

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?
A HISTORICAL EVALUATION OF PROJECT CHECO

BY
MAJ DANIEL S. HOADLEY

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF
THE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES
FOR COMPLETION OF GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES
AIR UNIVERSITY
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA
JUNE 2013

Report Documentation Page			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.				
1. REPORT DATE JUN 2013		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2013 to 00-00-2013
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE What Just Happened? A historical Evauation Of Project CHECO		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
		5b. GRANT NUMBER		
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
		5e. TASK NUMBER		
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) School Of Advanced Air And Space Studies,,Air University,,Maxwell Air Force Base,,AL		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited				
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
14. ABSTRACT Project Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations (CHECO) was an Air Force program during the Vietnam War that employed civilians and active duty officers to write the history of air operations as the war was unfolding. Their products also doubled as a unique tool for operations analysis. The study that follows is an effort to document the history of Project CHECO and evaluate the program both as a work of history and a tool for operations analysis. Chapter 1 records CHECO???s story including the personalities, formative guidance, and significant events that shaped the program. Chapter 2 contains profiles of four CHECO reports that are representative of the project???s work, evaluating their content for bias, accuracy, and influence on USAF operations. This study concludes that although the authors did a remarkable providing objective and critical studies, the Air Force did not use them to their full potential. The paper closes with some parallels to the documentation and analysis of USAF operations in Afghanistan.				
15. SUBJECT TERMS				
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 124
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified		

APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

RICHARD R. MULLER (Date)

JAMES D. KIRAS (Date)

DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Daniel Hoadley graduated from the United States Air Force Academy in 2000 with a commission as a 2nd Lt and a BS in History. In 2001 he completed an MA in Military History at The Ohio State University. After pilot training at Vance Air Force Base, Major Hoadley qualified in the B-52H and served in the 23 BS at Minot AFB, ND. In 2005, he transferred to Whiteman AFB and served in the 393 BS flying the B-2 and T-38. Major Hoadley graduated from the United States Air Force Weapons School in 2008, and he spent his last 2 years at Whiteman as a Weapons School Instructor. In June 2013, Major Hoadley will be assigned to the Aviation Tactics and Evaluation Group (AVTEG) at the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely appreciate the attentive guidance from my thesis advisor Dr. Richard Muller and reader Dr. James Kiras. The thoughts and words that follow have been significantly elevated because of their mentoring and insightful critique. I am also indebted to Warren Trest, Dr. John Schlight, Dr. David Mets, Dr. Philip Caine, Dr. Richard Kott, Dr. Robert Burch, and Dr. John Pratt. Their recollections of Project CHECO provided an insider's perspective of the program that immensely increased the paper's quality. Most importantly, I would like to thank my wife who patiently tolerated long hours of my physical and spiritual absence.

ABSTRACT

Project Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations (CHECO) was an Air Force program during the Vietnam War that employed civilians and active duty officers to write the history of air operations as the war was unfolding. Their products also doubled as a unique tool for operations analysis. The study that follows is an effort to document the history of Project CHECO and evaluate the program both as a work of history and a tool for operations analysis. Chapter 1 records CHECO's story including the personalities, formative guidance, and significant events that shaped the program. Chapter 2 contains profiles of four CHECO reports that are representative of the project's work, evaluating their content for bias, accuracy, and influence on USAF operations. This study concludes that although the authors did a remarkable providing objective and critical studies, the Air Force did not use them to their full potential. The paper closes with some parallels to the documentation and analysis of USAF operations in Afghanistan.

CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
DISCLAIMER.....	iii
ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1 A HISTORY OF PROJECT CHECO.....	12
2 THE REPRESENTATIVE CHECO REPORTS.....	44
CONCLUSION.....	72
APPENDIX A.....	87
APPENDIX B.....	99
APPENDIX C.....	100
APPENDIX D.....	102
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	110

Illustrations

Figure

1	Phil Caine, Dick Kott, Dave Folkman off to get a CHECO story, Mar 1970.....	30
2	Handling of CHECO Studies.....	32
3	Project CHECO Staff, Tan Son Nhut AB, Vietnam, Mar 1970.....	37
4	CHECO “Morale” Patch.....	39
5	The Crew of Boxer 22.....	59
6	CHECO Organization, 1962 – 1965.....	100
7	CHECO Organization, 1966 – 1973.....	101
8	Distribution List for “The Fall of A Shau”.....	102
9	Distribution List for “USAF Support of Special Forces in SEA”.....	103
10	PACAF CoS Letter for “USAF Support of Special Forces in SEA”.....	109

INTRODUCTION

In 1962 the Air Force initiated Project CHECO (Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations), an unprecedented official history program which published 251 monographs on USAF involvement in Southeast Asia (SEA). Project CHECO had two mandates that distinguished it from past official history programs: to document the role of airpower in SEA for the long term and to fill the immediate needs for operational analysis.¹ CHECO's credibility suffered by association with the sins committed by past official history programs. Although history professionals cannot seem to agree on many of the central issues of their field, they hold a virtually universal disdain for official military histories. B.H. Liddell Hart observed, "History that bears the qualification 'official' carries with it a natural reservation; and the additional prefix 'military' is apt to imply a double reservation . . . The history of history yields ample evidence that the art of camouflage was developed in that field long before it was applied to the battlefield."² Critiques of official military histories generally highlight three flaws – they are official, contemporary, and often attempt to derive specific lessons.³ A review of the debate in each category creates a useful tool for evaluating the development of Project CHECO. Ultimately, CHECO's legacy is defined by the extent to which it met its dual purpose while avoiding the pitfalls of past official histories.

Official histories bear their moniker for two reasons. First, the authors have access to classified official documents and key individuals within an organization. Second, the organization provides financial and administrative support for completing the study.⁴ Critiques of the 'official' label center on what organizations ask in return for access and the level of academic freedom allotted to the author.⁵ Organizations employ

¹ Col W.J. Meng, Executive to the Vice Chief of Staff, USAF, to PACAF, Current Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations, 30 June 1962, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522, "CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969," AFHRA.

² B.H. Liddell Hart, *Why Don't We Learn from History?*, 4th ed. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1946), 13.

³ Leonard Krieger, "Official History and the War in Vietnam: Comment," *Military Affairs* XXXII, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 16. The first two categories come from Krieger. He also labels official history as collaborative, but the focus of his critique is on the former two categories. The third category above is my own based on extensive research on official history critiques.

⁴ Robin Higham, *Official Histories: Essays and Bibliographies from Around the World* (Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University Library, 1970), 1.

⁵ Louis Morton, "The Writing of Official History," in Higham, *Official Histories*, 35.

a spectrum of methods to alter external perception of their internally generated accounts. Some organizations attempt to preserve their studies' credibility by eliminating the appearance of undue influence on the finished product, while others intentionally alter key aspects of the account's central message.

Organizations almost always demand the right to review official accounts before they are published. Official reviews differ in who is allowed to review the material and whether the review is cursory or substantive. The USAF regulation governing the history program during Vietnam, Air Force Regulation 210-3, mandated a review process: "Each echelon will examine carefully all historical material sent forward by the next lower echelons and point out any methods by which the material may be improved."⁶ While the USAF review process seems benign, such editing can be controversial if outsiders perceive malevolent intent behind the changes. The British Expeditionary Force's (BEF) official account of World War I is perhaps the most notorious example of official meddling. In the course of reviewing the official account of the Western Front, the British Army allowed general officers involved in the operations to revise the report.⁷ In this process, the manuscript went through three drafts to remove any implication that poor leadership had any bearing on disastrous events of WWI. For example, the final account of the Battle of Passchendaele concealed any indictment of leadership by deploying a smokescreen of complex accounts of retreats and confusion on the front line.⁸ Inevitably, subsequent historians uncovered these deceptions as they re-examined the historical record, resulting in damage to the originating organization and the reputation of official history.

In some cases, organizations expect their historical accounts to express an official position. In the opening of *The Army Air Forces in WWII*, Craven and Cate slighted previous official histories written with the intent to provide evidence for an independent Air Force. In contrast, the authors asserted that their study was completed simply to fill an academic void by providing a comprehensive account of the US Army Air Forces

⁶ AFR 210-3, Air Force Historical Program, 8 April 1969, K168.12210-3, IRIS No. 8472798, "Air Force Regulation 210-3, Air Force Historical Program," AFHRA.

⁷ Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front, and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 204.

⁸ Travers, *The Killing Ground*, 237.

(USAAF).⁹ Conversely, the post WWI German government conducted a campaign of “preemptive historiography.” In 1921 they created a bureaucracy called the Center for the Study of the Causes of the War, which commissioned official accounts of the war by civilian historians that absolved Germany of any responsibility for starting the war. These were deliberate attempts at “patriotic self censorship” to counter the war guilt clause of Versailles Treaty.¹⁰ Historian Holger Herwig argues that the German government tactics worked for a time, and deliberately manipulated histories created a populace receptive to the radical ideas espoused by the Nazi party.¹¹ Much like the BEF history of WWI, follow on studies lifted the thin veil of the official purpose exposing the deceitful manipulation of historical events.

Official histories are often influenced by the authors’ close contact with the organization. Authors who are a part of the organization may have institutional loyalties that compromise their objectivity. In addition, official historians work with a limited body of official documents, and they have regular contact with a discrete group of authoritative individuals within an organization. Over time this may have the tendency to color their opinion.¹² In addition, military doctrine can exert a powerful sway on official accounts. To the extent that official historians adopt them as their own, these codified beliefs tend to constrain the scope of questions that the historian asks. The British and German official histories of the Russo-Japanese War are instructive examples of this phenomenon. In hindsight, the Russo-Japanese War clearly indicated the weakness of frontal assaults in the face of defensive infantry weapons and indirect artillery fire. However, both countries produced studies that ignored these harbingers of WWI, finding instead evidence that validated their doctrinal preference for the offensive.¹³ As Jay Luvaas points out, “you can’t answer a question that is not asked.”¹⁴ In any case, by

⁹ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lee Cate, *The Army Air Forces in WWII, Volume 1, Plans and Early Operations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), viii.

¹⁰ Holger Herwig, “Clio Deceived: Patriotic Self-Censorship in Germany After the Great War,” *International Security* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 10–21.

¹¹ Herwig, “Clio Deceived,” 43.

¹² Morton, “The Writing of Official History,” in Higham, *Official Histories*, 36.

¹³ Bailey, “Military History and the Pathology of Lessons Learned,” in Murray and Hart, *The Past as Prologue*, 183-185.

¹⁴ Jay Luvaas, “Lessons and Lessons Learned: A Historical Perspective,” in Robert E Harkavy and Neuman, Stephanie G, eds., *The Lessons of Recent Wars in the Third World, Volume 1* (Lexington, MA: DC Heath and Company, 1985), 61.

virtue of their affiliation with a government institution, critics consider official histories to be fruit of the poisonous tree.

Many organizations attempt to bolster the credibility of their official accounts by selecting authors that don't have a direct association with the military. Military organizations attempt to balance their author selection criteria with technical expertise and professional distance. The British Cabinet Office wrangled over selecting authors for the official account of Royal Air Force (RAF) Bomber Command's campaign against Germany in WWII. From the outset, RAF leadership ruled out the possibility of employing a serving officer, in order to avoid the appearance of bias. They finally settled on the team of Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland. Webster was a diplomatic historian who had no previous association with the RAF and a reputation for insisting on independent work. Frankland was a former RAF officer who completed a wartime tour in Bomber Command as a navigator and a brief stint in the Air Historical Branch. The cabinet office selected Frankland to compensate for Webster's lack of technical expertise, while preserving the independence that would lend credibility to the study.¹⁵ In a similar move, the USAF selected Wesley Craven and James Cate to complete their official history of the Army Air Forces in WWII. Both men were independent academic historians – Craven at New York University and Cate at the University of Chicago.¹⁶ The examples cited here represent ideal circumstances. Military history offices were able to dodge affronts to the objectivity of their historical accounts by selecting the right authors.

Finally, the perception of official histories varies according to the audiences that they address. Military organizations frequently commission official histories entirely for their own consumption. Whether they are classified or not, studies in this category eventually become part of the public record, and when these histories are subject to public scrutiny their parochial motives cause outsiders to question their objectivity. Commenting on the Army's official history program in Vietnam, Charles MacDonald said, "service historians write history of and for a particular service, with the mission of

¹⁵ Sebastian Cox, "Setting the Historical Agenda: Webster and Frankland and the Debate over the Strategic Bombing Offensive against Germany, 1939-1945," in Jeffrey Grey, ed., *Last Word?: Essays on Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 150–154.

¹⁶ Thomas P. Ofcansky, "The History of the United States Air Force History Program," in Barbara J. Howe and Emory L. Kemp, eds., *Public History: An Introduction* (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1986), 312.

informing the public distinctly secondary.”¹⁷ Much like Project CHECO, the Army founded its Vietnam history program to help diagnose problems with doctrine, organization, and training.¹⁸ MacDonald’s assertion brought scathing critiques from civilian academics; one such individual noted, “. . . an official historian should not allow himself to become primarily a mere technician for a government department. If he abandons the primary mission of being a sort of public trustee of truth, he is in some degree downgrading his high vocation.”¹⁹ In contrast, Craven and Cate attempted to sidestep this type of criticism by addressing themselves to the public from the outset. In their preface the authors state, “it is very important that the true facts, the causes and consequences that make our military history, should be matters of common knowledge. The present authors have tried to set down as they have understood it the story of the Army air arm for the people to whom that arm belongs.”²⁰ With varying levels of success, organizations leverage deliberate influence tactics with endemic factors that shape their historical accounts. Regardless, academics tend to believe the ‘official-ness’ of official history violates its objectivity, and official history’s apparent abuse of dearly held principles of the historical profession does not stop here.

Official military histories are frequently constructed in close proximity to the events they describe, thus inviting the next round of critiques from academic historians for being contemporary. The academic historian’s resistance to contemporary history has deep roots in the philosophy of the field. In spite of this, the military developed a traditional preference for contemporary accounts. From the academic’s perspective, the military’s affinity for contemporary history further justified their skeptical view of official history.

The academic historian’s principled stand against contemporary history is grounded in the writings of Leopold von Ranke, who is credited with being the father of the modern historical discipline. Von Ranke argued that historians required a temporal

¹⁷ Charles B. MacDonald, “Official History and the War in Vietnam,” *Military Affairs* XXXII, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 4.

¹⁸ Sinnreich, “Awkward Partners: Military History and American Military Education,” in Murray and Sinnreich, *The Past as Prologue*, 60.

¹⁹ C.P. Stacey, “Official History and the Vietnam War: A Canadian Comment,” *Military Affairs*, XXXII, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 12.

²⁰ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lee Cate, *The Army Air Forces in WWII, Volume 1, Plans and Early Operations*, viii.

removal from their subjects, which allows the historian to discern the relationships between events. He maintained that it was impossible for a historian to put events into context when “surrounded by contemporary passions and interests.”²¹ Von Ranke implored historians to base history “no longer on the reports of contemporary historians, except in so far as they were in possession of personal and immediate knowledge of facts.”²² By von Ranke’s logic, close connection with events compromised two of the historian’s sacred values – objectivity and perspective.

Coincident with von Ranke’s seminal works in the field of history, European staff colleges proliferated, basing much of their curriculum on the contemporary accounts that were so anathema to his profession. Students learned the art of war from studying the campaigns of recent ‘great captains.’²³ Carl von Clausewitz, a military thinker of equal stature to von Ranke, urged officers to study these “modern” military campaigns. He argued, “conditions were different in more distant times, with different ways of waging war, so that earlier wars have fewer practical lessons for us.”²⁴ The time horizon on useful case studies decreased in proportion with the pace of evolution in the conduct of warfare. By WWII, military history programs focused on creating historical studies in the midst of conflict. In 1942, Brigadier General Laurence Kuter, Deputy Chief of the USAAF Air Staff, asserted, “It is important that our history be recorded while it is hot.”²⁵ The practice of combat history converted key documents and eye-witness accounts into monographs within a matter of months.²⁶ This method met the dual purpose of capturing a detailed account of events for posterity and deriving practical information, which may hold transitory value.

Predictably, academics attacked historical accounts of ongoing events. According to critics these accounts do not even qualify as contemporary history; they are contemporaneous history. Leonard Krieger argues, “contemporaneous history is, indeed,

²¹ Leopold von Ranke, *The Secret of World History: Selected Writings on the Art and Science of History*, ed. Roger Wines (New York: Fordham University Press, 1981), 242–243.

²² Von Ranke, *The Secret of World History*, 72.

²³ Luvaas, “Lessons and Lessons Learned,” in Harkavy and Neuman, *The Lessons of Recent Wars in the Third World*, 54.

²⁴ Carl von Clausewitz et al., *On war* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 173.

²⁵ Robert Frank Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953* (Washington: Office of Air Force History, 1983), vii.

²⁶ F.D.G. Williams and Robert K. Wright, “When Clio Marries Mars: The Combat Historian,” in Robin Higham, ed., *The Writing of Official Military History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Pr., 1999), 138–139, 147.

a contradiction in terms: what is going on now is contemporaneous but it is not history. To become history, something must have stopped, must have reached its terminal point.”²⁷ Much like von Ranke, Krieger asserts that the lack of finality calls the objectivity into question and impairs the author’s ability to make contextual connections. Marc Bloch offers an alternative take on the issue, “Some who consider that the most recent events are unsuitable for all really objective research just because they are recent, wish only to spare Clio’s chastity from the profanation of present controversy . . . This is to rate our self- control rather low. It also quite overlooks that, once an emotional chord has been struck the line between the present and past is no longer strictly regulated by a mathematically measurable chronology.”²⁸ As Bloch points out, skeptics should question the objectivity and perspective of contemporary historical works, but histories published well after the events they describe should be subject to the same kind of scrutiny.

Reasonable authors of official history acknowledge the objections to contemporary studies. Martin Blumenson, a former staff historian with the Army’s official history office, describes three “insoluble problems” of contemporary history – deciding what is important, achieving perspective, and the sheer quantity of records.²⁹ Craven and Cate recognized similar problems constructing their study of the USAAF. Their preface describes the dilemma of “rapidly accumulating records of varied activity.” In response their team had to develop a plan to select the most historically significant evidence and assemble it in a cogent manner. In the end, profession historians had to make a judgment call.³⁰ Also in line with Blumenson’s problems, Charles MacDonald admitted the difficulty in gaining the perspective necessary to write the Army’s official history of the Vietnam War. Vietnam did not resemble the more conventional wars of the past. There were no set piece battles, front lines, or obvious campaigns. The authors resorted to delineating phases, which carried the inherent difficulty in determining the start and end dates for each period. He also noted the difficulty of connecting military events to the political environment, which was influencing operations in unprecedented

²⁷ Leonard Krieger, “Official History and the War in Vietnam: Comment,” 19.

²⁸ Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1953), 37.

²⁹ Martin Blumenson, “Can Official History Be Honest History?”, in Higham, *Official Histories: Essays and Bibliographies from Around the World*, 41.

³⁰ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lee Cate, *The Army Air Forces in WWII, Volume 1, Plans and Early Operations*, x.

ways.³¹ Official military historians do not attempt to dodge the spears thrown at their contemporary accounts. Instead, they acknowledge the imperfections and treat them as a necessary evil to meet their institution's needs.

Academic historians aim their final volley of critique at the military's insistence that official histories serve some practical purpose. In organizations that seem to be chronically strapped for cash, military commanders consistently demand that historians justify their existence.³² On the final balance sheet the military measures official history's value by its ability to furnish lessons applicable to present and anticipated problems.³³ Warren Trest, a 34 year veteran of the Air Force history program commented, "I never met a commander who wasn't interested in history as long as it was timely and you could prove the value. If not it was often discounted."³⁴ Air Force history regulations institutionalized the practical requirements for official history. The "Manual for Air Force Historians," AFR 210-1, stated, "Military history, by revealing lessons which have been learned, enables military and civilian leaders to approach problems more intelligently."³⁵ The manual also reminded the official historian that, "his work is not designed solely to produce 'history for history's sake' but to have both immediate and long range utility."³⁶ Many military commanders overlook history's intrinsic value derived from consciousness of the complex circumstances that led to the present. Instead, they insist that history create value beyond this in the form of practical lessons.

The USAF's German Air Force Monograph Project (Karlsruhe Project) is a poignant example of this phenomenon. Between 1952 and 1958, the Air Force employed former Luftwaffe officers to write monographs on their WWII experience. The monograph topics ranged from discussions of German leadership to airlift operations to experiences on the Eastern Front. Much to the USAF's disappointment, the authors tended to produce narrative accounts devoid any specific analysis or lessons learned. The

³¹ Charles B. MacDonald, "Official History and the War in Vietnam," 7-9.

³² Ed Drea, "Change Becomes Continuity: The Start of the US Army's 'Green Back' Series," in Jeffrey Grey, *Last Word?: Essays on Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth*, 89-90.

³³ Jay Luvaas, "Military History: Is It Still Practicable?," *Parameters* XXV, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 83.

³⁴ Warren Trest, interview with the author, 23 January 2013.

³⁵ Air Force Manual 210-1, 30 Aug 1963, K168.1321-1, Iris No. 917288, "Air Force Manual 210-1, Manual for Air Force Historians," AFHRA, 1.

³⁶ Air Force Manual 210-1, 30 Aug 1963, 7.

Air Force eventually cut funding to the project, publishing only 12 of 40 monographs.³⁷ Ryan Shaughnessy argues that Air Force leaders discounted whatever lessons could be drawn from the studies because of dramatic leaps in aircraft technology.³⁸ The Karlsruhe Project's value to the USAF depreciated because the studies were not explicitly instructive and seemed to be inapplicable in light of different circumstances.

