for the F-105 and F-4C resulted in desirable assigned levels at the end of 1966.

In the area of pilot manning and number of pilots assigned to some fighter squadrons fell below authorized levels for varying periods of time during 1966. Shortages were relieved in part by the assignment of pilots from other Pacific commands to temporary duty in Southeast Asia.

In attempting to meet the manpower needs for tactical air forces in Southeast Asia, the Air Force has responded rapidly and commendably. Normal procurement leadtimes for replacement personnel have been cut considerably in many cases. Many actions have been taken to achieve maximum utilization of available manpower resources.

V. AIRCRAFT SPARE PARTS

The rapid buildup of tactical air forces in Southeast Asia and the exceptionally high utilization rates for tactical aircraft have created difficult problems for the maintenance and support personnel in Southeast Asia. In many instances during 1966, the NORS (not opera-

tionally ready because of supply) rates rose to undesirable levels, especially for newer type aircraft such as the F-4 and RF-4. However, no sorties or missions have been lost due to lack of parts. Unavailability of spare parts frequently resulted in the cannibalization of other aircraft.

Numerous actions, programs, and measures were instituted during 1966 to alleviate the serious NORS condition. Collectively, they have resulted in the creation of a highly responsive and efficient supply and maintenance system. It is to be expected that the availability of aircraft spare parts and components will continue to improve in the future as a result of this and the fact that the long leadtime procurement will be coming into the inventory in increasing numbers.

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The greatest praise that could be bestowed upon personnel of the tactical air forces in Southeast Asia, as well as all other military forces in the Vietnam war, would be inadequate to the magnitude of the problems they have faced and the tremendous way in which they have responded to the unanticipated demands of escalating requirements for manpower and material resources. In the case of Air Force tactical air forces in the Pacific, the problems have been magnified and complicated by the progressive increase in the allowance of aircraft and personnel in Southeast Asia for virtually every area of tactical air warfare. While assigned personnel and aircraft, especially in the areas of fighter and reconnaissance forces, continued to lag behind increases in allowances, the deficiencies were alleviated increasingly by a drawdown on other Air Force units in the Pacific.

Defense comment: As noted in previous comments, although PACAF units have made major contributions, they have not borne the entire burden, but have shared it with Air Force units worldwide.

Subcommittee response: None.

In its report in July 1966, the subcommittee emphasized the fact that the Air Force could not continue to support a large-scale augmentation in Southeast Asia, or support another possible contingency without calling the Air Reserve and Air National Guard. Since that time the Tactical Air Forces have been augmented in Southeast Asia. In some cases assignments of personnel and aircraft lagged behind authorizations for increased allowances. Attempts to reach authorized levels have resulted in reductions of allowances for other tactical air units in the Pacific. Some of these units subsequently have been degraded below their new lower allowances as a result of additional transfers and assignments on a temporary basis to southeast Asia.

Defense comment: There has not been a consistent lag between assigned versus authorized strengths. In an escalating situation, as authorizations are increased, some time must be consumed in getting the additional personnel to the area. With a leveling of effort, this situation no longer exists.

Attainment of authorized SEA levels has resulted in some reductions throughout the Air Force, but USAF priority missions, e.g., SAC prime crews, have continued to receive 100% of authorized resources. Other activities have shared in the burden through longer duty schedules, reduced input to professional schools and other "belt tightening" actions.

While not readily clear, the "lag" in aircraft may imply that deployments of units were late. Actually, while some AF units did not deploy as originally scheduled, this resulted from inability of the theater to accept them, due to the time required for airfield construction and other factors.

Subcommittee response: None.

Additional manpower and personnel resources of these units are earmarked for transfer to Southeast Asia if losses make it necessary. Hence, there is a very serious question of the extent to which other Air Force tactical air units in the Pacific can be expected to support the Southeast Asia effort, without [deleted] weakening [deleted] their capability to respond to other missions or contingency responsibilities.

Defense comment: All assets of the Air Force worldwide are utilized in providing resources for SEA, not just those of PACAF. As the Chief of Staff of the Air Force recently testified: "We have been able to take care of our operational commitments."

Subcommittee response: See response to general comments (Appendix "A").

The separate, variable and restrictive rules of engagement in the air war over North Vietnam have been a very significant factor in the tactical air problems in Southeast Asia. The cost has been heavy for the limited gains we have achieved. The air raids over North Vietnam admittedly have made it more costly for the North Vietnamese to wage aggression, but it has been done through the sacrifice of many American lives and aircraft losses extending into billions of dollars.

Defense comment: The air campaign over NVN has made it more difficult and increased the price for the North Vietnamese to support insurgency in the South. It has reduced infiltration and diverted the enemy effort. It has provided a permissive air environment for our operations in SVN. The enemy initiative in SVN has diminished. An important reason for enemy failure in combat is the fact it is far more difficult to support large-scale sustained combat operations than it is to infiltrate troops. It is on this basis—the cost to the enemy of logistically supporting aggression—as well as the cost of infiltrating troops, that the success of the air interdiction campaign must be judged. Similarly, the losses in aircraft and lives that we have incurred over NVN must be weighed against the lives and material saved in SVN due to enemy inability to mount large-scale attacks.

The major resupply efforts initiated during each standdown substantiate the effectiveness of the air interdiction efforts and are indicative of what would occur were it not for air attacks.

Subcommittee response: We agree. There is no significant conflict between the Air Force and the Subcommittee on this point. The bombing of previously prohibited targets in North Vietnam since the writing of this report suggests some relaxation of prior restrictions.

There is a limit to which our Air Force tactical air resources can support such a limited and restrictive type of tactical air warfare. In the time that meaningful military targets in North Vietnam have been protected by immunity from possible strikes, the North Vietnamese have been able to place formidable networks of air defensive weapons around them, and these have taken their toll when immunity was lifted. The conduct of a tactical air war under such conditions can only result in increased aircraft losses from resources that have already become very seriously strained. Until October, 1966, the worldwide inventory of Air Force tactical aircraft was dwindling as a result of attrition in Southeast Asia.

Defense comment: The worldwide inventory of USAF fighter aircraft will increase during FY 67. Considering first-line fighters in use in SEA (F-100, F-105 and F-4s) the inventory will increase from 2061 on June 30, 1966, to 2227 on June 30, 1967. The breakdown is as follows:

	June 30, 1966	June 30, 1967
F-4.....	(1)	(1)
F-100.....	(1)	(1)
F-105.....	(1)	(1)
Total.....	2,061	2,227

¹ Deleted.

If all tactical fighter and attack aircraft are counted, (excepting the SAWF) the inventory will increase from 2489 to 2629 in the same time period.

Subcommittee response: The deletion of specific aircraft numbers precludes a responsive comment by the Subcommittee. The question of aircraft inventories and production is a subject currently under review by the Subcommittee.

Aircraft production was not replacing strike aircraft losses up until that time.

Defense comment: Strike aircraft losses are being replaced from production. Since October 1966, production of tactical and fighter aircraft has exceeded losses worldwide. The following chart reflects actual monthly losses and production for the months of July 1966 through February 1967.

<i>Losses</i> ¹	
July	46
August	39
September	49
October	29
November	29
December	28
January	23
February	49
<i>Production</i> ²	
July	28
August	32
September	37
October	39
November	41
December	42
January	49
February	50

¹ Includes total worldwide losses of the following fighter and attack-type aircraft: A-1, A-26, B-57, F-4, F-5, F-100, F-102, F-104, F-105, F-84, F-86.

² Not included in production are F-111 aircraft or aircraft added from modification; i.e., AT-37's.

Subcommittee response: As previously noted, the time frame to which this report was primarily directed was October 1966. As the above chart indicates, losses of strike aircraft exceeded production until that month.

In spite of the heavy burdens imposed upon the U.S. Air Force tactical air forces in the Pacific, they have responded to the needs in Southeast Asia rapidly and as fully as possible within the limits of their capability. Many improvements and advances were accomplished during 1966. However many problems remain.

In the months to come, pilot, aircrew, and aircraft replacements will continue as problems of major concern. In some cases there is a need for additional aircraft, and for some aircraft, such as the O-1, there is a growing need for newer and more modern aircraft. However, the most pressing need is an affirmative response to some of the recommendations of responsible commanders to strike more meaningful military targets in North Vietnam.

...all general... (including the...)

...production was not... up until...

...: some... production...

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APPENDIX "A"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS ON REPORT BY SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PREPAREDNESS INVESTIGATING RE "U.S. AIR FORCE TACTICAL AIR OPERATIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA"

GENERAL COMMENTS

As brought out more fully in the attached detailed comments, we believe that the subject report is in important respects marred by errors of fact and inference. Among the points that must be emphasized are these:

The Air Force has responded to the rapidly rising requirements of SEA in a timely and effective manner.