The military penchant for historical lessons cuts at another deep root of the professional history tradition. Von Ranke established a precedent that history should “seek only to show what actually happened.”³⁹ Von Ranke shunned the practice of judging past events to create generalizations that forecast historical trends into the future. He opted instead to emphasize the unrepeatable context that surrounds historical events.⁴⁰ The historian John Lewis Gaddis describes this as an “ecological view of reality” in which “interconnections matter more than the enshrinement of particular variables.”⁴¹ Gaddis states that historians believe in “contingent causation not categorical causation.”⁴² Professional historians hold a wide range of opinions on whether their rightful task lies in discerning the most significant causes or reveling in their complexity. Regardless of where they stand on this issue, Michael Howard points out, “historians find it as difficult as anyone else to distinguish between the significant and the transitory in contemporary efforts to determine when an event is purely fortuitous or indicative of a long term trend.”⁴³ He describes history as “an inexhaustible storehouse of events from which we can prove anything or its contrary.”⁴⁴ These widely held principles form a philosophical base, which is anathema to the belief that generalizations from the past can lead to unambiguous lessons for the future.

Finally, academic historians take issue with the neatly ordered official histories that blaze the path for unequivocal conclusions. J.F.C. Fuller was the leading proponent for these ‘scientific’ accounts of military history. He argued, “if we are denied a science

³⁷ Ryan Shaughnessy, *No Sense in Dwelling on the Past? The Fate of the US Air Force's German Air Force Monograph Project, 1952-1969* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2011), xxi–xxvi.

³⁸ Shaughnessy, *No Sense in Dwelling on the Past?*, xxvi–xxvii.

³⁹ Von Ranke, *The Secret of World History*, 58.

⁴⁰ Von Ranke, *The Secret of World History*, 58.

⁴¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 54–65.

⁴² Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 64.

⁴³ Michael Howard, *The Lessons of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 2.

⁴⁴ Howard, *The Lessons of History*, 11.

of war, we can have no true history of war, only a terrible and impassioned drama. . . we do not want drama; we want truth.”⁴⁵ Official historians have a duty to unravel the complex web of battlefield events to create a digestible account. However when they take this to an extreme they have a potential to distort the true nature of war.⁴⁶ Michael Howard poignantly writes, “the tidy accounts military historians give of battles, with generals imposing their will on the battlefield, with neat little blocks and arrows moving in a rational and orderly way, with the principles of war being meticulously illustrated, are an almost blasphemous travesty of the chaotic truth . . . we would do well not to take this orderly account even for an approximation to what really happened, much less base any conclusions on it for the future.”⁴⁷ Official histories must strike a balance between oversimplification and showing “what really happened.” Accounts which err on the ‘scientific’ side for the sake of deriving practical lessons may be self defeating, as they will leave the military professional unprepared for the reality of combat.

In light of this cacophony of criticism of official history, Project CHECO appears to be damned from the outset. However as Jeffrey Grey points out, “official histories are often judged by standards that are applied nowhere else and against which most other historical writing would likewise fail to measure.”⁴⁸ Instead of creating an impossible hurdle, the critiques generate several key questions, which the following chapters will attempt to answer. What factors may have impinged on the CHECO authors’ academic freedom? Did the official guidance for the program or its general association with the Air Force skew the objectivity of the CHECO reports? To what extent were the CHECO authors able to put events into historical context, and were they influenced in any undue manner by contentious debates in the airpower community? What kinds of lessons, explicit or implicit, did the reports produce, and did the Air Force take full advantage of the information at hand? Chapter One will provide a narrative account of the program, and attempt to shed light on these questions through the story of key individuals, documents, and events that shaped CHECO. Chapter Two will evaluate four

⁴⁵ J.F.C. Fuller, *The Foundations of the Science of War* (Ft Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1993), 21.

⁴⁶ Luvaas, “Military History: Is It Still Practicable?,” 89.

⁴⁷ Michael Howard, “The Use and Abuse of Military History,” *Parameters* XI, no. 1 (March 1981): 12.

⁴⁸ Jeffrey Grey, *Last Word?: Essays on Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth*, xi.

representative CHECO reports, attempting to discern the level of objectivity, criticism, and official utility found in the projects end-state product. The preceding questions should provide a balanced evaluation of CHECO as well as a reasonable assessment of how well the project met its stated aim.

CHAPTER 1

A History of Project CHECO

CHECO Begins, 1962 - 1964

The point men for Project CHECO, Major Thomas Hickman and Mr. Joseph Grainger, arrived at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, South Vietnam on October 3, 1962. Their office space consisted of two tables in a 16 by 32 foot screen-walled tent on the airfield. They shared the space with eight other personnel from the Information Office, including a Vietnamese typist who did not have a security clearance. The 2nd Air Division (ADVON) staff gave them a typewriter with a French keyboard and a broken tape recorder to produce their reports. They did not have a safe to store classified documents, much less the ability to discuss classified material around the parade of reporters and photographers interacting with the public affairs officers. To make matters worse, the classified orders explaining their purpose would not arrive at 2nd ADVON for another week.¹ ADVON staff looked at the pair suspiciously when they explained their direct line to the Air Staff.² Hickman and Grainger had scant resources, and they were acutely aware that the theater was bleeding vital operational experience in the minds of departing personnel.³ In spite of these difficulties, the two pioneers carved out a humble salient that grew into a substantial breakthrough for CHECO over the next two years.

Grainger and Hickman's arrival was precipitated by changes in American policy toward Vietnam. The Kennedy Administration suffered multiple setbacks in the Cold War during 1961. In April 1961 the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba failed. On August 13, 1961 the Soviets constructed the Berlin Wall.⁴ Viet Cong numbers in South Vietnam doubled to 4,000 in 1961, and in September they captured a provincial capital 55 miles from Saigon.⁵ The Administration faced dubious prospects for success in the Communist

¹ Maj Thomas J. Hickman, Chief CHECO Team in SEA, to Mr. Joseph W. Angell, Jr., AFCHO, Progress Report, CHECO Project, 2 November 1962, K717.062-1, IRIS No. 898520, "CHECO Historical Progress Reports, October 1962 – December 1964," AFHRA.

² Warren A. Trest, "Projects CHECO and Corona Harvest: Keys to the Air Force's Southeast Asia Memory Bank," *Aerospace Historian* 33, no. 2 (June 1986): 116.

³ Hickman to Angell, Progress Report, CHECO Project, 2 November 1962.

⁴ George C Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), 83–87.

⁵ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 88.

insurgencies of Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia, in which they were unwilling to intervene militarily. Kennedy pinned his Cold War credibility in Southeast Asia on a firm stand in South Vietnam. On February 8, 1962 the Administration created Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), the formal military organization that would lead the war effort until the US withdrawal in 1973. American advisors in Vietnam tripled from 3,205 in December 1961 to over 9,000 by the end of 1962.⁶

The USAF role in South Vietnam escalated along with increasing US involvement. In 1961, the USAF established an air advisory program known as Farm Gate. Farm Gate employed 1940s vintage C-47s, T-28s, and B-26s to train South Vietnamese aviators and provide air cover for military operations against the Viet Cong.⁷ In 1962 the Air Force established a permanent presence at Tan Son Nhut Air Base and created the 2nd ADVON underneath MACV. The headquarters element brought the disorganized air effort under the Tactical Air Control System (TACS), which attempted to centralize control of air strikes in order to keep pace with the increased intensity of operations.⁸ The USAF also began operations out of Pleiku, Bien Hoa, and Da Nang, and deployed regular squadrons of C-123s, RF-101s, and O-1s. In early 1963, the USAF converted the ad hoc Farm Gate advisory effort into the more regular 1st Air Commando Squadron. Over the next year, the air operations tempo surged to meet the demand of supporting Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) offensives.⁹

In light of the new USAF posture in Vietnam, Lt Gen Thomas Moorman, the Vice Commander of Pacific Air Force (PACAF), composed a memorandum on March 2, 1962, which marked the first move toward Project CHECO. Moorman noted, “The USAF operation in S.E. Asia has opened a new and unique chapter in the employment of airpower. In S.E. Asia we are experimenting with new forces, new tactics and techniques, new organization, new policies, new material and new methods to combat a shrewd and elusive enemy. In addition, we are finding it necessary to revert to some

⁶ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 95.

⁷ John Schligh, *A War Too Long: The USAF in Southeast Asia, 1961-1975* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1996), 5–6.

⁸ Schligh, *A War Too Long*, 9.

⁹ Schligh, *A War Too Long*, 10–11.

tactics, techniques, material, previously considered outdated.”¹⁰ Moorman recognized that Vietnam air operations had the potential to change future Department of Defense (DoD) and national policy toward the Air Force. Although he identified the value of judging the events in retrospect, he also felt that conventional histories would fail to adequately or promptly capture information that could be immediately applied. Consequently, Moorman recommended, “Provision be made now for the compilation, analysis, presentation, and documentation of USAF activity in S.E. Asia with aim of producing an end product on a timely basis.”¹¹

The Air Staff responded to Moorman’s request in June 1962, creating the Current Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations (CHECO). The staff stipulated that CHECO should be “readily responsive to the needs of Headquarters USAF for timely and analytical studies of operations.”¹² The staff allocated one officer and one civilian to PACAF headquarters and one officer and one civilian to the 2nd ADVON. The mix of officers and civilians gave CHECO a balance of operational experience and professional historical analysis.¹³ CHECO had a convoluted chain of command that did not improve with time. (reference Appendix C, Figure 6 for CHECO organization chart) The Air Staff interacted with the project through the USAF Historical Division Liaison Office, occupied by Mr. Joe Angell in 1962. The staff established CHECO as an extension of the USAF Historical Program, which ceded some guidance for the project to the Historical Division at the Air University. However, Headquarters PACAF retained operational and administrative control of the program.¹⁴ At both the PACAF and 2nd ADVON echelons, CHECO fell into the standard chain of command position for official history offices at the time under the Information Office, currently known as public affairs.

¹⁰ Lt Gen Thomas S. Moorman, Vice Commander in Chief PACAF, to Chief of Staff USAF and Air University, Maxwell AFB, 2 March 1962, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

¹¹ Moorman to Chief of Staff and Air University, 2 March 1962.

¹² Col W.J. Meng, Executive to the Vice Chief of Staff, USAF, to PACAF, Current Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations, 30 June 1962, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

¹³ Summary of Air Staff Position on PACAF Proposal for Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations, 14 June 1962, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

¹⁴ Meng to PACAF, Current Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations, 30 June 1962.

PACAF headquarters drafted orders for the program on October 5, 1962. PACAF tapped Lt Col Donald F. Martin and Mr. Carl Clever to fill the CHECO positions in Hawaii, and they hired Hickman and Grainger for the jobs in Saigon. Their orders specified four primary tasks: “monthly progress reports, special studies on critical areas, periodic comprehensive semi-annual histories of 2nd ADVON, and recap studies covering particular areas, functions, and problems.”¹⁵ PACAF predicted two years for project completion. Although the initial orders spelled out essential dates, personnel, and responsibility, they painted a vague picture of the project’s overall purpose. Hickman and Grainger received briefs before departing the US from the responsible staff agencies at HQ USAF, AFOOP (Counterinsurgency Division) and AFXPD (Cold War Division). AFXPD ultimately took control of the program. Remarkably, the orders stated, “Inauguration of the CHECO project will be without fanfare and information will be kept within Air Force channels.”¹⁶ This intimates that the Air Force had a hidden agenda for the program, which became more obvious as Hickman and Grainger set up operations.

After several months of battling for administrative support, Hickman and Grainger got down to business. The two men established a sound working relationship with 2nd ADVON and MACV, which granted them access to staff meetings and a wealth of documents on air operations.¹⁷ In addition, they conducted interviews with key Army and Air Force officers around the theater to include Forward Air Controllers (FACs), Air Liaison Officers (ALOs), and Army aviators. Interview questions centered on tactical details of the individuals’ experience with a strong emphasis on Vietnamese and sister service counterparts.¹⁸ The team consolidated information in brief monthly status reports, never more than ten pages. Because they did not have the manpower or resources to compile larger studies, the monthly reports and their supporting documents were the program’s sole output for the next two years.

The monthly CHECO status reports covered a broad swath of subjects in line with their mission to capture unique aspects of counterinsurgency operations. Reports in this

¹⁵ Message, PFDAL 109, PACAF, to 2nd ADVON, 5 October 1962, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 517530, “PACAF Msg, Subj: Current Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations,” AFHRA.

¹⁶ Message, PFDAL 109, PACAF, to 2nd ADVON, 5 October 1962.

¹⁷ “CHECO Historical Progress Reports, October 1962 – December 1964,” K717.062-1, IRIS No. 898520, AFHRA.

¹⁸ Southeast Asia Studies and Interviews by Joseph W. Grainger and Others, 6 June 1964, K717.0414-59 C.2, IRIS No. 1010376, AFHRA.

category included topics such as Vietnam Air Force (VNAF) Night Strike Capability, Psychological Aspects of Tactical Air Operations, and Early Ranch Hand Operations.¹⁹ The Saigon team maintained a steady flow of information on counterinsurgency related topics, but the reports developed a consistent theme that betrayed the Air Force's ulterior motive for Project CHECO. In the first substantive status report on April 30, 1963, Grainger wrote a comparison of the YC-123 and the Army's CV-2 Caribou.²⁰ This was the first wave in a flood of information detailing Army efforts to develop an organic Counterinsurgency (COIN) aviation capability. Subsequent status reports discussed armaments on the AV-1 Mohawk close support aircraft, helicopter assault operations, and the results of official Army studies on aviation in COIN operations.²¹ The CHECO Team also gathered evidence to counter Army attacks on Air Force programs like the TACS.²²

CHECO became an Air Force weapon in the fierce inter-service battle with the Army over roles and missions in Southeast Asia. In 1962 the Army released the results of the Tactical Mobility Requirements Board (also known as the Howze Board). Howze Board members conducted "tactical experiments" with fixed and rotary wing aircraft to provide Army Air Mobile Divisions with an organic airlift, reconnaissance, and CAS capability.²³ Vietnam became the proving ground for Army aviation concepts. The Army employed fixed wing AV-1 Mohawks for armed reconnaissance, and they used armed UH-1 helicopters to support troops in contact. Both threatened to usurp the USAF's Close Air Support (CAS) mission. The Army also challenged the USAF's tactical airlift capability with the CV-2 Caribou.²⁴ In 1962 the Army created a rival to Project CHECO known as the Army Concept Team in Vietnam (ACTIV). ACTIV was a mix of 60 officers and scientists commissioned to evaluate Army doctrine, tactics, and

¹⁹ "CHECO Historical Progress Reports, October 1962 – December 1964."

²⁰ Joseph Grainger, CHECO Team in SEA, to Mr. Joseph W. Angell, Jr., AFCHO, Progress Report, CHECO Project, 30 April 1963, K717.062-1, IRIS No. 898520, "CHECO Historical Progress Reports, October 1962 – December 1964," AFHRA.

²¹ "CHECO Historical Progress Reports, October 1962 – December 1964."

²² Maj Dean S. Gaushe, Chief CHECO Team in SEA, to Lt Col Donald Martin, PACAF CHECO, Progress Report, CHECO Project, October 1963, K717.062-1, IRIS No. 898520, "CHECO Historical Progress Reports, October 1962 – December 1964," AFHRA.

²³ J.A. Stockfish, *The 1962 Howze Board and Army Concept Developments* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1994), 17–18.

²⁴ Ian Horwood, *Interservice Rivalry and Airpower in the Vietnam War* (Ft Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2009), 50–54.

material under field conditions.²⁵ Unofficially, CHECO created the evidentiary basis for the Air Force to hold its position in the roles and missions debate. Air Staff representatives instructed CHECO hires to “watch what the other side was doing, the other side being the Army.”²⁶ Although ACTIV reports were close hold Army products, CHECO personnel frequently acquired them through back channels and sent them with the monthly status reports. Early participants referred to themselves as “the first historical spooks in Air Force history.”²⁷ CHECO’s parochial purpose did not dominate its work by any means, but the Air Force continued to use CHECO reports to back its position in wartime confrontations with the other services.

CHECO’s two-year tenure was due to expire in the middle of 1964 with little to show for the effort except the collection of monthly status reports. Fortuitously, the CHECO office at PACAF delivered a landmark report that altered the program’s course. Lt Col Donald Martin published the first official CHECO report on May 31, 1964. The six-volume report covered the history of USAF involvement in Southeast Asia (SEA) from October 1961 to December 1963. The report was based on 30,000 documents collected by the CHECO team in Vietnam, and it contained 650 pages of narrative, 450 supporting documents, and 800 footnotes.²⁸ The report thoroughly covered many issues initially identified in the monthly CHECO status reports. Martin noted the challenges of an emboldened Viet Cong (VC) insurgency coupled with a weak US commitment to coercive military action. The report also described the doctrinal controversy between the Air Force and the Army, and it notably concluded that the USAF was at a material disadvantage vis-a-vis the Army’s aircraft, which were designed expressly for the COIN role.²⁹

²⁵ Dennis J. Vetock, *Lessons Learned: A History of US Army Lesson Learning* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army Military History Institute, 1988), 100. ACTIV continued operations throughout the war, eventually producing 600 studies.

²⁶ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 29 November 1987, K239.0512-1856, IRIS No. 1095302, AFHRA.

²⁷ Ken Sams, “Operation CHECO,” in Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams, K239.0512-1856, IRIS No. 1095302, AFHRA.

²⁸ Col Reade Tilley, Director of Information PACAF, to General Martin, 28 December 1964, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

²⁹ CHECO - Abstract - History: War in Vietnam, 1961-1963, 31 May 1964, K717.0413-30, IRIS No. 1071562, AFHRA.

Headquarters Air Force responded favorably to the report and made initial moves to alter CHECO's mandate. The Air Force Chief of Staff (CSAF), General Curtis LeMay, noted that the report provided "useful supplemental and additional documentation of USAF efforts of particular value."³⁰ While the staff was enthusiastic about the initial report, they lamented that the material augmented standard historical writing instead of producing the timely analysis of tactics, equipment, and doctrine, which was the program's intended purpose.³¹ The Air Staff elected to extend CHECO duration past the initial two-year period, and they requested special monographs combining documentation and analysis on a quarterly and semi-annual basis. In addition, the staff broadened CHECO's mandate to include the operations of Detachment 6 at Udorn, Thailand and Yankee Team Operations in Laos.³² In order to meet the challenge levied by the Air Staff, the PACAF staff proposed an increase in CHECO manning to 10 spaces in Saigon.³³ The requests met resistance from Air Force leadership who responded that the team should accomplish the mission "within available resources."³⁴ Project CHECO had a renewed charter, but it took major changes in air operations and more hard-hitting material from the team in Saigon to force further investment in the program.

CHECO Hits Its Stride, 1965-1968

US involvement in Vietnam escalated significantly in 1965, and the consequent changes in USAF posture gave CHECO a boost. On the night of August 2nd and allegedly again the night of August 4th 1964, North Vietnamese boats engaged US Navy warships in the Gulf of Tonkin. These incidents prompted Congress to issue the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution on August 7, 1964, authorizing the use of conventional armed forces to defend South Vietnam.³⁵ Within days of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, President

³⁰ Message PFCVC 00888, From CSAF to PACAF, 17 October 1964, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522, "CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969," AFHRA.

³¹ Lt Gen Thomas S. Moorman, Vice Commander in Chief, PACAF, to 2nd ADVON, 8 January 1965, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522, "CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969," AFHRA.

³² Message PFCVC 00888, From CSAF to PACAF, 17 October 1964.

³³ Col Reade Tilley, Director of Information PACAF, to General Martin, 28 December 1964, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522, "CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969," AFHRA.

³⁴ Message VC 00027, From 13th Air Force to Lt Gen Thomas Moorman, Vice Commander in Chief PACAF, Subject: Improved Reporting and Documentation of Air Activity in RVN, 10 Mar 1965, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522, "CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969," AFHRA.

³⁵ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 133-137.

Lyndon Baines Johnson (more popularly known as “LBJ”) ordered the first jet aircraft into the theater. F-100s, F-102s, F-105s, and B-57s deployed to airbases throughout South Vietnam. The jets offered a lucrative target for the Communist forces, and the VC cashed in with an attack on the B-57s at Bien Hoa on November 1, 1964. The Air Force responded in December with an air campaign against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the panhandle of Laos.³⁶ These actions started a cycle of challenge and response actions between the US and Communist forces. After VC attacks on US forces at Pleiku and Qui Nhon in February 1965, LBJ authorized a series of retaliatory air raids in North Vietnam known as Operation Flaming Dart. The USAF flew 49 sorties on 7 February and 99 more on 11 February. The raids turned into a sustained air campaign, which officially became Operation Rolling Thunder on February 26, 1965.³⁷ In July, Johnson committed 100,000 ground troops to defend South Vietnam, with an additional 100,000 to follow in 1966.³⁸ The Air Force became fully engaged in combat missions to support the massive influx of military effort into Southeast Asia. This dramatic leap in the pace of military operations gave CHECO ample fodder for incisive reports.

On March 11, 1965 the CHECO Team in Saigon published their next milestone report - Expository Paper #1, “Punitive Air Strikes.” As the title implies, the report was a speculative position paper on the consequences of the limited air raids at the beginning of 1965. The paper opened with an acute observation, “One may say with some confidence that the net result of our air attacks on North Vietnam and Laos, whether good or bad, will greatly influence the future composition and force structure of US air power, its utility in the pursuit of political objectives, the willingness of the Executive to employ it, and public understanding and acceptance of aerospace power for some years to come.”³⁹ In a passage frequently cited by later message traffic, the author asserted, “For the past 10-15 years we have repeatedly asked for a chance to show what air power could do. Now we are having our ‘day in court.’ When the verdict is in we shall [have] little chance for appeal. Whatever the outcome, the popular impression will undoubtedly be

³⁶ Schlight, *A War Too Long*, 17–19.

³⁷ Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Airpower, The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 58–63.

³⁸ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 155.

³⁹ Project CHECO, Expository Paper #1, 11 March 1965, K717.041-1, IRIS No. 898532, AFHRA.

that air power had been given ample opportunity to prove its thesis.”⁴⁰ The report listed three possible outcomes for the war in SEA: internal collapse of the resistance followed by US withdrawal and Communist takeover, a negotiated settlement with the Communists, or VC defeat at the hands of US and Republic of Vietnam (RVN) forces. In all cases, the report stated that airpower proponents need answers to the critics of the efficacy of their military instrument.⁴¹

Expository Paper #1 elicited a definitive response from Headquarters Air Force, with a decisive impact on Project CHECO. “Punitive Air Strikes” landed on the desk of General John P. McConnell, CSAF, with a letter from General Hunter Harris, PACAF Commander. General Harris echoed the concerns expressed in the CHECO report regarding the “post-mortem” judgment against air power. Harris wrote, “It troubles me that for all of our military superiority we have been out-maneuvered by a third class power. I can’t help but believe that a defeat or poor settlement in RVN will tend to relegate the military instrument to an essentially defensive role aimed primarily at forestalling a direct attack upon the U.S.”⁴² Harris pointed out that the Congressmen and columnists were already taking sides, and he offered PACAF’s assistance in collecting evidence for the inevitable defense.⁴³ McConnell accepted the offer and engaged the Air Staff to make it happen. McConnell’s staff tasked Project CHECO with “a formal effort to document the part airpower played in setting the terms of settlement or at least to produce a strengthened position at the negotiation table.”⁴⁴ The staff approved the additional manpower requested by PACAF in late 1964 and created a document titled “Terms of Reference for CHECO Study on the Role of Air Power in the Southeast Asia Conflict.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Project CHECO, Expository Paper #1.

⁴¹ Project CHECO, Expository Paper #1.

⁴² Letter General Hunter Harris, Commander in Chief, PACAF to General J.P. McConnell, CSAF, 12 March 1965 in Project CHECO, Expository Paper #1.

⁴³ Letter General Hunter Harris, Commander in Chief, PACAF to General J.P. McConnell, CSAF, 12 March 1965. A New York Times article titled, “Debate Over Airpower, Attacks Revive Pentagon Controversy on Value of Bombing in Limited Wars.” by Jack Raymond, 3 March 1965, accompanied Harris’ letter. Raymond describes the USAF’s effectiveness in such situations as “over-rated.”

⁴⁴ Memorandum From Major General Seth J. McKee, Director of Plans, AFXPDR, Subject: Role of Airpower in the Southeast Asia Conflict, 6 May 1965, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

⁴⁵ Memorandum, AFXPDR, Role of Airpower in the Southeast Asia Conflict, 6 May 1965.

The 1965 Terms of Reference (TORs) codified CHECO's responsibility to document and analyze air operations in SEA. The de facto regulation spelled out a new purpose, expanded scope, and specific guidance. According to the document, CHECO's purpose was not only to document the role of airpower in SEA, but it was also instructed to "interpret these facts in a manner which will illuminate the Air Force doctrine, clarify it, provide (if necessary) for its refinement and modification, and delineate the operational conditions which lend themselves to successful application of doctrine in counterinsurgency situations."⁴⁶ In the revised scope, the Air Staff charged CHECO with examining the extent to which USAF doctrine was "on trial" and whether their doctrine was successful or unsuccessful. If airpower was unsuccessful, the team was charged with identifying the factors that made it so and providing suggestions for improvement. Finally the staff issued specific guidance on topics to be covered, including: command and control arrangements, weapons systems, Air Force imposed restrictions, restraints – presidential, Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Commander in Chief Pacific Command (CINCPAC), Commander US Military Assistance Command Vietnam (COMUSMACV), rules of engagement, roles and missions, and testing in RVN.⁴⁷

On July 15, 1965, CHECO published another influential report, "Escalation of the War in SEA, Jul-Dec 1964," authored by Kenneth Sams, a career civil servant in the Air Force official history program. Joe Angell hired Sams in May 1964 as chief of project CHECO in SEA, a post he held until 1971.⁴⁸ Sams' first report was based on a collection of high-level communications, classified "Top Secret," between MACV, PACAF, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and OSD. An Army drinking buddy unwittingly granted Sams access to the document archive at MACV headquarters without realizing

⁴⁶ Terms of Reference for CHECO Study on the Role of Air Power in the Southeast Asia Conflict, 6 May 1965, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 517531, "Role of Airpower in the Southeast Asia Conflict CHECO Information, Mar – May 1965," AFHRA.

⁴⁷ Terms of Reference for CHECO Study on the Role of Air Power in the Southeast Asia Conflict, 6 May 1965.

⁴⁸ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 1. Some interesting side notes on personnel swaps: Maj Hickman left Saigon after only two months with a broken leg. Joe Grainger left the program in less than a year after assuming the CHECO job for a position with the Agency for International Development. Tragically, the VC captured him in August 1964, and he was killed in January 1965 after an attempted escape. For more, see Warren A. Trest. "Projects CHECO and Corona Harvest: Keys to the Air Force's Southeast Asia Memory Bank." *Aerospace Historian* 33, no. 2 (June 1986): 114–120.

the gravity of the material. According to Sams, the report read like an early version of the Pentagon Papers.⁴⁹ The report contrasted military leadership's bleak prospects for success in SEA with their deliberate steps to intensify operations.⁵⁰ The report closed with a chapter entitled "Outlook for 1965," highlighting the need for increased doses of US airpower to counter the growing VC strength while compensating for ARVN weakness.⁵¹ Sams maintained that this report, not its predecessors, created the impetus for increased support to CHECO.⁵² While the historical record does not explicitly support his contention, "Escalation of the War" certainly set a standard for the format of following CHECO reports.

CHECO's manpower increased appreciably between the fall of 1965 and the beginning of 1966, facilitating a more defined organizational structure within the project. Project CHECO assignments seemed to be haphazard. Much to Sams' dismay, the PACAF CHECO office retained hiring authority for the Saigon team. They assigned General Schedule (GS) civilians to the project from the pool of official historians throughout the Air Force. In general, the official historians who worked on the project had bachelor's degrees in the liberal arts, but the Air Force history program did not have a training program.⁵³ Authors felt that their academic training in research and writing afforded them all of the expertise they needed to carry out CHECO's mission.⁵⁴ As one might expect, the CHECO authors represented the spectrum of capability. There did not seem to be a consistent set of hiring criteria, and Sams recalled several civilian hires that were "real lemons."⁵⁵ The military officers that worked at CHECO were brought in because of their tactical experience. Some officers stayed on a temporary basis for as little as two months to write a single report, and others stayed for a year after completing their complement of combat sorties over Vietnam. For example, Captain Leo Vining

⁴⁹ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 9-10.

⁵⁰ Project CHECO, Southeast Asia Report, Escalation of the War, July – December 1964, 15 July 1965, K717.0414-17, IRIS No. 1103494, AFHRA, 18-20. According to Sams the report made its way to McNamara's desk. All copies were immediately recalled and redacted to remove material, which elevated the report beyond the Top Secret level of classification.

⁵¹ Escalation of the War, July – December 1964, 246-254.

⁵² Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 10.

⁵³ Warren Trest, interview with the author, 23 January 2013.

⁵⁴ Robert Burch, interview with the author, 28 February 2013, John Schlight, email to the author, 21 February 2013, Philip Caine, email to the author, 22 February 2013.

⁵⁵ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 15-17.

spent a year in the CHECO office after completing 120 missions in the F-100, while Major David Mets went to CHECO for a two month Temporary Duty (TDY) from his C-130 squadron in Thailand.⁵⁶ Sams organized the influx of personnel into three divisions: in-country operations, out-country operations, and special studies.⁵⁷ The increase in manning also allowed Sams to open the CHECO office at Udorn Royal Thai Air Base (RTAB) in April 1965.⁵⁸

Internal changes to the CHECO structure accompanied adjustments to the project's position in the headquarters chain of command. In June 1965, CHECO moved from the Information Office to the Director of Plans and Operations for Tactical Evaluation.⁵⁹ The change obviated historians' concerns regarding the undue emphasis placed on portraying the Air Force in the best light caused by association with the Information Office.⁶⁰ With the move, CHECO took its place in a permanent building across from headquarters as one of four divisions under the Tactical Air Analysis Center, which also included offices for Operations Research, Combat Analysis, and Special Combat Analysis. (reference Appendix C, Figure 7 for the updated organization chart) Initially, CHECO maintained an affiliation with the 7th Air Force official history office, which carried the responsibility to write a standard narrative account of the command on a semi-annual basis. Since this did not fit into the project's Air Staff charter, Sams successfully lobbied to eliminate this connection in 1967.⁶¹ The bulk of the Tactical Air Analysis Center concerned itself with what happened today and yesterday. They compiled quantified results of the air effort with brief discussions of trends, tactics, and operational effectiveness in a biweekly report titled "Summary of Air Operations, Southeast Asia." In contrast, CHECO looked 30 days to six months in the past, placing events in context and transforming quantitative analysis into more digestible narrative

⁵⁶ William L. Brantley, "CHECO Is Its Name," *The Airman* XII, no. 7 (July 1968): 33, and David Mets, email to the author, 23 January 2013.

⁵⁷ CHECO Since 1962, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898522, "CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969," AFHRA.

⁵⁸ Memorandum, Col Harold Wood, Director of Ops Analysis, HQ 7AF, to 7th AF DO, Subject: CHECO Historical Team at Udorn, 25 October 1966, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898523, "CHECO Historical Letters and Messages, Jun 62 – Dec 68," AFHRA.

⁵⁹ Memorandum, from Col Reade Tilley, Director of Information, PACAF, Subject: Transfer of CHECO Responsibilities, 6 July 1965, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522, "CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969," AFHRA.

⁶⁰ Memorandum, from Max Rosenburg, AFCHO, Subject: Trip Report Pacific Area 12 Mar – 18 Apr 1967, 22 May 1967, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898521, "CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968," AFHRA.

⁶¹ Warren Trest, interview with the author, 23 January 2013.

monographs.⁶² The organizational change gave CHECO a more forceful mandate to write reports, and it put a more focused spotlight on the lessons generated from their reports.⁶³ In a larger sense, this move reflected USAF leadership's renewed interest in the utility of historical studies.

Coincident with the change from 2nd ADVON to 7th Air Force in April 1966, the Air Staff issued Revised Terms of Reference for Project CHECO that made slight changes to the program's guidance. The new document formalized two modifications to the CHECO acronym, changing the project's title to Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Combat Operations. The word "Contemporary" replaced the word "Current," "to provide a more accurate description of the specialized responsibility and function of the project." "Combat" replaced "Counterinsurgency" to reflect the expanded scope of the project beyond unconventional operations.⁶⁴ Both changes were more semantic than substantive and did not make a difference in the project's reporting. The new document did not appreciably change the purpose, scope, or guidance, but the Air Staff instruction added a thinly veiled requirement to promote Air Force interests. The document states, "Use of quotes, messages, letters, and other authentic documentation reflecting favorably on the Air Force should be optimized when appropriate." The document later directs, "There will be an accumulation of certain information, data, and experiences which for various reasons are not suitable for wide distribution, i.e., untimeliness, contrary to AF interests, unsupportability in joint arena, lack of appropriate documentation, could be interpreted as vitriolic, etc. . . . When this type of material has usefulness to the Air Force family, then it should be refined, properly documented, and forwarded with an appropriate classification assigned – 'Air Force Eyes Only'."⁶⁵ In spite of CHECO's physical move away from the Information Office, the Air Force clearly expected the project to levy criticism judiciously and keep it under wraps.

The abundant Air Staff guidance had very little effect on the CHECO authors. Most CHECO participants were unaware that such documents existed, and the authors

⁶² Lt Col Donald F. Martin, Talking Paper on Tactical Evaluation System, 16 September 1965, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522, "CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969," AFHRA.

⁶³ Memorandum, from Rosenburg, AFCHO, Subject: Trip Report Pacific Area 12 Mar – 18 Apr 1967, 22 May 1967.

⁶⁴ Revised Terms of Reference for Project CHECO, 15 April 1966, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898522, "CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969," AFHRA.

⁶⁵ Revised Terms of Reference for Project CHECO, 15 April 1966.

believed that they were simply writing the history of the war as it unfolded.⁶⁶ Warren Trest stated, “CHECO was mostly history.” He asserted that historians were uniquely equipped to put wartime events into context for the commander. Trest reported that doctrine was always in the back of his mind, especially when roles and missions were at stake, but any evaluation of contentious issues came from the reader’s own analysis of his dispassionate presentation of the information.⁶⁷ While the authors were aware that the Air Force would be subjected to scrutiny after the war, they did not feel any undue pressure to “optimize” favorable information.⁶⁸ Ken Sams stated, “CHECO studies are definitely not accomplishment oriented. Our job is to tell it like it is. The minute we start writing with the objective of making an individual or a command look good, we’ve lost our usefulness.”⁶⁹ Philip Caine remarked, “Any guidance that I received was on procedure rather than content.”⁷⁰ In spite of the parochial interest that comes across in the official Air Force guidance for CHECO, the chain of command did not communicate or enforce this at the tactical level of CHECO operations.

Throughout the maturing period of 1965 to 1968, Ken Sams aggressively pursued creative measures to supplement CHECO’s workforce, and a unique opportunity presented itself in the summer of 1967. Brigadier General McDermott, Dean of the US Air Force Academy (USAFA), wanted to bolster his instructors’ credibility by sending them to Southeast Asia. He established a mutually beneficial exchange with CHECO during USAFA’s two-month summer break.⁷¹ The exchange started with two instructors in the summer of 1967. A year later, eight instructors completed the 60-day trip, including Col Jesse C. Gatlin and Col Alfred F. Hurley, the directors of USAFA’s English and History departments.⁷² The summer trips were typically enough time to complete one report, and the professors brought a beneficial combination of operational

⁶⁶ Robert Burch, interview with the author, 28 February 2013, John Schlight, email to the author, 21 February 2013, Philip Caine, email to the author, 22 February 2013.

⁶⁷ Warren Trest, interview with the author, 23 January 2013.

⁶⁸ Robert Burch, interview with the author, 28 February 2013.

⁶⁹ William L. Brantley, “CHECO Is Its Name,” 35.

⁷⁰ Philip Caine, email to the author, 22 February 2013.

⁷¹ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 18.

⁷² Memorandum, From Col Alfred F. Hurley, Professor and Head of USAFA Department of History, to Col Edward C. Burtenshaw, CHECO Project, PACAF, 2 November 1967, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

experience and guaranteed writing skill.⁷³ As the program gathered steam, several professors volunteered for one-year tours with CHECO. The exchange continued until 1972, eventually involving 40 professors.⁷⁴ After four years, the USAFA contingent accounted for one third of CHECO's report output.⁷⁵ Sams came to rely on the regular injection of productivity from the USAFA team, reserving special topics for the instructors in order to secure a quality report.⁷⁶

As the Vietnam War progressed, Air Force leadership remained focused on effectively capturing their experiences, and document collection was a crucial part of the effort. Shortly after taking command of 7th Air Force, William Momyer implored subordinate units to maintain files of historical significance and grant historians the appropriate security clearances to preserve them.⁷⁷ However, he recognized that the preservation effort must be accomplished on a more systematic basis. To this end, CHECO became the "primary USAF agency responsible for collection of information and documentation."⁷⁸ The task was not drastically different from the research effort that CHECO participants already accomplished, but the official directive stressed the importance of capturing archival material in the process of writing reports. The CHECO teams carried microfilming equipment with them into the field, and they compiled a large library of documents for posterity.⁷⁹ By 1970, CHECO amassed over 700,000 microfilmed documents.⁸⁰ CHECO was also on the distribution list for a wide variety of

⁷³ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 41-42.

⁷⁴ John Schligh, e-mail to the author, 21 February 2013.

⁷⁵ Letter, From Gen Lucius D. Clay, CINCPACAF, to Lt Gen Albert P. Clark, Superintendent, USAFA, 5 September 1970, K717.062-7, Iris No. 517536, "Kenneth Sams Personal File, 1967-1971," AFHRA.

⁷⁶ Memorandum, From Ken Sams, Chief of CHECO, SEA, to Col Burtenshaw, PACAF CHECO, Subject: CHECO, 22 April 1967, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898521, "CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968," AFHRA.

⁷⁷ Memorandum, From Lt Gen William W. Momyer, Commander, 7th AF, to All 7th AF Units, Subject: Historical Program in the Pacific Air Forces, 16 August 1966, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898521, "CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968," AFHRA.

⁷⁸ Memorandum of Understanding between Headquarters PACAF and Headquarters Air University, 2 May 1968, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898521, "CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968," AFHRA. The tasking is also codified in PACAF OPLAN 204-68, Project CHECO Document Collection System, 15 October 1968, M-38245-73-U, Fairchild Documents, MSFRIC.

⁷⁹ Warren Trest, interview with the author, 23 January 2013. Trest reports that at first the microfilming equipment was perpetually broken. The team did not receive any official training on the equipment either, which resulted in several roles of unusable film. The AFHRA historical record contains countless memorandums back to PACAF HQ asking for repairs and additional information on how to use the equipment.

⁸⁰ Richard Liefer, "War History Recorded as Combat Continues," *Air Force Times* XXX, no. 35 (April 8, 1970): 16.

official studies by military and government-sponsored agencies in Vietnam. With the most complete historical archive in theater on the war, the CHECO office received daily requests for information from commanders and outside researchers.⁸¹ CHECO's new assignment also gave Sams an excuse to ask for more personnel, which resulted in the addition of two more positions in the program at the end of 1968. By 1970 the program doubled in size, with up to 20 authors and administrative personnel in the office.

Lifecycle of a CHECO Report

As CHECO matured, the project developed a regular process for producing reports. The process started with selecting a topic and assigning an author. Predictably, the authors gathered sources and conducted research before they sat down to write. Upon completion, the reports went through an official review process, after which they were published and distributed throughout the Air Force and DoD. In the prolific period between 1965 and 1968, the Saigon team refined this process, publishing 99 reports (see Appendix B). The yellow-covered CHECO reports became a ubiquitous product across the USAF, known for up to date information on air operations in SEA.

CHECO report topics came from a wide variety of sources. In general, the team adhered to the topic guidance dictated in the 1965 TORs. The team also categorized reports in accordance with revised guidance in the 1966 TORs. The document specified that reports should take one of three forms: periodic historical reports, special reports, and continuing reports.⁸² The Air Staff occasionally exercised their right to mandate report topics. For example, in 1966 the Air Force was working with the Marine Corps to acquire a new blind bombing system. The staff requested a report on Combat Skyspot (AN/MSQ-77), the existing system, to justify the requirements for a follow-on system.⁸³ Lower echelons of the chain of command also dictated report topics to the CHECO team. In 1967, Gen Momyer initiated a broad study to justify unifying all four services' air efforts in Vietnam under a single command and control element. As part of the effort, Momyer asked the CHECO team to produce a report, which turned into the series titled

⁸¹ William L. Brantley, "CHECO Is Its Name," 34.

⁸² Revised Terms of Reference for Project CHECO, 15 April 1966, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898522, "CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969," AFHRA.

⁸³ Memorandum, from Col Edward C. Burtenshaw, Chief CHECO division, PACAF, to Mr. Ken Sams, CHECO, HQ 7th AF, Subject: Assignment of CHECO Topic, 20 July 1966, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898523, "CHECO Historical Letters and Messages, Jan 1962-Dec 1968," AFHRA.

“Single Manager for Air.”⁸⁴ In another notable example, General George Brown, 7th AF Commander, requested a study as a result of Army criticism of CAS response times. His guidance specified that the report should “. . . determine whether in fact there is a need to provide for improved response time. If there is a need is it a general one or is it special and limited, and if so, to what degree?”⁸⁵ General Brown’s request turned into a report titled, “Air Response to Immediate Air Requests in SVN.” Headquarters direction seemed to be the exception. In most cases, report topics came from within the CHECO office, many of them picked by Sams. Warren Trest, who spent two years with CHECO in Saigon, recounts, “most topics picked themselves. . . momentous events like the Battle of Khe Sanh demanded attention.” Individual authors had the latitude to suggest report subjects.⁸⁶ Trest’s report on “Control of Air Strikes in SEA, 1961-1966,” was one such example.⁸⁷ Sams retained final authority on which topics the team pursued, and he kept an up-to-date list of the ongoing projects on a prominently displayed board in the office.⁸⁸

The author assignment process was straightforward. Sams assigned reports on the basis of experience and interest. Although the authors were not completely familiar with all of the tactics they reported on, Sams made an effort to pair reports to authors with some general knowledge on the topic. In general, he divided the reports into rated and non-rated topics, assigning aviation related topics to authors with flying experience.⁸⁹ On occasion, Sams found authors with specific tactical expertise matched to a report topic. Maj David Mets employed his airlift expertise during a two-month TDY with the program for the sole purpose of writing “Tactical Airlift Operations.”⁹⁰ Capt Gary Sheets was a FAC with over 80 missions over North Vietnam. Sheets wrote “Air War in the DMZ,” which capitalized on his intimate knowledge of operations in that area of the country.⁹¹ In any case, Sams optimized a blend of academic skill and writing ability with operational credibility. Sometimes this meant pairing a civilian historian with a military

⁸⁴ Warren Trest, email to the author, 1 January 2013.