The support of air operations in SEA has not compromised the capabilities of either PACAF or other Air Force units to meet their operational commitments.

Attrition rates in SEA, far from increasing, have in fact decreased significantly during the period covered in this report.

Aircraft production has exceeded aircraft losses since fiscal year 1965.

The losses incurred over North Vietnam, though low in terms of losses per thousand sorties, are large in number because of the very large number of sorties flown (about 45,000 Air Force attack sorties alone in North Vietnam in calendar year 1966). The losses must be viewed in light of the cost to the enemy, as well as in terms of the lives saved in South Vietnam, due to the effectiveness of the air interdiction campaign.

SUBCOMMITTEE RESPONSE TO DEFENSE GENERAL COMMENTS

The specific Defense comments appear in the body of the report. Some merely supplement and expand upon the statements in the report. Some appear designed to create the impression that the subcommittee's report attempts to leave erroneous inferences. We have responded to the Defense comments only to the extent necessary to give a balanced presentation. Thus the reader will be able to make an independent judgment as to whether the report is in fact "in important respects marred by errors of fact and inference."

While some of the Defense comments strengthen the subcommittee report, others are general in nature and apparently attempt to infer that all is well, that there are no deficiencies, that no shortages exist or have existed, and that tactical Air Force units are fully capable of meeting all contingencies and performing all missions assigned.

An example of this is the statement that "The support of air operations in SEA has not compromised the capabilities of either PACAF or other Air Force units to meet their operational commitments." This statement, of course, is not documented in any manner. Under the circumstances the subcommittee must rely on the testimony of Gen. J. P. McConnell, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, before the subcommittee on May 9, 1966, and March 1, 1967; the testimony of Gen. G. P. Disosway, commander in chief of the Tactical Air Command, before the subcommittee on May 10, 1966; and the documentary evidence furnished the subcommittee by the Department of the Air Force, the Tactical Air Command, PACAF, the 5th Air Force, the 7th Air Force and the 13th Air Force. The bulk of this information is classified and it can be declassified and released only by the Department of Defense.

General McConnell, in testifying before the subcommittee on May 9, 1966, said:

"The buildup of tactical fighter forces in southeast Asia, which began shortly after the Tonkin Bay incident in August 1964, has severely strained the tactical fighter forces structure. It is apparent now that the Tactical Air Command cannot, within existing resources, continue to support a large-scale augmentation and, at the same time, provide adequate forces for other possible contingencies without calling up the Air National Guard."¹

¹ U.S. Air Force Tactical Air Operations and Readiness, hearings before Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate, 89th Congress, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., May 9-10, 1966, p. 2.

Recent information received from both General McConnell and General Disosway shows that the foregoing statement is still true and that the Tactical Air Command is, in effect, still a training command, rather than a combat command.

General Disosway's testimony before the subcommittee on May 10, 1966, shows the following exchange:

"Senator SMITH. How long will this ratio last? Are we going to run into a shortage of pilots?"

"General DISOSWAY. Well, it is not a shortage of pilots, *it is a shortage of aircraft.* The aircraft shortage is supposed to be over with at the end of [deleted].

"Senator SMITH. That is [deleted].

"General DISOSWAY. Yes, ma'am. You are getting [deleted] aircraft a month, and you are losing about [deleted], *so you gradually overcome your shortage.* That is on the assumption that the war is over in July of 1967."² [Emphasis added.]

The subcommittee also notes from very recent information that the timetable for overcoming the aircraft shortage has not changed.

We also note the statement that "Attrition rates in SEA * * * have in fact decreased significantly during the period covered in this report." For this statement to be truly meaningful a separation between attrition rates in-country and out-of-country operations is required.

With respect to the statement that aircraft production has exceeded aircraft losses since fiscal year 1965, we call attention to the table furnished by the Defense Department and which appears on page 9 of the report. As this shows, losses of strike aircraft exceeded production until October 1966, and in February 1967, production and losses of such aircraft were almost precisely equal.

We are happy to emphasize that "The Air Force has responded to the rapidly rising requirements of SEA in a timely and effective manner." We thought the report made this very clear. See pages 2, 3, 6, and 7.

² Op. cit., pp. 7, 53.