⁸⁵ Memorandum, from Gen George S. Brown, 7th AF Commander, to PACAF DO, Subject: CHECO Study, 15 January 1969, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

⁸⁶ Warren Trest, interview with the author, 23 January 2013.

⁸⁷ Oral History Interview of Warren Trest by Mr. Edward T. Russell, 10 July 2000, K238.051-3, IRIS No. 1135642, AFHRA.

⁸⁸ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 20.

⁸⁹ Robert Burch, interview with the author, 28 February 2013.

⁹⁰ David Mets email to the author, 23 January 2013.

⁹¹ William L. Brantley, “CHECO Is Its Name,” 35.

officer, but in many cases he found civilian or military authors with a fortuitous combination of both qualities.⁹²

After topic assignment, the CHECO team set out to gather sources for research. Initially the program encountered resistance to the idea of historians asking for highly classified documents, in spite of the fact that all of the researchers had Top Secret clearances. However, the CHECO authors quickly developed a rapport with 7th Air Force Headquarters, and commanders like Momyer stridently advocated for compliance with historians from his staff and subordinate units.⁹³ CHECO also coordinated other documentation agencies to share information, including: MACV History, Document Exploitation, Combined Intelligence Center, US Army History, US Embassy, Joint US Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), RAND, and US Agency for International Development (USAID).⁹⁴ In a few exceptional cases, CHECO authors encountered classification roadblocks. CIA files were hard to come by, and the Agency typically denied access to CHECO on the basis of insufficient “need to know.”⁹⁵ In another unique instance, the MACV Studies and Observation (MACV-SOG) denied a special access clearance to teams researching topics on air support to SOF. The CHECO team started their research with OPLANs, operational reports, intelligence reports, and high-level staff message traffic from 7th AF and MACV headquarters regarding the operation under examination.⁹⁶ Prior to moving into the field, the CHECO authors typically contacted someone at the tactical unit to “grease the skids” for their arrival by collecting key documents and setting up interviews.⁹⁷ Upon arrival, they conducted field interviews with key personnel and gathered the official After Action Reports.⁹⁸ In this time period, the CHECO team found sources in the field to be generally cooperative. They were glad to see someone from 7th Air Force Headquarters who was interested in what they were doing.⁹⁹ According to Trest, FACs were typically the best sources because they were in a unique position to

⁹² William L. Brantley, “CHECO Is Its Name,” 34.

⁹³ Warren Trest, interview with the author, 23 January 2013. and Memorandum, From Lt Gen William W. Momyer, Commander, 7th AF, to All 7th AF Units, Subject: Historical Program in the Pacific Air Forces, 16 August 1966, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898521, “CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968,” AFHRA.

⁹⁴ CHECO Since 1962, in “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

⁹⁵ Warren Trest, interview with the author, 23 January 2013.

⁹⁶ Oral History Interview of Warren Trest by Mr. Edward T. Russell, 10 July 2000.

⁹⁷ Robert Burch, interview with the author, 28 February 2013.

⁹⁸ CHECO Since 1962, in “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

⁹⁹ Warren Trest, interview with the author, 23 January 2013.

observe and control air operations for longer periods of time and were very familiar with the area of operations.¹⁰⁰ If the operation involved ground forces, the researchers attempted to gather facts from the affected Army and Marine Corps units. For ongoing operations, CHECO team members often observed the action first hand. For his report on Igloo White, the codename given to the network of sensors, relays, and aircraft designed to detect movement on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, Maj Philip Caine spent several nights in the control center at Nakhon Phanom RTAB listening to the sensors.¹⁰¹ Maj Richard Durkee received two air medals after flying with FACs to conduct CHECO research.¹⁰² In all cases, the CHECO team conducted research with the intent to gather the fresh information from key sources before memories faded.

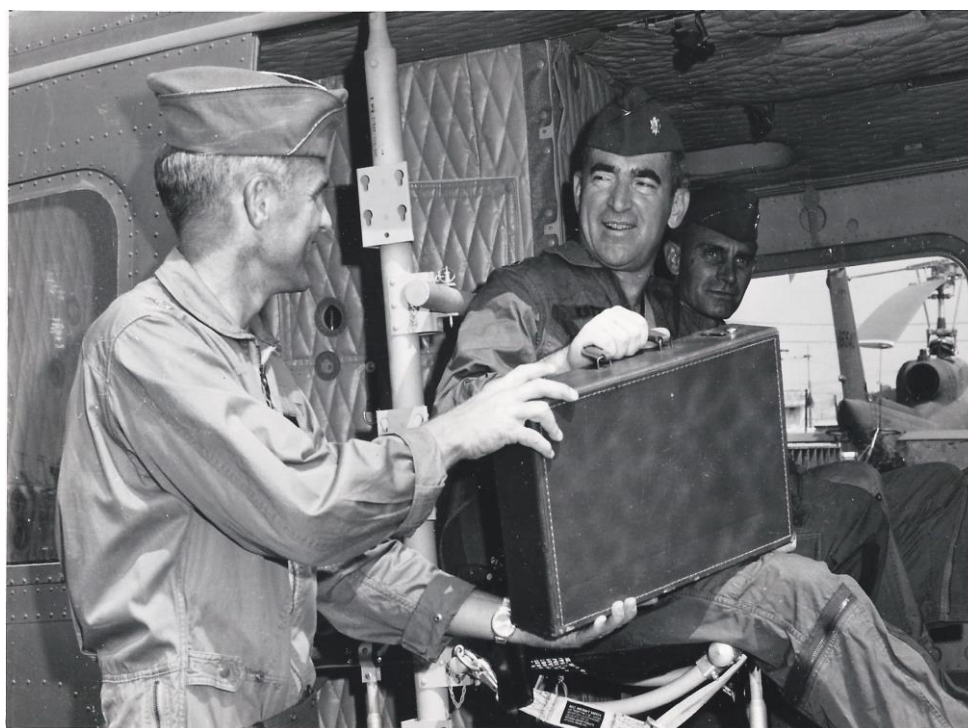


Figure 1: Phil Caine, Dick Kott, Dave Folkman off to get a CHECO story, Mar 1970
Source: Richard Kott, email to the author, 12 March 2013.

Writing the report was a fairly straightforward process. Sams developed a template for report format that all authors followed, and he left the writing style to individual initiative.¹⁰³ The PACAF CHECO office mandated a two month due date

¹⁰⁰ Oral History Interview of Warren Trest by Mr. Edward T. Russell, 10 July 2000.

¹⁰¹ Philip Caine, email to the author, 22 February 2013.

¹⁰² William L. Brantley, "CHECO Is Its Name," 33.

¹⁰³ Philip Caine, email to the author, 22 February 2013.

from topic selection to report publication. In the case of complex report topics, the suspense became a contentious issue. The need to get reports out in a timely manner to impact ongoing operations drove PACAF's urgency. However, the authors often felt that the timeliness came at the expense of research and writing quality. As the review process became more complicated, authors had to complete their writing sooner in order to comply with the two-month time limit. In addition, the short suspense on support related topics delayed the CHECO team in collecting "fresh data" on late breaking operations from the field before the participants' memories faded.¹⁰⁴ Although the time limit was not a universal problem, the authors of complex studies generally agreed that the two-month limit was "much too ambitious."¹⁰⁵

When the author completed writing, the report entered the chain of command for a thorough review (see Figure 2 for the review flow). Although official reviews were not codified until 1969, the process started as the CHECO team ramped up report production in 1966. The review process had two goals. First, it allowed the staff offices in the chain of command that had any bearing on the report to provide amplifying data and corrections to factually incorrect information. The memorandum guiding the review process stated, "Occasionally, CHECO reports may question operating procedures or suggest improvements – staff agencies should take note of those which pertain and when applicable include appropriate comments."¹⁰⁶ Second, the process was intended to improve the general quality of the writing in the report before it went out to a high level audience.¹⁰⁷ Some authors felt that the review process was genuinely helpful and it contributed to a better end product.¹⁰⁸ However, most writers did not see the report after it left their hands, and the reviewers did not coordinate with the author directly on changes to their writing.¹⁰⁹ The historical record contains a few examples of reports that were either recalled or rejected altogether as a result of the review process. In 1967,

¹⁰⁴ "CHECO Talking Paper," March 1969, K717.062-5, Iris No. 517535, AFHRA.

¹⁰⁵ David Mets, email to the author, 23 January 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Memorandum, From Maj Gen J.F. Kirkendall, 7th AF DCS/Operations, to 7th AF DO, Subject: Coordination of Project CHECO Reports, 26 September 1969, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898521, "CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968," AFHRA.

¹⁰⁷ Memorandum, From Maj Gen Kirkendall, to 7th AF DO, Subject: Coordination of Project CHECO Reports, 26 September 1969.

¹⁰⁸ Warren Trest, interview with the author, 23 January 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Philip Caine, email to the author, 22 February 2013 and John Schlight, email to the author, 21 February 2013.

Momyer recalled a report on USAF civic construction projects due to lack of objectivity. The CHECO team later revised the content and included it in “The War in Vietnam, 1966.”¹¹⁰ Although the review process was relatively benign in this period, it became controversial in years to come.

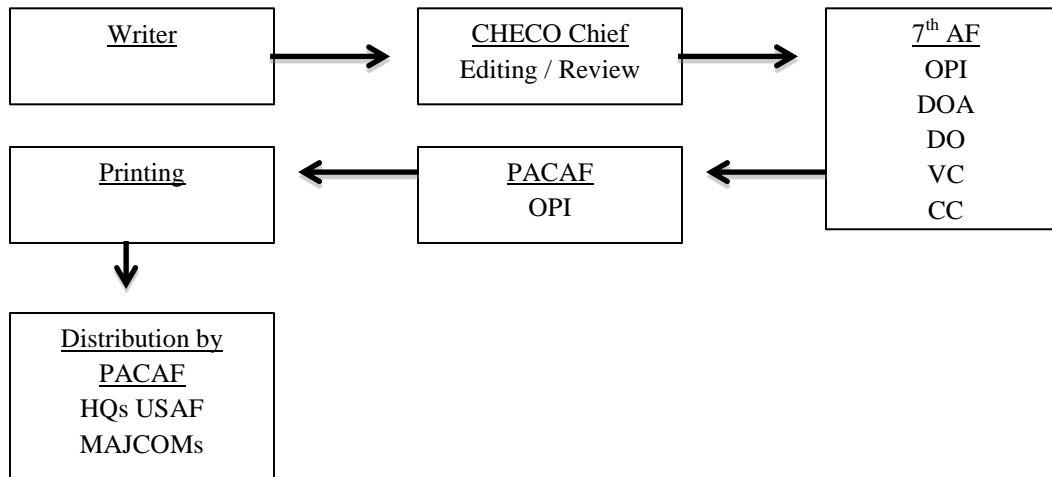


Figure 2: Handling of CHECO Studies

Source: CHECO Since 1962, in “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

Following official review, the PACAF CHECO office printed and distributed the reports. The catalog of supporting documents that accompanied each report went to 7th Air Force, PACAF, and the USAF archives at Maxwell Air Force Base, and the reports themselves went to a much wider audience.¹¹¹ The distribution list for CHECO reports in 1965 pales in comparison for the extensive circulation that followed as CHECO gained notoriety. The 1966 TORs specified an expansion of the distribution list “to insure optimum coverage and appropriate utilization of primary CHECO documents.”¹¹² The TORs also directed dissemination to the other services and civilian organizations in order to spread Air Force accounts to a larger audience.¹¹³ (see Appendix D, Figures 8 and 9

¹¹⁰ Memorandum, From Mr. Ken Sams, Chief, CHECO in SEA to CINCPACAF, Subject: Construction Study, 27 April 1967, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

¹¹¹ CHECO Since 1962, in “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

¹¹² Revised Terms of Reference for Project CHECO, 15 April 1966, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

¹¹³ Revised Terms of Reference for Project CHECO, 15 April 1966, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA. and Letter, From Lt Gen Keith Compton, DCS/Plans and Operations, HQAF, To Maj Gen John Vogt, DCS/Plans and Operations, PACAF, 16 April 1968, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

for a comparison of distribution lists) In addition to the official means of increasing circulation, the Air Force employed several indirect measures to increase interest in the reports. In October 1968, the PACAF staff hosted a CHECO conference between the USAF history office, the Air Staff, and the CHECO offices from Saigon and Hawaii. The group discussed efforts to “enhance the image and appreciation of CHECO in the Air Force and Joint/DC arena.”¹¹⁴ The discussion generated CHECO articles in *Air Force Times* and *The Airman*.¹¹⁵ The group also added a letter to the front of each report from the PACAF Chief of Staff explaining the purpose and importance of the program¹¹⁶ (see Appendix D, Figure 10 for an example). As the word spread about CHECO, tactical level units developed an interest in the reports, and the distribution list continued to swell.

The wide-ranging audience of CHECO reports acquired unique uses for their content. The Air Staff issued few statements on the utility of CHECO reports, which is unusual given the fact they drove the requirements for the program. Presumably, the staff used CHECO reports to justify policy positions, but the historical record does not contain specifics on the influence that CHECO reports had on Washington decision-making. In a few rare instances, the Saigon office received letters from the Pentagon praising specific reports. In 1967 the CSAF sent a letter thanking the team for the timely report on crop destruction tactics. He stated, “this type of effort reinforces the validity and usefulness of project CHECO endeavors.”¹¹⁷ Another letter reported “high level Washington interest” in the CHECO report on “USAF Civic Actions in SEA, June 1961 – December 1967,” but the author did not specify the nature of the “interest.”¹¹⁸ In some cases, CHECO authors received feedback from the chain of command in country on their reports. Warren Trest recounts regular feedback from Gen Momyer. In particular, Momyer appreciated reports on the Tactical Air Control System and Khe Sanh, which backed his position in battles with the other services over command and control. While he disliked

¹¹⁴ Notes from Project CHECO Conference, 2-4 October 1968, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898524, “CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968,” AFHRA.

¹¹⁵ William L. Brantley, “CHECO Is Its Name,” *The Airman* XII, no. 7 (July 1968): 32-35. and Richard Liefer, “War History Recorded as Combat Continues,” *Air Force Times* XXX, no. 35 (April 8, 1970): 16.

¹¹⁶ Notes from Project CHECO Conference, 2-4 October 1968.

¹¹⁷ Letter, From Gen J.P. McConnell, CSAF, to PACAF CHECO, 12 December 1967, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898524, “CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968,” AFHRA.

¹¹⁸ Memorandum, From Col Edward Burtenshaw, PACAF CHECO, To Kenneth Sams, 7 AF CHECO, 4 January 1968, K717.062-2, Iris No. 383453, “CHECO Manning and Organizational Messages, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

Trest's report on "Lucky Tiger Special Air Warfare Operations," Mommyer did not dissuade the team from publishing reports that were critical of 7th AF operations.¹¹⁹ Trest's experience seems to be exceptional; most authors reported little feedback on their work after it left their hands.¹²⁰ Aside from their immediate utility for decision makers, the high-level audience used the reports to build situational awareness on significant events throughout SEA. Sams described the reports as "a classified news service for a high level audience."¹²¹

Although the CHECO team received scant feedback from the high-level audience, the record is replete with accounts of the reports' tactical utility. The CHECO series on Escape and Evasion was a vital part of the curriculum for students at the USAF survival school in the Philippines.¹²² The "Short Rounds" reports documented friendly fire incidents and other mishaps with ordnance delivery in an effort to identify trends and lessons to prevent future occurrences.¹²³ Headquarters 7th Air Force made them mandatory reading for all flyers in the theater, and consequently aviators routinely found them in their squadron briefing areas.¹²⁴ The CHECO team also engaged in a short-lived effort to produce reports catering to the tactical audience. The monthly "CHECO Digest" reports combined brief summaries of the most tactically relevant information from preceding reports, but it died after only three issues due to a lack of manpower to continue the series.¹²⁵ The USAF Director of the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) required personnel assigned to counterintelligence duty to read the CHECO study, "Counterinsurgency in Thailand, 1966." In his laudatory memorandum to the Saigon team he stated the report "represents the most accurate and penetrating historical study

¹¹⁹ Warren Trest, email to the author, 1 January 2013, and Warren Trest, interview with the author, 23 January 2013.

¹²⁰ Philip Caine, email to the author, 22 February 2013, John Schlight, email to the author, 21 February 2013, and David Mets, email to the author, 23 January 2013.

¹²¹ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 14 and 32.

¹²² Staff Summary Sheet, by Kenneth Sams, Subject: AFA Summer Research Program, 21 September 1967, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898524, "CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968," AFHRA.

¹²³ Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Short Rounds, June 1968 – May 1969, K717.0413-19 C.1, Iris No. 898403, AFHRA.

¹²⁴ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 20. and Memorandum, From Maj Gen Gordon Blood, DCS Operations, 7 AF, To All 7 AF Units, Subject: Short Rounds, July 1968, K717.062-6, Iris No. 898527, "CHECO Summary for General Slay," AFHRA.

¹²⁵ Memorandum, From Maj Gen Robert F Worley, Vice Commander, 7th AF, To All 7th AF Units, Subject: New Publication "CHECO Digest," December 1967, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898524, "CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968," AFHRA.

seen on this subject.”¹²⁶ Units outside of Southeast Asia regularly requested copies of CHECO reports. The US Air Force Europe (USAFE) historian noted that the “USAFE Air to Ground School” considered the reports invaluable tools for teaching ALOs and FACs the latest tactics for controlling ordnance delivery.¹²⁷ Maj Gen Blood, a former 7th AF Director of Operations, wrote from North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1971 to request copies of the CHECO reports on TACS and Air Traffic Control to aid efforts to build a similar system in Europe.¹²⁸ The timely CHECO narratives became a helpful tool for the entire Air Force to hone its tactical skill.

From topic selection to consumption, the CHECO report cycle became a finely tuned process. The Saigon office became proficient enough to handle 15 reports in the production process at once.¹²⁹ As CHECO entered its final phase, critical events changed the tenor of the Vietnam War. The charged political environment and new personnel altered expectations of CHECO and key aspects of the report production process, which had a decided impact on CHECO until its close.

CHECO, 1969-1975 – Challenge, Response, and Finale

On January 30, 1968, a six-hour VC assault on the US embassy in Saigon initiated a chain reaction of events that drastically altered American policy in Vietnam. This opening volley in the Tet Offensive ultimately led to heavy Communist casualties and defeat on the battlefield. However, the forceful Communist actions opened a “credibility gap” for military and political leadership who had claimed that the US was winning the war.¹³⁰ Bernard Brodie accurately observed that the event was “unique in that the side that lost completely in the tactical sense came away with an overwhelming psychological and hence political victory.”¹³¹ Demoralized by the blistering public critique, President Johnson announced that he would not seek re-election, and he dedicated the rest of his

¹²⁶ Memorandum, From Brig Gen Joseph J. Cappucci, USAF Director of Special Investigations, To PACAF DO, Subject: Project CHECO Report “Counterinsurgency in Thailand, 1966”, 20 December 1967, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

¹²⁷ Memorandum, From Robert Swetzer, Assistant Chief, USAFE Historical Division, To Headquarters PACAF, CHECO Division, Subject: Project CHECO SEA Reports, 3 August 1966, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

¹²⁸ Letter, From Maj Gen Gordon Blood, To Maj Gen Ernest C. Hardin, Vice CC, 7 AF, 13 January 1971, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898525, “CHECO Correspondence, 1967-1971,” AFHRA.

¹²⁹ Richard Liefer, “War History Recorded as Combat Continues,” 16.

¹³⁰ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 209.

¹³¹ Quoted in Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 203–204.

term to implementing a policy of Vietnamization. Vietnamization combined gradual American troop withdrawals with a handoff of war-fighting responsibility to the South Vietnamese.¹³² In addition, LBJ imposed a bombing halt north of the 17th parallel on November 1, 1968 as part of a negotiating strategy designed to bring the North Vietnamese back to the table.¹³³ John Schlight states, “From late 1968 until the spring of 1972, every undertaking by the Air Force . . . was designed to facilitate in some way the withdrawal of American combat forces, their replacement by the South Vietnamese, and the negotiation of an end to the war. During 1965 air power had protected the build-up of American ground forces in South Vietnam; now it formed a shield for their withdrawal.”¹³⁴ The newly elected Nixon administration was intent on avoiding the appearance of defeat as the US disengaged from Vietnam, and the USAF was determined to do the same.

Between 1969 and 1970 the Air Staff implemented a series of administrative changes that influenced Project CHECO. On August 30, 1969 the staff published a second revision to the CHECO Terms of Reference. Once more, they changed the meaning of the CHECO acronym. According to their guidance CHECO now stood for Contemporary Historical *Examination of Current* Operations.¹³⁵ The change from “Evaluation” to “Examination” came at the request of the Air Force official history community. They rejected the notion that historians could evaluate operations, insisting instead that evaluation was the duty of officers who read the reports.¹³⁶ The change from “Combat” to “Current” reflected an increase in CHECO’s scope of responsibility to cover operations across the Pacific AOR.¹³⁷ As a result, the PACAF CHECO office completed a series of reports on the North Korean seizure of the USS *Pueblo* and the North Korean shoot-down of an EC-121. However, these reports were the extent of the coverage outside of Southeast Asia. The Air Staff also intended the latter change to reflect a move

¹³² Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 226–227.

¹³³ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 236–239.

¹³⁴ John Schlight, *A War Too Long*, 62–63.

¹³⁵ Terms of Reference for Project CHECO in Documenting and Reporting the Role of Airpower, 30 August 1969, K717.062-6, Iris No. 898527, “CHECO Summary for General Slay,” AFHRA.

¹³⁶ Oral History Interview of Robert Frank Futrell by Hugh N. Ahmann and Warren Trest, 1 July 1995, K239.0512-2135, Tape 1, Iris No. 1143653, AFHRA.

¹³⁷ Terms of Reference for Project CHECO in Documenting and Reporting the Role of Airpower, 30 August 1969.

toward a permanent CHECO function after the war. The final paragraph of the TOR stipulated that the document would be replaced by a formal Air Force Regulation covering the project's worldwide responsibilities, but that guidance never appeared.¹³⁸ In addition to the TOR update, the headquarters also changed the staff directorate responsible for CHECO activities to AFCHO, the Office of Air Force History.¹³⁹ The Air Staff created the Office of Air Force History on the recommendation of a CSAF-initiated blue ribbon panel. The change created an independent history function in the Air Force at large, permanently separating it from the information office, and many in the USAF official history community believed that CHECO's success created the impetus for this move.¹⁴⁰



Figure 3: Project CHECO Staff, Tan Son Nhut AB, Vietnam, Mar 1970
Source: Richard Kott, email to the author, 12 March 2013.

¹³⁸ Terms of Reference for Project CHECO in Documenting and Reporting the Role of Airpower, 30 August 1969.

¹³⁹ Memorandum, From Lt Gen John W. Carpenter, Assistant Vice CoS, USAF, To AFCCS, Subject: Change of Office of Primary Responsibility for Project CHECO, 12 May 1970, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898526, "CHECO Re-organization Correspondence," AFHRA.

¹⁴⁰ Warren A. Trest, "Projects CHECO and Corona Harvest: Keys to the Air Force's Southeast Asia Memory Bank," 118.

Despite early ambivalence on the contents of CHECO reports, the American strategic shift in Vietnam elicited a renewed interest in the message CHECO delivered on air power's conduct in the war. The review process became the staff's chief control lever. Mike Grady, a USAFA author, referred to the official review as a "cleansing process" in which 7th AF tried to eliminate all constructive criticism.¹⁴¹ Dave Roe, another USAFA author, reported, "it is virtually impossible for a CHECO report to get through coordination that does not closely resemble the sanitized party line . . . they just delete things they 'feel' should not be said even when it is well documented."¹⁴² Echoing Roe's comment, John Pratt recounted that 7th AF and PACAF changed reports "to fit doctrine rather than fact."¹⁴³ Staff alterations did not only impact the reports, they also influenced CHECO authors themselves. David Mets felt embarrassed by the contrived message in his final report, counting it as one of his "least worthy writing efforts."¹⁴⁴ Grady relayed that the manipulations induced morale problems, and the unofficial CHECO patch reflected an undercurrent of slight cynicism many authors developed due to the review process.¹⁴⁵ (see Figure 4) Ken Sams argued that the editing process socialized authors to avoid controversial statements; the authors sanitized reports before they even hit the review process.¹⁴⁶ Official meddling does not seem to be universal. Many authors, especially those involved in the earlier years of the program, reported no issues with the review process whatsoever. However, Ken Sams stated that contemporary authors should be skeptical of reports published after 1968 on controversial topics, such as interdiction.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ Letter, Mike Grady, to Col Thomas D. Wade, USAFA, 11 June 1971, K717.062-8, Iris No. 517537, "Letters of Advice to Col Thomas D. Wade upon his Becoming Head of CHECO Division," AFHRA. Col Thomas Wade took over as Chief of CHECO after Ken Sams left in 1971. Before departing his position on the USAFA faculty he solicited letters of advice from professors who had participated in CHECO. Seven of the fifteen responses mention some aspect of the review process as a key issue for his attention.

¹⁴² Letter, Dave Roe, to Col Thomas D. Wade, USAFA, 26 May 1971, K717.062-8, Iris No. 517537, "Letters of Advice to Col Thomas D. Wade upon his Becoming Head of CHECO Division," AFHRA.

¹⁴³ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 25.

¹⁴⁴ David Mets, email to the author, 23 January 2013.

¹⁴⁵ Letter, Mike Grady, to Col Thomas D. Wade, USAFA, 11 June 1971

¹⁴⁶ Ken Sams, CHECO Talking Paper, 4 March 1969, K717.062-5, Iris No. 517535, AFHRA.

¹⁴⁷ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 50-51.



Figure 4: CHECO “Morale” Patch

Source: Robert Burch, email to author, 28 February 2013.

Official reviewers employed several tactics to alter reports. In some cases, they changed wording that altered the narrative’s central message. Col Carl Anderson, 7th AF Director of Tactical Analysis, registered his dissatisfaction with the PACAF staff for changing sections of the CHECO reports on “The RAAF in SEA” and “The Employment of Air by the Thais and Koreans in SEA.” His memorandum stated, “That some of the editorial changes substituted flowery expressions for simple phrases was annoying but acceptable. Unfortunately some of the substantive changes made to the cited reports were in error.” The reviewers edited language specifically used to preserve diplomatic relations with key allies, and they arbitrarily inflated statistics without documentation.¹⁴⁸ The 834th Air Division changed the conclusions altogether in David Mets’ report on “Tactical Airlift Operations.” Mets originally argued that the C-7 Caribou was not compatible with the existing airlift fleet, and he recommended against procuring the Buffalo, which was very similar.¹⁴⁹ The published version of the report contradicted his assertions. The final section titled “Future Alternatives” focused overwhelmingly on justifying the need for the new tactical airlift platform.¹⁵⁰ In some cases, the staff

¹⁴⁸ Memorandum, From Col Carl A. Anderson, Director of Tactical Analysis, 7th AF, to CINCPACAF DOA, Subject: Editing of CHECO Reports, 12 February 1971, K717.062-7, Iris No. 517536, “Kenneth Sams Personal File, 1967-1971,” AFHRA.

¹⁴⁹ David Mets, email to the author, 23 January 2013.

¹⁵⁰ Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Tactical Airlift Operations, 30 June 1969, K717.0414-2, Iris No. 898440, AFHRA, 124-126.

prevented the publication of critical reports. According to an attached memorandum from the 7th AF Directorate of Operations Analysis, a CHECO report on “The Huk Challenge in the Philippines” never advanced beyond draft form due to problems with the “style of writing” and “format.” This justification is suspicious in light of the report’s highly critical conclusions. The author stated that “few Air Force people *believe* in civic action,” and he argued that if the program were given more support it could be “substantive instead of a charade.”¹⁵¹

In many cases official manipulation came at the hand of a select group of individuals at key positions in the chain of command. Ken Sams described an anonymous general officer in the 7th Air Force operations analysis division who suggested that “CHECO personnel should be ‘re-oriented’ so that they present the Air Force viewpoint.”¹⁵² He referred to another nameless general officer who was intent on proving to the administration that the Air Force was the cornerstone of the Vietnamization policy. According to Sams, the general suppressed negative information in order to demonstrate that the USAF could compensate for the troop withdrawals initiated in 1969.¹⁵³ In 1969, Col Howard Fish took over as 7th AF Director of Tactical Analysis. Lt Col John Pratt referred to him as the “bane of CHECO’s existence.” Fish not only dictated the content of controversial CHECO reports, he also questioned the loyalty of those who remained intent on documenting unflattering information. In Pratt’s case, Fish went so far as to threaten court martial over interdiction statistics.¹⁵⁴ Pratt observed that Fish “represented the power of one individual to impede the accurate reporting of what was going on.”¹⁵⁵ Many of Pratt’s colleagues in the CHECO office did not have the same vitriolic relationship with Col Fish. It is possible that the root of Fish and Pratt’s disagreement was a personality conflict, but the net result of their interaction remains unchanged - a series of reports that towed the party line.

The CHECO office in Saigon initiated a number of defensive maneuvers to counter official efforts to distort the historical record. From 1969 on, the team sent

¹⁵¹ The Huk Challenge in the Philippines, Unpublished CHECO Draft, 15 March 1969, K717.0413-100, Iris No. 517391, AFHRA.

¹⁵² Ken Sams, CHECO Talking Paper, 4 March 1969.

¹⁵³ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 22 and 34.

¹⁵⁴ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 23 and 35.

¹⁵⁵ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 35.

copies of their un-edited drafts on microfilm to the Air University historical archives. Their hope was to expose the manipulation for later researchers.¹⁵⁶ Unfortunately these unfiltered reports are either impossibly difficult to find or they have been destroyed. The CHECO team also attached copies of the source material to the reports as supplementary volumes, instead of filing them in the historical archive. They intended for subsequent historians to have reference material readily available to validate places where reviewers altered evidence or added unsupported material.¹⁵⁷ In addition, the historical record is brimming with evidence of Ken Sams' efforts to challenge CHECO manipulation. Remarkably, at a 1969 CHECO meeting attended by members of the Air Staff, Air University, and PACAF, Sams emphasized that CHECO authors were "professionals who have a reason for saying what they do the way they say it."¹⁵⁸ Sams described the author's objectivity as their "greatest asset" and defended their right to "tell it like it is."¹⁵⁹ Although Sams officially left his position as head of the Saigon CHECO office due to medical retirement, close friend John Schlight asserts that his departure was due in equal part to disappointment and exhaustion.¹⁶⁰

The detailed historical record on Project CHECO dries up after Ken Sams' departure on April 1, 1971. Col Thomas Wade, a member of the USAFA faculty, was Ken Sams' immediate replacement, but there is no record of subsequent CHECO manning. CHECO changed to military supervision to give the program more clout in the debates with other staff directorates. The staff also felt that the military members of the office should have an officer as their immediate supervisor.¹⁶¹ On March 29, 1973, 7th Air Force Headquarters moved to Nakhon Phanom RTAB. It is not clear whether the Saigon CHECO office moved along with the headquarters; it is possible that the 7th AF office combined with the PACAF office at this point. The Udorn CHECO office

¹⁵⁶ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 25.

¹⁵⁷ Letter, Monte Wright, to Col Thomas D. Wade, USAFA, K717.062-8, Iris No. 517537, "Letters of Advice to Col Thomas D. Wade upon his Becoming Head of CHECO Division," AFHRA.

¹⁵⁸ Ken Sams, CHECO Talking Paper, 4 March 1969.

¹⁵⁹ Ken Sams, CHECO Talking Paper, 4 March 1969.

¹⁶⁰ John Schlight, email to the author, 21 February 2013.

¹⁶¹ "Letters of Advice to Col Thomas D. Wade upon his Becoming Head of CHECO Division," K717.062-8, Iris No. 517537, AFHRA.

remained open until June 30, 1975.¹⁶² By 1975 the PACAF office absorbed all of the CHECO function for Southeast Asia, and PACAF CHECO transitioned to a contingency team of one officer and one civilian. CHECO produced reports on the war well after the last American helicopter departed Saigon on April 29, 1975.¹⁶³ The PACAF Office published the last CHECO report, “USAAG / 7 AF in Thailand, Policy Changes and the Military Role, 1973-1975” on January 27, 1979.

CHECO continued to exist in name for several years after its wartime mission ended. Based on CHECO’s success in Vietnam, the Vice CSAF directed the Office of Air Force History to establish a permanent CHECO function for crisis response. The organization consisted of a deployable five person team at Maxwell AFB, a two person team at USAFE, and a two person team at PACAF.¹⁶⁴ In contrast to their Vietnam War mandate, later CHECO teams existed entirely for preserving historical documents; they never produced another historical report. Between 1975 and 1978 the Maxwell team microfilmed documents for the historical record at Bolling AFB, the Air Force Academy Library, and Torrejon Air Base, Spain.¹⁶⁵ In 1977, the USAFE documented Air Force disaster relief efforts in response to an earthquake in northern Italy.¹⁶⁶ The Air Force Historical Research Agency catalog contains a plethora of documents archived by CHECO teams during the Gulf War, but CHECO fades from the historical record in 1992.

In a personal letter written in 1967, Ken Sams stated, “I’d like to think that we’ve pioneered a new place for the history program in the Air Force structure. The combination of trained civilian professionals and rated officer personnel in our CHECO program has worked out beautifully, particularly as part of the operations function. The

¹⁶² Staff Summary Sheet, Subject: Project CHECO, by Robert Hiller, Assistant for Operations Analysis, PACAF, 7 April 1975, K238.01, Iris No. 1143923, “History of the Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, 1 July 1975 – 31 December 1975,” AFHRA.

¹⁶³ Staff Summary Sheet, Subject: Project CHECO, by Robert Hiller, Assistant for Operations Analysis, PACAF, 7 April 1975.

¹⁶⁴ Letter, From Brig Gen Lloyd H. Cornett, Chief Air Force History Office, Subject: Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations, 12 November 1975, K238.01, Iris No. 1143923, “History of the Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, 1 July – 31 December 1975,” AFHRA.

¹⁶⁵ “Air University History, 1 July – 31 December 1975,” K239.01, Iris No. 1012225, AFHRA, and “Air Force Historical Advisory Committee, 15-16 September 1977,” K168.27-46, Iris No. 1117116, AFHRA, and “History of the AFSHRC, 1978,” K238.01, Iris No. 1143920, AFHRA.

¹⁶⁶ “Air Force Historical Advisory Committee, 15-16 September 1977,” K168.27-46, Iris No. 1117116, AFHRA.

same arrangement can be applied elsewhere. It injects a certain dynamism, a feeling of being on the inside, that the history program often lacks, and it definitely improves the status and image of the documentation effort. A hell of a lot of old Air Force concepts and procedures have undergone major change as result of our experience here in Vietnam – why not history?”¹⁶⁷ Unfortunately, the latter years of Sams’ experience crushed the enthusiastic vision inspired by the four years that preceded his letter. Sams left Vietnam disillusioned by his belief that the CHECO reports collectively had very little influence on Air Force policy or doctrine.¹⁶⁸ The majority of CHECO authors did not experience the same level of disappointment, but the basic sentiment endured. They departed confident in their positive contribution to the USAF history in Vietnam but skeptical of the proposition that their work had any immediate or lasting impact on Air Force doctrine. Although the “pioneering” body of work produced by these dedicated professionals lives on, the Air Force has allowed the CHECO concept to die.

¹⁶⁷ Letter, From Ken Sams, To Max Rosenburg, Chief USAF Historical Division Liaison Office, 9 June 1967, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898521, “CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968,” AFHRA.

¹⁶⁸ Ken Sams, “CHECO 20 Years On,” Unpublished Manuscript in Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt.

CHAPTER 2

The Representative CHECO Reports

Introduction

The signature yellow-covered report was Project CHECO's currency, and any analysis of the operation must appraise the value of these documents. However, with 251 monographs, where does one begin? Although there are outliers, the reports fall into four categories – Tactical Mission Sets, Technology, Specific Operations, and Campaign Overview. This brief chapter and the three that follow will cover a representative report from each of these categories, while also spanning the lifecycle of the project. With this in mind the reports under examination are: "Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 - June 1967," published October 11, 1967; "The Role of USAF Gunships in SEA, 1967 - 1969," published August 30, 1969; "Rescue at Ban Phanop, 5 - 7 Dec 1969," published February 15, 1970; and "LINEBACKER Operations, Sep - Dec 1972," published December 31, 1978. The evaluation of each report will orbit around four questions. First, what was the impetus for writing the report? Second, who wrote the report, and did they exhibit any professional biases or handicaps? Third, how accurate was the report given the information available at the time? Finally, what influence, if any, did the report have on the Air Force or the DoD? The analysis of these representative reports provides an indispensable look at the extent to which the program met its dual purpose, rounding out a full investigation of Project CHECO.

"Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 – June 1967"

Operation Ranch Hand was, is, and will continue to be controversial. Ranch Hand involved specially equipped C-123s, which delivered a variety of chemical defoliants. The program had two distinct objectives – first, to eliminate jungle cover, concealment, and sanctuaries around key LOCs and fire-bases and second, to destroy the crops providing sustenance to the VC. The program was subject to virtually constant evaluation and criticism by government agencies, civilian auditors, and concerned citizens. In January 1966, Professor John Edsall, a scientist at Harvard University, initiated a protest movement in the scientific community involving 29 of his colleagues. The group argued that herbicide operations crossed a blurry line into chemical warfare –

something normatively prohibited by most civilized states – and set a precedent that led to employment of more lethal chemical weapons. In early 1967, the group sent a petition to LBJ’s science advisor signed by 5,000 scientists. The signatures included 17 Nobel Laureates and 129 members of the National Academy of Sciences.¹ Fearing that the scientists’ objections might put Ranch Hand in danger, Secretary of Defense (SecDef) Robert McNamara prepared to defend the program. McNamara’s request for data wound through the chain of command and landed on Ken Sams’ desk. The SecDef needed a report 48 hours prior to a Congressional Hearing on the future of herbicide operations. Sams and eight other CHECO authors traveled to Ranch Hand’s home at Bien Hoa to collect historical documents and intelligence reports. They put together a nine-page report, which articulated the basic facts about the program’s tactical effectiveness, inside of the two-day window.² “Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 – June 1967” was the full-length follow on to the short notice report, intended to capture a more comprehensive picture of Ranch Hand’s story and tactical effectiveness.

The Author

Maj Charles Collins, the author of the Herbicide Operations report, was an assistant professor in the physics department at the Air Force Academy. There is scant information on his operational background, but it is clear that he did not have any experience with Ranch Hand prior to writing the report. Significantly, Collins completed the report over the course of a six-week TDY to Vietnam.³ Collins likely benefitted from the research completed by his predecessors, but the short time period allotted to complete the report was surely a handicap. The historical record does not explicitly indicate whether Collins was aware of the high level interest in the preceding report. Regardless, the abundance of official studies undoubtedly painted a clear picture for the author of Ranch Hand’s constantly precarious state of existence.

The Report

Collins’ report consists of four chapters. The first two chapters, entitled “Early

¹ William A. Buckingham, Jr., “Operation Ranch Hand: Herbicides in Southeast Asia,” *Air University Review* XXXIV, no. 5 (Jul-Aug 1983): 44.

² Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 29 November 1987, K239.0512-1856, IRIS No. 1095302, AFHRA, 43.

³ Letter, Maj Charles V. Collins, to Col Thomas D. Wade, USAFA, 4 June 1971, K717.062-8, Iris No. 517537, “Letters of Advice to Col Thomas D. Wade upon his Becoming Head of CHECO Division,” AFHRA.

Operational History” and “Expanded Herbicide Operations,” recount the history of Ranch Hand from its inception to mid-1967. Collins starts with an explanation of military herbicide use as it evolved in the late 1940’s and moves quickly to a description of the specifics of operations in Vietnam. Throughout the narrative, Collins is careful to differentiate between the defoliation and crop destruction missions. The author traces the evolution of ROE for the program and summarizes the details and statistics for the squadron’s most significant missions. Collins presents balanced coverage of tactics development, including the results of some failed experiments to burn large sections of enemy held jungle (Sherwood Forrest and Pink Rose). These sections cover all of Ranch Hand’s noteworthy tactical events up to June 1967, and Collins’ account is comparable to later reports on the operation.

The middle section of the Herbicide Operations report is a summary of the “Current Concept of Operations.” This chapter opens with a technical description of Ranch Hand’s aircraft and spraying equipment, along with updates implemented during the time period. The chapter also includes a thorough description of the command and control procedures, charting a target from nomination through the approval process to execution. Next, Collins moves to a summary of missions and tactics. He explains aerial spray procedures and the evolution of unique fighter escort and FAC tactics for the herbicide mission. The author closes the chapter with a discussion of the characteristics of the herbicides employed by the unit, summarizing their operational results on various plant-life in Vietnam. Although this section is a succinct explanation of operational concepts, it seems out of place, and many of the details would fit better if they were interspersed throughout the narrative of the previous two sections.

Collins closes the report with a chapter on “Results and Effects.” The subsections of the chapter cover VC propaganda, crop destruction effectiveness, results of defoliation, effects on VC morale, and effects on the civilian populace. The section draws from intelligence reports, captured documents, and VC interviews collected by RAND. The chapter is an emphatic defense of Ranch Hand’s effort, citing examples of tactical success and negative impact on the VC. Collins closes the report with an Epilogue summarizing the way forward and emphasizing Ranch Hand’s positive accomplishments. Collins penultimate paragraph sums up the central message of his report: “In the past six

years, the herbicide concept has grown from a research and development test program into an effective tactical operation. Statements from the enemy confirm that operations are producing the desired results. Military and government leaders from both the United States and GVN have consistently evaluated the herbicide program as an effective tactical weapon and expressed the desire for continued and expanded activity in both defoliation and crop destruction projects.”⁴ While Collins does not hesitate to describe tactical failures, the preponderance of the report paints Ranch Hand in a positive light.

The Herbicide Operations report is a factually accurate recounting of Ranch Hand at the tactical level, but there are some significant faults with the monograph. Collins missed many of the broader contextual factors addressed in later accounts of the operation. While some of this is excusable given the records on hand at his echelon, Collins’ neglect is due in large part to careless handling of material that was available to him. The most complete work on the subject is the Air Force official history, *Operation Ranch Hand: The Air Force and Herbicides in Southeast Asia, 1961-1971*, by William Buckingham. Published in 1982, Buckingham’s history provides more detail on the political wrangling over the herbicide operation. Buckingham draws from high-level message traffic and a large collection of government studies to portray the tension between the State Department and the Department of Defense regarding the operation. For example, Buckingham describes a 1962 ARPA study, which concluded, “defoliation yields no military advantage.”⁵ Collins omits any discussion of this report and cites only a later MACV study, which stated, “defoliation operations had a definite military value in counterinsurgency operations and recommended the program be continued.”⁶ Collins’ omission of countervailing studies and dissenting government opinions leaves the reader with a distorted view of the controversy surrounding Ranch Hand.

In addition to the lack of contextual discussion, Collins’ use of the source material he did consult lacks rigor in some cases. The first two chapters of the report draw almost exclusively from only three sources – “Herbicide Operations in the Republic of

⁴ Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 – June 1967, K717.0413-20, Iris No. 517272, AFHRA, 57.

⁵ William A. Buckingham, Jr., *Operation Ranch Hand: The Air Force and Herbicides in Southeast Asia, 1961-1971* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1982), 49–50.

⁶ Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 – June 1967, 5-6. For a later description of the same report see Buckingham, *Operation Ranch Hand*, 88.

Vietnam,” “TAC Aerial Spray Flight Operations in SEA,” and a draft copy of “Defoliation and Ranch Hand in the Republic of South Vietnam.”⁷ All three documents came from the 12th Air Commando Squadron’s historical archive, but none of them has an author or publication date listed. Without this information, it is difficult to judge their bias or veracity, both vital tasks for a historian before citing them as a source. In other places, Collins makes inappropriate use of source material. In his defense of herbicide safety, the author adamantly states, “these chemicals are non-toxic, non-corrosive, and generally not harmful to any form of human or animal life.”⁸ However, the facts to support his assertion came from a series of counter-propaganda statements written by US intelligence units and some briefing notes written by Ranch Hand personnel.⁹ Collins ignored later statements in Intelligence Summaries that contradict his evidence. One of his sources states, “There is sufficient consistency in the reports to indicate that a mild form of nausea, fever, and headache may occur when humans breathe the spray.”¹⁰ Although definitive evidence of herbicide toxicity was not released until 1969, Collins may have preserved his credibility by acknowledging the dissenting viewpoints and providing a more authoritative source for his argument.¹¹

Collins’ defense of Herbicide Operations in the final chapter is not always well supported. Collins’ assessment of defoliation relies on a shallow pool of supporting information. Although he copiously quotes statistics on the acres of jungle affected, a more accurate measure of tactical effectiveness is the testimony of ground commanders regarding a connection between defoliation and ameliorating ambush problems and improving fire base safety. Collins included brief statements from two Army general

⁷ Supporting Documents 1-3 to Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 – June 1967, K717.0413-20 Vol 3, Iris No. 1010372, AFHRA.

⁸ Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 – June 1967, 42.

⁹ “MACCOC Directive Number 525-1, Herbicide Operations,” 15 February 1966, and “Ranch Hand Briefing Notes,” in Supporting Documents to Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 – June 1967, K717.0413-20 Vol 3, Iris No. 1010372, AFHRA. The Ranch Hand Briefing Notes contain a cavalier statement on the topic that Collins rewrote. The original document states, “Ranch Hand personnel are slopped with it daily and some have actually drank the stuff.” Collins version states, “. . . some Ranch Hand personnel have actually ingested some of the agents during demonstrations to show that there is no danger.”

¹⁰ Weekly Air Intelligence Summary, 9 July 1967 – Effects of Ranch Hand Operations, in Supporting Documents to Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 – June 1967, K717.0413-20 Vol 3, Iris No. 1010372, AFHRA.

¹¹ Paul Frederick Cecil, *Herbicide Warfare, The Ranch Hand Project in Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 163.

officers, and a nonspecific quote from an intelligence summary regarding the improved visibility of ground targets afforded to FACs.¹² Later works refer to an abundant supply of Army testimony on the improvements to security as a result of defoliation, citing MACV studies completed concurrent with the CHECO report.¹³

Collins' final chapter also suffers from a selective interpretation of the available evidence. Collins' discussion of crop destruction results draws from a pool of 206 interviews of ex-VC and non-VC civilians conducted by RAND. The author states that crop destruction is "somewhat harsh" on the civilian population, and he admits that many of them are frustrated with the US and do not understand the mission's rationale.¹⁴ However, he concludes that the crop destruction is effective because it disrupts the VC food supply and provides a motivation for civilians to move to GVN controlled areas.¹⁵ Collins' evaluation is in stark contrast to a RAND report based on the same data set. In "An Evaluation of Chemical Crop Destruction in Vietnam," Betts and Denton draw their conclusions based on broad characterizations of all survey responses. Their report states that "VC combat units appear to be adequately fed," and later asserts that it would be "exceedingly difficult" make any substantial difference in their food supply through crop destruction.¹⁶ Furthermore, they argue, "peasants bear the brunt of the deprivation" and their frustration may be counterproductive to the overall mission in Vietnam.¹⁷ On the surface it seems that Collins selectively picked quotes from the RAND interviews to support his argument, and a more comprehensive review of their content leads to a different conclusion. Collins' exclusion of the contradictory evidence may not have been deliberate. Perhaps he felt that the information validating Ranch Hand's operation was more convincing. Regardless, the exclusion of opposing data opens the door for accusations of professional bias if not official cover-up.

Impact of the Report

The Herbicide Operations report had a lasting impact on Ranch Hand's survival. The aforementioned RAND report created a stir in Washington, DC that threatened the

¹² Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 – June 1967, 23 and 45-46.

¹³ Paul Frederick Cecil, *Herbicidal Warfare: The Ranch Hand Project in Vietnam*, 179.

¹⁴ Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 – June 1967, 54-55.

¹⁵ Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 – June 1967, 49.

¹⁶ Russell Betts and Frank Denton, "An Evaluation of Chemical Crop Destruction in Vietnam" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1967), x-xi.

¹⁷ Betts and Denton, "An Evaluation of Chemical Crop Destruction in Vietnam," xiii.

continuation of herbicide operations. Released in October 1967, the Betts and Denton report came out at the same time as the CHECO report and a sister report from RAND titled, "A Statistical Analysis of the US Crop Spraying Program in South Vietnam." The sister report concluded that 500 civilians experienced crop loss for every ton of rice denied to the VC and that Ranch Hand would have to destroy 50% or more of the rural economy to have any significant impact on VC food rations.¹⁸ The report closes with a damning assessment: "In terms of denying food to the VC, the returns from the crop destruction program seem insignificant at best, and the costs to the villager seem disproportionately high. . . the author's feeling is that the program should be discontinued."¹⁹ McNamara directed the JCS to review RAND's data and provide a response justifying continuation of the program. In December 1967, the Joint Chiefs made their case to the SecDef based on information from 7th Air Force, MACV, and CINPAC, and as a result OSD elected to preserve Ranch Hand.²⁰ Later documentation confirms that Collins' report was part of the evidentiary basis for the JCS policy position. A thank you letter from the CSAF states, "I appreciate the comprehensive analysis of crop destruction. Extracts of the report were provided to the joint staff to support the case for further operations. . . This type of effort reinforces the validity and usefulness of Project CHECO endeavors."²¹ The Herbicide Operations report was also cited by a 1968 CINPAC Scientific Advisory Group study defending Ranch Hand.²² It is not certain that Collins' report elicited any changes in USAF herbicide tactics or counterinsurgency doctrine, but the report clearly played a role in the continuation of Ranch Hand until January 1971.

In the final analysis, Collins' Herbicide Operations CHECO report contains a balance of positive and negative qualities. For his contemporaries, the report was

¹⁸ Anthony J. Russo, "A Statistical Analysis of the US Crop Spraying Program in South Vietnam" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1967), vii.

¹⁹ Russo, "A Statistical Analysis of the US Crop Spraying Program in South Vietnam," 32.

²⁰ Buckingham, *Operation Ranch Hand*, 134–136. It is within the realm of possibility that Collins knew about the RAND reports while he was conducting his research. Although he may not have anticipated their conclusions and constructed his argument as a response, the reports were written in parallel.

²¹ Letter, From CSAF, to CINCPACAF, 12 December 1967, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898524, "CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968," AFHRA.

²² William F. Warren, "A Review of the Herbicide Program in South Vietnam," Commander in Chief Pacific Scientific Advisory Group, Working Paper No. 10-68, August 1968, <http://www.ditc.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/779797.pdf> (accessed on 19 March 2013).

undoubtedly a cogent summary of the tactical level details of the program, including an accurate historical reconstruction of the program's significant accomplishments and setbacks. However in retrospect, the report falls prey to many of the typical pitfalls of contemporary official accounts. Collins' work lacks many of the contextual details that provide a clear understanding of the divisive nature of the herbicide program. In addition, Collins' argument is notably one-sided. Even if he found the opposition's argument unpersuasive, a balanced assessment must acknowledge the conflicting evidence and provide a convincing rejoinder. The Herbicide Operations report is an excellent starting point for understanding Ranch Hand, but it falls short of being an authoritative source. It is difficult to hold Collins responsible given the information available to him, but he unwittingly played a role in a program that had devastating health consequences for friend and foe alike. Contemplating this report in hindsight, Ken Sams reflected, "It'll always be one of the black marks in my book."²³

"The Role of USAF Gunships in SEASIA"

Richard Kott's "The Role of USAF Gunships in SEASIA" is the third report in a larger body of CHECO's work addressing aspects of gunship technology. Ken Sams' "First Test and Combat Use of the AC-47" precedes Kott's report, and it discusses the concept development and early history of the gunship.²⁴ Lawrence Hickey's March 1967 report, "Night Close Air Support in RVN, 1961-1966," also documents the accomplishments of the AC-47 as one of three Air Force solutions to the Night CAS problem.²⁵ There is no evidence that higher headquarters directed CHECO studies on the gunship, but in the foreword to his report, Kott points out the "persistent high-level interest in the progress and development" of the gunship.²⁶ By the time Kott arrived in Vietnam, the gunship had a firmly established reputation, and it was an obvious decision to continue the series of reports on this burgeoning technology.

²³ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 43.

²⁴ Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, First Test and Combat Use of the AC-47, 8 December 1965, M-38245-4-U No. 2, Fairchild Documents, MSFRIC, 1.

²⁵ Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Night Close Air Support in RVN, 1961-1966, 15 March 1967, M-38245-30, Fairchild Documents, MSFRIC, 1.

²⁶ Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, The Role of USAF Gunships in SEASIA, 30 August 1969, K717.0414-15 V.1, Iris No. 1147636, AFHRA, xi.

The Author

Major Richard Kott arrived at the Tan Son Nhut CHECO office in 1969 on a one year tour from the Air Force Academy. Kott had an extensive academic and operational background. From 1959 to 1963, he taught geography at USAFA, and two years prior to his CHECO assignment, Kott completed a PhD in geography at the University of Poitiers, France. He received his pilot's wings in 1954 and accumulated approximately 5000 hours in fighters, bombers, transports, and seaplanes. Kott remained on flying status while he was assigned to CHECO, flying as an instructor pilot (IP) on C-47 cargo missions from Tan Son Nhut. As part of his research Kott flew missions on two of the three models of gunships described in his report, the AC-47 Spooky and AC-130 Spectre. Kott reports, "On one occasion, I had the opportunity to see firsthand the devastation of concentrated firepower, in this case from a Spooky directed at a VC perimeter attack at Cam Ran Bay AB."²⁷ Kott was among the most qualified CHECO authors in the history of the program, with a solid foundation in the technical expertise and academic rigor necessary to report on the gunship program.

The Report

"The Role of USAF Gunships in SEASIA" is logically divided into three main body chapters and a brief set of closing observations. In the opening chapter, Kott describes "The Mixed Gunship Force." He starts with a basic chronology of how the three gunship variants arrived in SEA with a breakout of their major roles and missions. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to a frank discussion of how the mixed gunship force evolved. Kott concisely summarizes the arguments of 7th Air Force commanders who favored the AC-130 over the AC-119 Stinger. The author documents the opposing view of the Secretary of the Air Force, who believed that the AC-119 would be a suitable follow on to the AC-47 and avoid the time delays associated with converting C-130s into gunships. Kott closes the chapter with a dispassionate summary of the compromise solution and the disposition of gunship forces throughout Southeast Asia.

Kott's middle chapter, "Employment of Gunships in SEA," is a concise summary of the capabilities and limitations of the three types of gunships. After a brief discussion of organization, the author describes control and fragging procedures. Kott walks

²⁷ Richard Kott, email to the author, 8 March 2013.

through a standard gunship engagement from arrival on station, to fire support coordination, culminating with firepower on target and BDA. Next, Kott provides a detailed description of the unique aspects of each gunship's tactics. He effectively incorporates first hand accounts of ground commanders who validate the gunship's effectiveness in the base defense and close air support roles. Kott also documents the gunship's vulnerability to hostile anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), admitting that the aircraft must be confined to low threat target areas. In addition, Kott describes many of the limitations of the AC-119G in the FAC and interdiction roles. Three appendices to the report supplement this chapter with descriptions of gunship characteristics, detailed statistics on gunship effectiveness, and a battle damage report from an AC-130 hit by hostile AAA. Throughout this chapter Kott does an exceptional job of balancing highlights of gunship capability with candid descriptions of their drawbacks.

Kott's third chapter provides a thorough description of gunship tactics. He begins with a rundown of the factors that define the boundaries of gunship capability: weather factors, sensor limitations, and ground-fire vulnerabilities. Kott includes a detailed discussion of Project Moonwatch, a study of moon illumination effects on AC-130 effectiveness and survivability in the interdiction role. After documenting the importance of threat intelligence, the author moves on to a thorough synopsis of the gunship/fighter escort tactic. The chapter ends with an update on evolving tactics for offset aiming techniques which promised to improve coordination with ground parties for close air support and air base defense. "The Role of USAF Gunships in SEASIA" closes with three pages of "Observations." Kott sums up by emphasizing the enduring effectiveness of the gunship concept and stressing the critical evolution of gunship escort tactics, which hold out promise for the future of "night firepower delivery."²⁸

Kott's Gunship report is among the most well-researched and documented monographs in the compendium of CHECO's effort. In 50 pages of narrative, Kott includes 135 footnotes.²⁹ Seven volumes of supporting documents, composed of 1,595 pages, accompany the report, and unlike many other reports, all of Kott's reference materials are in the supporting volumes. Kott's sources are diverse, including first-hand

²⁸ The Role of USAF Gunships in SEASIA, 30 August 1969, 50.

²⁹ The Role of USAF Gunships in SEASIA, 30 August 1969, 50-58.

interviews with crew members and key leadership, unit histories, official studies, technical manuals on the aircraft, and command level message traffic. The report also contains 55 graphs, diagrams, and charts depicting gunship tactics, operational results, and technical information on gunship equipment. Significantly, Kott's report appeared in the contentious period following the Tet Offensive, when reviewers had a propensity to alter the data in CHECO reports. Although gunships were not particularly controversial, Kott does include data on interdiction, comparing gunship results with those achieved by jet aircraft. The data in the published version of his report shows no signs of tampering, remaining consistent with his source material.³⁰ Few, if any, CHECO reports come close to Kott's exhaustive research. Jack Ballard, author of the later USAF history of Gunships, comments that the report "greatly simplified and aided research" by compiling the essential documents on the topic in one place.³¹

In light of Kott's meticulous documentation, there is very little missing or inaccurate information in his report. *Development and Employment of Fixed-Wing Gunships, 1962-1972* by Jack Ballard is the most comprehensive source on gunships to appear following Kott's report. Ballard quotes extensively from a declassified version of "The Role of USAF Gunships in SEASIA," and footnotes many of the same sources included in Kott's supporting documents. Ballard's work provides more contextual detail for many of the issues discussed in Kott's report. For example, Ballard has an in-depth discussion of the program requirements that grew into the AC-130, documenting its path from the self-contained night attack capability and Project Shed Light. The official history also contains a more comprehensive account of the competing positions of USAF leadership regarding the AC-130 and the AC-119.³² For this discussion, Ballard draws from Pentagon message traffic that Kott likely did not have access to in Saigon. Ballard's account does not compete with Kott's, nor does the extra information lead to a different conclusion about gunship operations. It simply adds more detail to the preliminary coverage of the topic in Kott's report.

³⁰ Supporting Documents to The Role of USAF Gunships in SEASIA, Volume 7, 30 August 1969, K717.0414-15 V.8, Iris No. 898457, AFHRA. This volume contains ops analysis reports completed by 7th AF DOA. Incidentally, nearly all of these reports are signed by Col H.M. Fish. To the extent that the source material is accurate, Kott's report is accurate as well.

³¹ Jack S. Ballard, *Development and Employment of Fixed Wing Gunships, 1962-1972* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1982), 268.

³² Ballard, *Development and Employment of Fixed Wing Gunships*, 79–86.

Compared to the assertions in later works, Kott's modest conclusions illustrate a limitation of the CHECO program. The report's last paragraph states, "The gunship weapon system is five years old. Despite its uniqueness and impact on the air war in SEA, there appear to be no immediate doctrinal implications that are not within the purview of existing statements."³³ In contrast, Ballard derives seven conclusions regarding the gunship's revolutionary impact on airpower employment. The statements boil down to the assertion that individual initiative, creativity, and evolutionary improvements created a potent platform for fighting irregular war as the contest was unfolding.³⁴ Kenneth Werrell counts the gunship among one of very few examples in which the Air Force successfully adapted technology to the unique challenges of the Vietnam War.³⁵ Donald Mrozek takes the more cynical position that the USAF forced the gunship into the interdiction role over ground support to suit institutional priorities, but he admits that the aircraft was a prime example of tactical and technological innovation.³⁶ Four later CHECO reports build upon Kott's work and extend the gunship story to the end of the war, yet all of them make the same qualified assessments of the program.³⁷ In spite of the accumulated gunship history that existed by 1973, CHECO authors lacked the perspective of later official historians that would have allowed them to make more sweeping judgments. Perhaps to their credit, Kott and others shied away from broad assertions based on their proximity to the events and an awareness of the relatively small window of activity under their examination. Nevertheless, the "contemporary historical" viewpoint carried inherent limitations for judging the significance of events in the long run.

³³ The Role of USAF Gunships in SEASIA, 30 August 1969, 50.

³⁴ Jack S. Ballard, *Development and Employment of Fixed Wing Gunships*, 259–260.

³⁵ Kenneth P. Werrell, "Did USAF Technology Fail in Vietnam?: Three Case Studies," *Airpower Journal* XII, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 91–93.

³⁶ Donald J Mrozek, *Airpower and the Ground War in Vietnam*. (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1988), 125.

³⁷ Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Fixed Wing Gunships in SEA, Jul 1969 – July 1971, 30 November 1971, K717.0414-15 V.9, Iris No. 517439, AFHRA. Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, PAVE AEGIS Weapon System (AC-130E), 30 July 1973, K717.0413-37, Iris No. 517463, AFHRA. Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, OV-1 / AC-119 Hunter-Killer Team, 10 October 1972, K717.0414-34, Iris No. 517461, AFHRA. Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, PAVE MACE / COMBAT RENDEZVOUS, 26 December 1972, K717.0414-35, Iris No. 517462, AFHRA. All of these reports build off of one another. Each of the subsequent reports cite Sams and Kott's work as background information in the beginning of their monographs.

“The Role of Gunships in SEASIA” remains classified “secret,” which creates a unique problem for judging its historical significance. Of the works surveyed, Ballard is the only author who directly cites Kott’s report. Later histories covering aspects of gunship employment rely on Ballard’s work and the handful of other CHECO reports declassified shortly after the war. Bernard Nalty’s *The War Against Trucks* and Jacob Van Staaveren’s *Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1960-1968* contain passages that are lifted almost verbatim from Kott’s report, but their vicarious reference is transmitted via Ballard’s official history of the gunship.³⁸ Many other histories of gunship operations, such as *Apollo’s Warriors* and *Air Base Defense in the Republic of Vietnam*, refer exclusively to Ballard’s book, with no references to CHECO reports whatsoever.³⁹ While classification may be justified, it creates a layer of administrative red tape that many authors will elect to avoid, and the researcher must trust that the author of a secondary work remained true to the source material.⁴⁰ The author must possess the appropriate clearance and be willing to cut through the bureaucratic barriers to gain access to these reports. In this case, Ballard’s initiative created a shortcut for others to gain the insights of the source material. Fortunately, Ballard’s work remains a definitive account of gunship operations, encompassing the key insights of the primary sources. However, in many other cases, the classification barrier of CHECO reports confines the audience to a select group of insiders who have the motivation to seek them out.

Impact of the Report

Air Force leadership expressed considerable interest in Kott’s CHECO report, and it even garnered praise from the Secretary of the Air Force, Robert Seamans. In a letter from the Air Staff, Maj Gen Talbott relayed, “Secretary Seamans reviewed the report in considerable detail and found it to be quite useful. In his opinion, the material presented,

³⁸ Bernard C Nalty, *The War Against Trucks: Aerial Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1968-1972*. (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2005) and Jacob Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1960-1968* (Washington, DC: Center for Air Force History, 1993).

³⁹ Michael E. Haas, *Apollo’s Warriors: United States Air Force Special Operations During the Cold War* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1997). and Roger P. Fox, *Air Base Defense in the Republic of Vietnam, 1961-1973* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1979).

⁴⁰ 47 CHECO reports, including Kott’s, remain classified “Confidential” or higher with several that are still “Top Secret.”

the format, and the style all contributed toward making it a good report.”⁴¹ Talbott lauded CHECO for its “consistently meritorious products.” Although Kott was aware that his report was “making the rounds” at the Pentagon, he did not receive the commendation letters until after departing Saigon. He was also unsure of the specific rationale for the Air Staff’s interest, and the historical record does not shed any light on this either.⁴² Nalty points out that interdiction was a lynch pin of the “aerial shield” for Nixon’s Vietnamization strategy, and gunships were the leading truck killer on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. As such, Secretary Seamans was committed to improving gunship weapons and sensors in order to keep them relevant in the interdiction campaign.⁴³ Kott’s report may have validated a position, which USAF leadership already held, but it did not seem to make any noticeable difference in terms of Air Force policy or doctrine.

“The Role of Gunships in SEASIA” stands out as one of CHECO’s highest quality products. Kott concisely covers a high interest topic, without overlooking any of the significant aspects of the gunship program. The author is candid about leadership opinions and drawbacks of the weapon system. Kott’s prolific research effort ensured a cogent account of events and preserved an archive for posterity that may otherwise have eluded historians. Although it may not be readily apparent, his work has established a foundation for the historiography of the subject. Kott’s report did not seem to have any immediate utility for diagnosing doctrinal shortfalls, but “The Role of Gunships in SEASIA” forms the backbone of a compelling account of USAF innovation in the midst of a counterinsurgency.

“Rescue at Ban Phanop, 5-7 December 1969”

On December 5, 1969, Boxer 21 flight, a two ship of F-4s, took off from Cam Ranh Bay AB on an interdiction mission to deliver Mk-36 antipersonnel mines along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. The lead aircraft delivered its ordnance without incident.⁴⁴ Lt Woodrow Bergeron, Boxer 22’s navigator, recalls their weapons delivery: “Our heading was almost due north, right at 500 knots, just pulling up. We had just pickled

⁴¹ Letter, From Maj Gen C.M. Talbott, Director of Operations, DCS/Plans and Operations, HQAF to CINCPACAF, 6 August 1970, K717.062-6, IRIS No. 898527, “CHECO Summary for General Slay,” AFHRA.

⁴² Richard Kott, email to the author, 8 March 2013.

⁴³ Nalty, *The War Against Trucks*, 58–60.

⁴⁴ Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Rescue at Ban Phanop, 5-7 December 1969, 15 February 1970, K717.0413-72 V.1, Iris No. 517358, AFHRA, 1.

our ordnance. We were starting to pull the nose up when we got hit and the plane just lurched at a steep angle, and that's when we bailed out.”⁴⁵ Within hours of their Mayday call, Ken Sams was aware that a major Search and Rescue (SAR) effort was underway, and he asked John Schlight to keep an eye on it as the subject for a potential report.⁴⁶ The rescue effort spanned three days. When it was all over, 336 aircraft participated delivering 1,463 weapons. Although it was later surpassed by the infamous rescue of Bat 21, which became the subject of a best-selling work of non-fiction and the basis for a Hollywood blockbuster film, the “Rescue at Ban Phanop” was the largest SAR mission in history at that point, most certainly meriting a CHECO report.⁴⁷

The Author

Lt Col John Schlight was among the most preeminently qualified authors on the CHECO staff. Schlight acquired extensive flying experience in two assignments as a navigator, before taking a teaching job in the history department at USAFA in 1958. He had three postgraduate degrees – an MA in philosophy from Fordham University, and an MA and PhD in history from Princeton. From 1967 to 1969, Schlight was the AF Academy's history department liaison to Project CHECO. He made decisions on who participated in the summer TDY program, as well as coordinated in advance on report topics to suit the participant's interests. In 1969, Schlight arrived in Saigon for a year-long tour with CHECO.⁴⁸ Much like Richard Kott, John Schlight had an ideal mix of operational experience and academic credentials, which made him a perfect fit for the CHECO program.

The Report

At thirteen pages, “Rescue at Ban Phanop” is a succinct account of a significant milestone in the history of SAR in Vietnam. Schlight's report consists of three chapters – one for each day of the rescue operation. In chronological order, the author compiles a narrative of the events that led to 1Lt Bergeron's rescue. Tragically, the VC discovered and killed Capt Ben Danielson, Boxer 22's pilot, on the first night of the operation. In addition, A1C David M. Davidson, a Pararescue Jumper (PJ) on board Jolly 76, was

⁴⁵ Interview with 1Lt Woodrow J Bergeron, Jr., Cam Ranh Bay AB, by LtCol John Schlight, 12 December 1969 in Supporting Documents to Rescue at Ban Phanop, K717.0413-72 V.2, Iris No. 517359, AFHRA.

⁴⁶ John Schlight, email to the author, 4 March 2013.

⁴⁷ Rescue at Ban Phanop, 5-7 December 1969, 13-17.

⁴⁸ John Schlight, email to the author, 21 February 2013.

wounded by hostile fire on the second day of the rescue and died en route to NKP.⁴⁹ Schligh deftly weaves together first-hand accounts of the heroic effort from Bergeron, FACs, the HC-130P SAR Airborne Mission Commander (AMC), the helicopter crews, and fighter pilots who supported the rescue operation. Throughout the narrative, the author emphasizes tactical missteps and innovation that culminated in Bergeron's rescue. Schligh asserts that the most effective tactics were not new, but the scale of this operation forced the crews to "relearn some lessons that had been forgotten through disuse."⁵⁰ Schligh closes the report with the prescient observation "that no two rescue operations are identical and success depends upon rapid adaptability to the location, terrain, and enemy tactics."⁵¹



Figure 5: The Crew of Boxer 22, Left - Capt Ben Danielson, Right – 1 Lt Woodrow Bergeron stepping off the helicopter at NKP on 7 December 1969. Source: Capt Ben Danielson, <http://www.oletouchdownclub.org/danielson-award/> (accessed on 30 March 2013). and "1 Lt Woodrow Bergeron, Jr." *Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service, 1946 – 1981, An Illustrated Chronology* (Scott AFB, IL: Office of MAC History, 1983), 40.

Schligh's research effort was the epitome of detailed and timely. Within days of the operation's end, Schligh set out to gather information. The author attended 1Lt Bergeron's official debrief on December 12, 1969, and he conducted a follow-on interview to capture information about the rescue while Bergeron's memory was fresh. Schligh's questions were exceptionally detailed: "Was your visor down, chin strap up? Did you get wind blast when you came out of the aircraft? How long were you in the

⁴⁹ Rescue at Ban Phanop, 5-7 December 1969, 6-8. Immediately after the shootdown Danielson was listed as MIA. In 2003, a piece of bone and Danielson's dogtags were brought to US officials in Vietnam, which subsequently resulted in discovering the rest of his body. Danielson was posthumously promoted to Major, and his remains were officially repatriated on June 15, 2007.

⁵⁰ Rescue at Ban Phanop, 5-7 December 1969, 12.

⁵¹ Rescue at Ban Phanop, 5-7 December 1969, 13.

chute? What did you eat?”⁵² While some of these questions may seem trivial, Schligh also captured substantive information on the VC tactics used and the enemy reaction to CBU-19, a new cluster bomb with riot control agents in the sub-munitions. Following this, Schligh traveled to key tactical units to interview aircrew who were in a unique position to observe the rescue. He talked to FACs at NKP who were responsible for controlling strikes and coordinating helicopter escort. He also interviewed crews of the HC-130Ps who managed C2, refueling, and airspace deconfliction for the operation. Schligh combined this information with detailed logs of the events from 7th Air Force Headquarters and the 3rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group, which managed SAR efforts for all of Southeast Asia.⁵³

In comparison, the unit histories and individual accounts lack the all encompassing perspective and timeliness of Schligh’s CHECO report. The 56th Special Operations Wing History for the time period devotes a mere five pages to the rescue, and it focuses exclusively on A-1 and helicopter pilots’ accounts. It was also written months after the events occurred.⁵⁴ Individual squadron histories go into excruciating specifics such as what time individual ordnance was delivered or descriptions of extraneous radio conversations.⁵⁵ An independent work by one of the many PJs that participated in the rescue contains some fascinating details of the events on board each of the 16 helicopters that attempted pick-ups, but his report does not appreciably alter Schligh’s interpretation of the events.⁵⁶ Schligh distills documents such as these into a digestible description of the most relevant content and puts it into context with a comprehensive view of the operation from all sides that is appropriate for a headquarters level product. It is important to recognize that without Project CHECO contemporary historians would be left to these pigeonholed versions of significant events to piece the story together for themselves.

⁵² Interview with 1Lt Woodrow J Bergeron, Jr., Cam Ranh Bay AB, by LtCol John Schligh, 12 December 1969 in Supporting Documents to Rescue at Ban Phanop, K717.0413-72 V.2, Iris No. 517359, AFHRA.

⁵³ Supporting Documents to Rescue at Ban Phanop, K717.0413-72 V.2, Iris No. 517359, AFHRA. and John Schligh, email to the author, 4 March 2013.

⁵⁴ History of the 56th Special Operations Wing, October – December 1969, K-WG-56-HI V.1, Iris No. 451134, AFHRA, 52-56.

⁵⁵ History of the 22nd Special Operations Squadron, 1-31 December 1969, Appendix V, Tab C, K-WG-56-HI V.2, Iris No. 451135, AFHRA.

⁵⁶ CMSgt Tony Gargano, “Boxer 22 Bravo,” K318.203-79, Iris No. 1024833, AFHRA.

In his discussion of the merits of official history Ronald Spector states, “Because of the services’ demand for coverage of technical and administrative as well as operational developments, official history often illuminates aspects of the story that might otherwise have remained obscure.”⁵⁷ This certainly seems to be the case with “Rescue at Ban Phanop,” and Schligh’s report has preserved the legacy of this momentous event. *Leave No Man Behind: The Saga of Combat Search and Rescue* is a narrative history of SAR from WWII to the present, and the authors devote four pages of their work to the Boxer 22 rescue. In fact, their account is a slightly re-worded version of Schligh’s CHECO report.⁵⁸ “Rescue at Ban Phanop” also plays a prominent role in the Air Force official history of search and rescue by Earl Tilford, *The United States Air Force Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia*. Apart from incorporating the event into the chronological coverage of SAR operations, Tilford uses the incident as evidence to make some significant judgments on USAF SAR lessons. In combination with the Bat 21 rescue, Tilford uses the Boxer 22 rescue to raise the “difficult question of how much effort was too much,” a question he argues the Air Force never asked or answered during the war.⁵⁹ Tilford also uses the episode to illustrate the costly consequences of conducting SAR in a high threat environment.⁶⁰ In the absence of Schligh’s meticulous record, “The Rescue of Ban Phanop” may not occupy its rightful place as a landmark event in SAR history.

Impact of the Report

In addition to cementing the rescue’s place in Air Force lore, “Rescue at Ban Phanop” had some indirect influence on USAF SAR tactics. In January 1971 shortly after the report was published, 7th Air Force Headquarters released Manual 64-1 “Search and Rescue – Southeast Asia.” It was the first attempt to codify SAR procedures, and the document clarified tactics, techniques, and operational procedures for each member of the SAR task force.⁶¹ Although there was not an explicit reference to Schligh’s work,

⁵⁷ Ronald Spector, “An Improbable Success Story: Official Military Histories in the Twentieth Century,” *The Public Historian* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 26.

⁵⁸ George Galdorisi and Thomas Phillips, *Leave No Man Behind: The Saga of Combat Search and Rescue* (Minneapolis, MN: MBI Pub. Co., 2008), 372–376.

⁵⁹ Earl H. Tilford, Jr., *The United States Air Force Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1992), 119.

⁶⁰ Tilford, *The United States Air Force Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia*, 122.

⁶¹ Supporting Documents to, Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, USAF Search and Rescue Jan 1971 – Mar 1972, K717.0414-1 V.2, Iris No. 517398, AFHRA.

the document addresses many of the shortfalls specifically identified in the CHECO report. Coincident with the manual's release a rescue professional involved in its publication, Col Frederick Sohle, Jr., stated, "Our development of present SAR capability has been a history of relearning lessons already learned by someone else, but who unfortunately could not or did not document it for others to profit by."⁶² His observation is virtually the same as Schligh's closing thought, and there is no question that "Rescue at Ban Phanop" played a role in documenting effective SAR tactics. Information from Schligh's interview with Lt Bergeron also appeared in a CHECO report titled, "Escape and Evasion SEA, 1964 -1971."⁶³ Schligh's research contributed to the evasion lessons in this subsequent work, and "Escape and Evasion" was an important instructional tool for the USAF Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape (SERE) School.⁶⁴ The historical record does not draw direct links between these doctrinal changes and "Rescue at Ban Phanop," but without a doubt, Schligh's analysis captured key insights, which at a minimum reinforced enduring principles for future SAR operations.

"Rescue at Ban Phanop" is the story of one rescue among 3,883 during Vietnam, and it is the shortest CHECO report.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, this concentrated summary of a significant event combined with forceful tactical analysis packs a punch. Schligh's report illustrates many of the unique advantages of the CHECO program. Schligh exploited CHECO's headquarters mandate to capture viewpoints from every significant participant in the operation. In addition, Schligh's position allowed him to gain early awareness of the unfolding events. Consequently, he secured in depth information from his sources immediately after the event and before their memories faded. The author subsequently interlaced this information into an authoritative description of the rescue, which may have otherwise escaped the grasp of his contemporaries in the field and the USAF's long-term consciousness.

⁶² Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, USAF Search and Rescue, 1 Jul 1966 – 31 Dec 1970, 23 April 1971, K717.0414-1, Iris No. 517396, AFHRA, 55.

⁶³ Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Escape and Evasion SEA, 1964-1971, 4 February 1972, K717.0414-27, Iris No. 1009759, AFHRA, 39-43.

⁶⁴ Staff Summary Sheet, by Kenneth Sams, Subject: AFA Summer Research Program, 21 September 1967, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898524, "CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968," AFHRA.

⁶⁵ Tilford, *The United States Air Force Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia*, 155.

“Linebacker Operations, September – December 1972”

If Project CHECO could only write one report on air operations during Vietnam, it would have been on Operation Linebacker. Commenting on Linebacker II in a coincidental allusion to CHECO’s unofficial mandate, CJCS Admiral Thomas Moorer stated, “Airpower, given its day in court after almost a decade of frustration, confirmed its effectiveness as an instrument of national policy in just nine and a half flying days.”⁶⁶ Although Moorer did not make this statement until 1973, there was a palpable sense during Linebacker that its results would vindicate the Air Force in the inevitable postwar review and critique. Therefore, it is not surprising that CHECO completed a campaign series on the two Linebacker operations. The initial report covers the first 120 days of Linebacker I, hence the title, “Linebacker: Overview of the First 120 Days.” “Linebacker Operations” covers the remainder of Linebacker I and comes to a logical conclusion with the completion of Linebacker II.

The Author

Major Calvin Johnson completed “Linebacker Operations” on two consecutive summer TDY’s from the USAFA civil engineering department in 1973 and 1974. During both trips Johnson worked with the CHECO staff at PACAF headquarters. Johnson was a navigator by trade with eight years of flying experience in the B-47 and B-58. He also accumulated 150 combat missions over Southeast Asia in the EB-66 between 1970 and 1971. Apart from his academic background in the engineering field, Johnson completed the full complement of Professional Military Education, including Air Command and Staff College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces at National Defense University in Washington, DC.⁶⁷ The author did not have a PhD and his primary academic background was not in the humanities. While these are not necessarily impediments, they may not have served him well in taking on a project of this magnitude. Regardless, Johnson had the tactical experience necessary to appreciate the myriad of technical details that had bearing on the outcome of Operation Linebacker.

⁶⁶ Earl H. Tilford, Jr., *Setup, What the Air Force Did in Vietnam and Why* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1991), 290.

⁶⁷ Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Linebacker Operations, September – December 1972, 31 December 1978, K717.0413-102, Iris No. 1029549, AFHRA, iv.

The Report

“Linebacker Operations” consists of four chapters that selectively cover various topics during the campaign. The report opens with a chapter on the “Linebacker Build-Up,” which contains a brief summary of the preceding report on Linebacker I. After discussing the changes to ROE, the author describes a typical strike package and walks through the target selection and approval process. Although Johnson does not make it explicitly clear, he is drawing a distinction between the higher command restrictions during Operation Rolling Thunder and the more relaxed approach to Linebacker.⁶⁸ The opening chapter transitions smoothly into the next titled one, “Linebacker I Operations.” Johnson covers the campaign in this chapter through discussion of discrete topics. The author opens with a description of the USAF, Navy, and Marine Corps air assets committed to the operation, and he follows this with a description of typical strike package tactics. Johnson then summarizes the command, control, and communications arrangements for Linebacker, including headquarters arrangements, the airborne C2 constellation which coordinated the strikes, and issues with strike package communication. Johnson closes Chapter Two with a set of Linebacker I lessons learned, in which he critiques air-to-air tactics and strike package composition.

Chapter Three breaks up the narrative with a discussion of “Special Topics,” addressing tactical and technological issues pervasive during both Linebacker I and II. The chapter starts off with a narrative account of the first B-52 loss to an SA-2 at the tail end of Linebacker I. Johnson thoroughly analyzes the causes of the loss, and then makes the assertion that the incident was “typical of many which occurred the following month during Linebacker II.”⁶⁹ The author moves on to a discussion of the F-111, which was in the midst of its combat debut during Linebacker I. Johnson explains the aircraft’s typical mission profile and discusses some of the difficulties encountered with integrating the new weapons system into the operation. The next section covers effectiveness and limitations of various ordnance employed during Linebacker I and II – including laser

⁶⁸ Melvin Porter makes it clear in the introduction of the preceding report that his purpose is to make a comparison between Rolling Thunder and Linebacker. Johnson’s opening chapter is essentially a summary of Porter’s work, but he does not carry over this detail. See Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Linebacker: Overview of the First 120 Days, 27 September 1973, K717.0414-42, Iris No. 1009900, AFHRA, xi-xii.

⁶⁹ Linebacker Operations, 31 December 1978, 33.

guided bombs (LGBs), electro-optical guided bombs (EOGBs), and the dismal failures of long-range navigation (LORAN) munitions deliveries. Chapter Three ends with an overview of the typical Linebacker mission that occurred during this campaign. Johnson includes a synopsis of hunter/killer tactics and the introduction of Teaball Weapons Control—generally considered one of the most successful C2 developments of the Vietnam War.

The final chapter of “Linebacker Operations” continues the topically organized format, bringing the report to a close with an outline of Linebacker II. Johnson opens the chapter with a breakout of the operational phases, objectives, and targets. In a section titled “Significant Events” Johnson provides a summary of the 15 B-52 shoot-downs and the consequent tactical adjustments made by Strategic Air Command (SAC). Next, the chapter addresses unique aspects of Linebacker II employment, outlining updated chaff, electronic countermeasures (ECM), and counter-air tactics. In the last section, Johnson covers Linebacker II lessons learned. He focuses on B-52 route planning, command and control arrangements, and bomb damage assessment (BDA) deficiencies. Johnson concludes “Linebacker Operations” with a concise assessment of the campaign’s overall effectiveness, stating unequivocally that Linebacker II brought the North Vietnamese back to peace talks in Paris. Johnson closes the report with an oft-quoted passage from a 1973 press conference with President Nixon’s National Security Advisor, Dr. Henry Kissinger: “When asked if Linebacker II was the key to achieving agreement he answered, ‘. . . there was a deadlock in the middle of December, and there was a rapid movement when negotiations resumed on January 8th. These facts have to be analyzed by each person for himself’.”⁷⁰

Johnson makes appropriate use of a broad base of source material. As his report is focused largely on the operational level of the air campaign, he relies largely on command-level message traffic, interviews with key figures, and operations (ops) analysis studies.⁷¹ Unfortunately, he did not preserve these documents in an attached volume as did his predecessors. Incidentally, many of the reports written at the same

⁷⁰ Linebacker Operations, 31 December 1978, 71.

⁷¹ Linebacker Operations, 31 December 1978, 73-85.

time do not have a supporting documents file either.⁷² At some point, and for reasons which remain unclear, the CHECO office ceased this practice. While many of the interviews and ops analysis material are relatively easy to find in the archives, much of the message traffic is either gone or hopelessly buried in obscure and loosely indexed (if at all) boxes of microfilm. The absence of the supporting documents file makes it difficult to verify the report's accuracy and eliminates a convenient research resource. Fortunately, several agencies completed a series of Linebacker I and II reports concurrent with Johnson's drawn from the same pool of documents. These reports do not have a supporting document file either, but they provide an excellent resource for comparing the consistency of Johnson's assertions with contemporary material.

Johnson's writing style and organization make "Linebacker Operations" difficult to digest. The author does not devote any space to a narrative description of either campaign, leaving the reader with little contextual information to help make sense of his topically-focused discussion. In contrast, the Corona Harvest report on Linebacker I and II follows a more intuitive format. The authors of this work begin their chapters with chronological coverage of the campaign events and follow up with significant tactical and operational topics of interest.⁷³ Another problem with Johnson's report, in addition to a lack of contextual information, is the poor structure. For example, he mixes evidence from Linebacker II in the Linebacker I tactical analysis section.⁷⁴ Johnson's description of Linebacker strike package issues is spread between three separate sections, making the argument incoherent.⁷⁵ In a similar fashion, the author separates analysis of the B-52 losses during Linebacker II into four sections, including some discussion in the middle chapter on "Special Topics" before he has introduced the events that led to the incidents in question.⁷⁶ Johnson's writing style makes it difficult to discern his central message on any of the individual issues, much less his overall assessment of Operation Linebacker.

⁷² I have not completed a comprehensive survey to determine which reports are missing the supporting documents file as time and space did not permit it for this project. The boxes of documents I pulled to research this chapter contained 10 reports and none of them had a supporting documents appendix. In addition, US Air Force Historical Research Agency personnel were not aware of the location of supporting documentation for this report when queried. All of these reports were published in 1973 and later.

⁷³ Headquarters PACAF, Corona Harvest, Air Operations in North Vietnam, 7 May 1975, K717.0423-23 V.2, Iris No. 1051287, "USAF Air Operations in Southeast Asia, 1 July 1972 – 15 August 1973," AFHRA.

⁷⁴ Linebacker Operations, 31 December 1978, 20-21.

⁷⁵ Linebacker Operations, 31 December 1978, 18-19, 26-28, 44-48.

⁷⁶ Linebacker Operations, 31 December 1978, 31-34, 60-62, 64-65, 69.

Aside from the convoluted organization and awkward style, Johnson presents technical information that is incorrect in several places throughout the report. In his discussion of LGB accuracy Johnson claims that the weapon demonstrated a Circular Error Probable (CEP) of zero feet during its evaluation phase. The author later claims that, in spite of inadequate data on miss distance versus targets in North Vietnam, the weapon likely achieved a zero CEP because of the large percentage of direct hits.⁷⁷ In fact, Linebacker II weaponeers planned on a 20' CEP for LGBs, based on test data, and post-strike analysis estimated that the weapons achieved an 18' CEP.⁷⁸ Johnson makes another significant error in his discussion of the tactics of chaff deployment. He states that the F-4 chaff corridor tactics employed in mid-1972 were "sufficient to protect the entire ingress and egress routing within the North Vietnamese heartland."⁷⁹ However, the chaff corridor became problematic later in 1972, and it proved to be insufficient to protect the B-52 strike packages during Linebacker II. A Corona Harvest report produced concurrently with Johnson's points out that the chaff corridor timing had to be perfect. If the F-4s laid the corridor too early, the chaff did not have time to spread out, and if the strike package showed late high winds aloft blew the corridor away from the planned ingress routing. In addition, the corridor essentially marked the attack axis for North Vietnamese air defenses, simplifying their radar search problem.⁸⁰ At the beginning of Linebacker II analysts estimated that only 20% of the strike package entered the chaff corridor, with an average dwell time of 40 seconds.⁸¹ These deficiencies led to a move away from the chaff corridor to a chaff blanket in the latter portion of Linebacker II.⁸² Johnson's factual errors mislead the reader and detract from the overall credibility of his report. Reports published concurrently with "Linebacker Operations" present a

⁷⁷ Linebacker Operations, 31 December 1978, 38. CEP is a calculation of miss distance from the intended aim point for a series of weapons dropped on a target, measuring where the closest 50% of weapons impact in relation to the laser spot in this case. The author's statement that a direct hit constitutes a zero miss distance demonstrates a lack of understanding of this concept. If the weapon were targeted against a 25' x 50' building, the fact that the weapon hit the building is irrelevant. CEP is calculated from the intended point of impact on that building's surface area.

⁷⁸ 7th Air Force, Directorate of Ops Analysis, Linebacker II USAF Bombing Survey, 1 April 1973, K143.054-1 V.34, Iris No. 1011707, AFHRA, 27-32.

⁷⁹ Linebacker Operations, 31 December 1978, 48.

⁸⁰ Air Operations in North Vietnam, 7 May 1975, 182.

⁸¹ Air Operations in North Vietnam, 7 May 1975, 243.

⁸² 8th Air Force History, 1 July 1972 – 30 June 1973, 23 August 1974, K520.01 V.2, Iris No. 1000759, AFHRA, 409.

consistent message on these issues, making Johnson's lapses omissions at best and inexcusable at worst.

"Linebacker Operations" also contains an incomplete analysis of several campaign shortfalls. Johnson's discussion of air-to-air tactics is technically correct, but he overlooks some significant contributing factors.⁸³ While the author does address the counter-air adjustments that occurred during Linebacker, he fails to make a point on which others are abundantly clear – USAF leadership considered the air-to-air kill ratio unacceptable. The other authors present a consistent diagnosis for the problem, attributing it to insufficient training and aircrews' taking missile shots out of the Weapons Engagement Zone (WEZ).⁸⁴ Johnson's analysis of F-105 and F-4 hunter/killer team tactics is also incomplete. He concludes a brief paragraph on the topic with the assertion that the "tactic was initially successful, as acknowledged by frequent SAM site relocations, improved camouflage, and strict emissions discipline."⁸⁵ Other studies devote much more attention to the topic, as it was a relatively significant tactical innovation during Linebacker. In addition, the authors of these other studies admit that the tactic was ineffective at night because ROE dictated that the Phantoms had to visually acquire the SAM to deliver a weapon. Furthermore, none of the other studies makes a connection between the hunter/killer tactic and SAM relocations or EMCON, casting doubt on Johnson's evidence.⁸⁶ Johnson's oversights demonstrate that he did not thoroughly research the topics he chose to discuss, leaving the reader with a less than authoritative account.

Compared to the corpus of contemporary reports on Linebacker, Johnson's report stands out for its neglect of significant topics that virtually all others analyze in depth. "Linebacker Operations" describes the headquarters command and control arrangements with some vague critiques of the Route Package system, but the author does not address how contentious and dysfunctional the divisions in authority became throughout the

⁸³ Air Operations in North Vietnam, 7 May 1975, 28.

⁸⁴ Headquarters PACAF, Corona Harvest, Lessons Learned and Recommendations, A Compendium, 16 June 1975, K717.0423-11, Iris No. 1009474, "USAF Air Operations in Southeast Asia, 1 July 1972 – 15 August 1973," AFHRA, 104-107.

⁸⁵ Air Operations in North Vietnam, 7 May 1975, 46.

⁸⁶ Headquarters PACAF, Corona Harvest, Lessons Learned and Recommendations, K717.0423-23 V.4, Iris No. 1051289, "USAF Air Operations in Southeast Asia, 1 July 1972 – 15 August 1973," AFHRA, VII-18.

operation.⁸⁷ Other reports contain extensive criticism of the inefficiencies between 7th Air Force, CTF-77, SAC, and MACV.⁸⁸ Later accounts highlight the friction between 7th Air Force and SAC during Linebacker II caused by SAC's insistence on planning the B-52 missions from the continental United States. These authors draw their assertions from a collection of staff message traffic that Johnson certainly had access to at PACAF headquarters.⁸⁹ Johnson's most significant oversight is the absence of any discussion of target effects during Linebacker II. His report closes with a generic description of the operation's overall effects on the peace talks in Paris, but he devotes a scant two paragraphs to this critical aspect of the operation.⁹⁰ Furthermore, his contemporaries analyze the effects on each target set at a minimum, and some even include a day-by-day account of target damage.⁹¹ Lacking these vital details, "Linebacker Operations" can hardly claim to be a comprehensive account of this momentous episode in Vietnam airpower history.

Impact of the Report

"Linebacker Operations" had minimal impact on Air Force doctrine, and it appeared too late to influence the USAF's general thinking about the significance of Operation Linebacker. The PACAF CHECO office did not publish "Linebacker Operations" until December 1978, even though Johnson completed the report in 1974. Following Linebacker II and the withdrawal of USAF assets from Southeast Asia, the leadership of the CHECO office undoubtedly lacked the sense of urgency to produce "timely" reporting on doctrinal deficiencies, but this incident seems to be an extreme case of indifference. "Linebacker Operations" drowned in a sea of literature on Linebacker I and II, written in the four years that it mysteriously languished at PACAF headquarters. The orthodox interpretation of Linebacker's significance emerged almost immediately. Major General Robert Ginsburgh, the Chief of Air Force History, wrote an article in early 1973 that is typical of these works. He stated, "The air measures of 1972 marked a new

⁸⁷ Linebacker Operations, 31 December 1978, 20.

⁸⁸ Lessons Learned and Recommendations, A Compendium, 16 June 1975, 116.

⁸⁹ Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Airpower, The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 192.

⁹⁰ Linebacker Operations, 31 December 1978, 71.

⁹¹ Linebacker II USAF Bombing Survey, 1 April 1973; 8th Air Force History, 1 July 1972 – 30 June 1973, 23 August 1974; and SAC Operations in Linebacker II, 3 August 1976, K416.04-13 V.10, Iris No. 1028671, AFHRA.

synchronization of military tasks and political objectives and led to the truce negotiations.”⁹² Later authors go a step further, suggesting that if the USAF had executed Linebacker II in 1965 the war would have been over much sooner.⁹³ In close succession, Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp released his polemic, *Strategy for Defeat, Vietnam in Retrospect*, and the Air Force published the first official account, *Linebacker II: A View from the Rock*, which boasts that the campaign set a “new milestone” in airpower history.⁹⁴ In light of the campaign’s apparently overwhelming and historically unprecedented success, another classified report on Linebacker’s tactical and operational shortfalls, especially one as difficult to digest as Johnson’s, was destined for insignificance.

“Linebacker Operations” does not represent CHECO’s best work by any measure. Johnson’s monograph is one of a handful of works on Linebacker that focuses on the operational and tactical details of the campaign, which is perhaps a redeeming quality of an otherwise disappointing report. Johnson clearly had the freedom to be critical, but his analysis is often incomplete or factually incorrect. In addition, the author’s disorganized coverage of events detracts from the report’s overall value. Johnson falls short of the authoritative standard set by his predecessors in the CHECO program because he neglects many of the critical issues covered exhaustively by his peers who wrote on the subject. To be fair, it is a tall order to construct a comprehensive account of a monumental air campaign like Operation Linebacker in a mere 16 weeks. Nevertheless, Johnson made some indefensible errors that tarnished his final product. Regrettably, Linebacker is such a high visibility topic that many researchers are likely to pull this specific report in search of the insightful analysis characteristic of a CHECO report and be left empty handed.

Conclusion

Collectively, the four report profiles contribute a new perspective to the full view of Project CHECO. For the most part topic selection seemed to be an intuitive process.

⁹² Robert N. Ginsburgh, “Strategy and Airpower: The Lessons of Southeast Asia,” *Strategic Review*, vol. I, no. 2 (Summer 1973): 18.

⁹³ Raymond W. Leonard, “Learning from History: Linebacker II and US Air Force Doctrine,” *The Journal of Military History* 58, no. 2 (April 1994): 272.

⁹⁴ U.S.G. Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat, Vietnam in Retrospect* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1978) and James R. McCarthy and George B. Allison, *Linebacker II: A View from the Rock* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Airpower Research Institute, 1979), 1.

“Herbicide Operations” is the only profiled report with any direct connection to the upper echelons of USAF leadership. Although the evidence does not indicate that the author was under any undue pressure to paint the program in a favorable light, “Herbicide Operations” likely would not have changed much if the staff wrote it themselves. Regardless, none of these reports show direct signs of official tampering, and many of them address issues that were prime candidates for editing. This does not necessarily discredit the previous accusations, it merely shows that staff alterations were not a matter of habit. Robin Higham asserts, “Official military histories remain only as good as the evidence, training, energy, perspicacity, and time to do the job,” and his insight certainly seems to apply in CHECO’s case.⁹⁵ The authors’ professional credentials were as varied as the quality of the reports, and in these four cases there is a direct correlation. In addition, authors with a longer tenure in the office tended to produce higher quality reports, likely by virtue of a higher level of situational awareness of the critical issues in theater. CHECO report value was a function of the author’s research quality, the ability of the author to make contextual connections, and their willingness to provide an objective and critical account. In terms of impact, the reports were at the mercy of staff prerogative. If the author offered original insights, interested parties generally took notice, otherwise the reports were an informative product that contributed chapters to the chronicle of USAF operations in Southeast Asia. In hindsight the reports largely meet the expectations one would have of an organization as diverse and prolific as Project CHECO. Each report must be judged on its own merits, juxtaposed with countervailing accounts, and supplemented by larger works for historical context.

⁹⁵ Robin Higham, ed., *Official Military Historical Offices and Sources, Volume 1* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Pr., 2000), xv.

CONCLUSION

Looking at the manifold documents of modern history; they speak to us with a thousand voices, display the most varied natures, and are clad in all colors. A few arrive with ceremony. They pretend to represent the ways of the ancients. Others seek to draw from the past lessons for the future. Many wish to defend or accuse. Not a few strive to develop events out of deeper motives of emotion and passion. Then there are a few whose only purpose is to transmit what happened; alongside these are the reports of eyewitnesses. Actions are turned into words; crowds of documents become available, both supposed and real. Most important, the person accustomed to original knowledge of so many items has to ask himself, "From which of these can I really learn?"

- Leopold von Ranke

In the closing paragraphs of CHECO's "Expository Paper #1," the author cautions that the contemporary evaluation of airpower in Southeast Asia should be "conducted under rigidly objective standards which would permit the products to stand up to detailed, critical evaluation."¹ Project CHECO has a tall hurdle to clear in order to meet this challenge as it is subject to criticism both as a work of history and operations analysis. As a historical work, the reports must withstand the withering critique of the academic community, which challenges official history on the basis of objectivity, contextual separation and analysis, and methodology. From the analytical standpoint, the program's utility must be measured by the immediate and long-range impact it had on Air Force tactics and doctrine. A critical examination of the program offers some insight into Air Force culture during Vietnam, as well as the larger process of self-evaluation and identity formation. The CHECO experience resonates in many ways with that of the contemporary Air Force as it searches for meaning in the culmination of a protracted war in Afghanistan.

CHECO as a Work of History

According to the academic community, objectivity is the gold standard for measuring the worth of a historical work. Peter Novick describes objectivity as "the rock

¹ Project CHECO, Expository Paper #1, 11 March 1965, K717.041-1, IRIS No. 898532, AFHRA.

on which the venture was constituted, its continuing *raison d'être*.”² Any judgment of CHECO’s objectivity must start with the program’s charter. First and foremost, CHECO reports were intended for internal consumption. The USAF initiated the program in the hope that it would form the backbone of historical documentation, but staffers also had parochial motives grounded in competition with the other services and anticipation of postwar critiques. Individual authors remained unaware of the provincial agenda, and the upper echelon staffers who derived the guidance did not bother to enforce the policy in any meaningful way. As a result, most reports contain remarkably candid accounts of their subject matter. However, the competitive drive led staff level auditors to edit some reports in order to more effectively fend off the Air Force’s critics. Official meddling was not pervasive, but a small percentage of the reports on contentious subjects are not strictly objective products. Remarkably, these infractions came to light as a result of internal whistleblowers such as Ken Sams and John Pratt who were committed to preserving the program’s integrity. As a whole, CHECO’s self-serving mandate did not drastically alter the objectivity of the final product, but in limited cases overzealous individuals acting on the basis of this agenda corrupted some reports.

Standards of objectivity are also based on the authors’ professional distance from the subject matter. All of the CHECO authors, whether civilian or active duty military, carried a direct association with the Air Force, which is a red flag for critics seeking objectivity, but this professional link was a virtual necessity given the technical and sensitive nature of the subject matter. The best of the CHECO authors had a combination of tactical experience and academic credentials. Regardless, the CHECO cadre’s professional association had varied effects on the group. Ken Sams insisted on telling the Air Force story in Vietnam truthfully, “warts and all,” and his philosophy largely permeated CHECO’s work.³ Most authors produced balanced works that were critical of the organization where warranted. However, in some cases authors may have shied away from incorporating negative information because of their USAF loyalty. For example, Maj Calvin Johnson may have avoided justifiable criticism of SAC’s fumbles during Linebacker II because of his previous association with the command. Maj Charles

² Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream, The Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1.

³ William L. Brantley, “CHECO Is Its Name,” *The Airman*, vol. XII, no. 7 (July 1968): 35.

Collins' sympathetic report on the Ranch Hand program is a prime example of institutional bias. While these reports represent significant examples of shortfalls, most CHECO authors overcame the organizational partiality through their academic grounding in the principles of unbiased research and reporting.

In addition to purpose and authors, CHECO's objectivity is also a function of its source material. Most CHECO reports derived their contents from a wide pool of staff message traffic, official studies, and first hand accounts gathered shortly after the events in question. In many cases the authors witnessed the events under investigation in person. This raw material collected at the point of occurrence has an authenticity that lends credibility to CHECO reports, making them stand out amongst the other USAF sources on Southeast Asia. However, CHECO reports are drawn predominantly from Air Force sources. While some reports contain ground force participants' appraisals of Air Force performance, the large majority of the monographs cite almost exclusively USAF material. This is not necessarily a slight against the program, because by and large the external sources were unavailable. However, the limitation is noteworthy and results in monographs that Vietnam scholar Stephen Randolph accurately describes as "self referential."⁴ General William Momyer also noted that Air Force sources reported on efficiency vice effectiveness. Because there were only limited attempts to gather the Communist sources on the impact of air operations, evaluations of effectiveness were based on the authors' subjective assessment, and CHECO reports were not an exception to this trend.⁵ The shortfalls resulting from source material were generally insurmountable, but they do have a bearing on the slanted objectivity in CHECO's final product. Ken Sams admitted after the war, "There was a definite blue suit flavor in all of these reports, but there has to be. There's no way you could not have it this way."⁶

Contextual perspective is a close second to objectivity in the professional historian's ranking of sacred values. The academic eschews contemporary accounts like CHECO on principle because they believe that the end product will inevitably reflect the passions of the day and fall short of illuminating the contextual connections which are the

⁴ Stephen P. Randolph, interview with the author, 22 February 2013.

⁵ Robert Frank Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine. Vol. 2: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1961-1984*. (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2004), 323.

⁶ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 29 November 1987, K239.0512-1856, IRIS No. 1095302, AFHRA, 51.

signature of a professional work of history. Without question, CHECO reports lack the historical perspective and contextual connections that later investigators brought to the subjects. Richard Kott's "Gunship Report" is one notable example. Jack Ballard's gunship history, published 10 years later, connects Kott's narrative to a wider milieu of debates in the halls of the Pentagon and Congress that offers insight into many of the issues encountered in theater. Most of the CHECO authors were keenly aware of the limits of their perspective. Lt Col Richard Sexton remarked, "One of the limitations we had in CHECO resulted from the very fact we were operating so close to the events we were documenting that there was very little opportunity to step back and try to gain some perspective."⁷ Ken Sams admitted, "We don't pretend to be historians. Yet we do collect and study everything we can get and I think our studies are valuable in that they provide the 'feel' for an operation at the time it takes place."⁸ While academic detractors may consider the boundaries imposed as a result of close temporal connection with the subject matter a drawback, the close association with the subject matter enabled CHECO authors to collect detailed accounts of events before the sharp edges of the participants' memories blurred with time. To the extent that they are biased by this close connection, the CHECO reports are a valuable artifact of the prevalent intellectual climate of the time. Thus the contemporary accounts have a value all their own.

In addition to the challenge of achieving perspective, contemporary historians bear the burden of weighing and selecting evidence amongst an infinite supply of material. E.H. Carr singles this task out as the primary standard for judging the value of a historian's work, ". . . not that he gets his facts right, but that he chooses the right facts, or in other words, that he applies the right standard of significance."⁹ In CHECO's case this was a function of selecting the right topics to begin with and then choosing the right source material. CHECO's prolific collection of 251 monographs covered the swath of conventional campaigns during the Vietnam War, and the program reported on topics as diverse as "Drug Abuse in SEA" and "Psychological Operations by the USAF." Its breadth of coverage left little to be desired. In the absence of CHECO, the rich source material on these niche subjects may have never been preserved, and in the off chance

⁷ Harold Newcomb, "A Memory in Words," *Airman* XXII, no. 6 (June 1978): 7.

⁸ William L. Brantley, "CHECO Is Its Name," 33.

⁹ Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1963), 163.

that the documents did survive they would have been impossibly scattered in archives across the world. Nevertheless, CHECO suffered criticism for adopting the “rifle” approach to historical documentation, narrowly focusing on selected topics. Robert Frank Futrell complained, “we are able to see the limbs without seeing the trunk of the tree.”¹⁰ In a general sense his critique is valid, but the task of assembling a holistic Vietnam airpower narrative was never part of CHECO’s charter. Judged according to the “standard of significance,” CHECO struck a remarkable balance between coverage of the USAF’s near term operational interest and long term historical significance.

Historical purists direct their final round of censure on the official military historian’s tendency to seek unambiguous lessons for immediate application to the warfighter, and this was certainly part of CHECO’s mandate. However, much like the parochial motives in CHECO’s official guidance, the Air Staff never dictated a format for the reports nor called for enumeration of explicit lessons. Reports such as Maj Calvin Johnson’s “Linebacker Operations” which emphasized lessons over operational narrative tended to be less insightful and they leave the reader with little true understanding of their subject. Most authors did not write their reports with the express purpose of deriving lessons. In many cases, the authors closed with a collection of well-qualified “observations” or “potential trends,” but they never resorted to the rote dictation of “Lesson Learned, Rationale, and Recommendation” found in later studies of Vietnam air operations.¹¹ The CHECO authors offer a poignant example of Jay Luvaas’ assertions on the advantages that historians bring to the process of lesson learning: “Historians are suspicious of generalizations, oversimplifications, instinctively understand factors unique to every situation, and that there can be more than one valid interpretation. Historians look to the past for understanding, not necessarily clinching answers.”¹² The title switch from “Evaluation” to “Examination” in 1969 seems somewhat superfluous, but in

¹⁰ Notes on the 1967 Worldwide Air Force Historical Conference, 18-19 October 1967, K239.151-11, IRIS No. 481255, AFHRA.

¹¹ Headquarters PACAF, Corona Harvest, Lessons Learned and Recommendations, A Compendium, 16 June 1975, K717.0423-11, Iris No. 1009474, “USAF Air Operations in Southeast Asia, 1 July 1972 – 15 August 1973,” AFHRA.

¹² Jay Luvaas, “Lessons and Lessons Learned: A Historical Perspective,” in Robert E Harkavy and Neuman, Stephanie G, eds., *The Lessons of Recent Wars in the Third World, Volume 1* (Lexington, MA: DC Heath and Company, 1985), 68–69.

hindsight it was an accurate reflection of the nuanced approach that the authors took to the task, which preserved the integrity of the work's historical methodology.

Evaluating Project CHECO according to the professional historian's standard is a useful academic exercise, but it runs the risk of attributing a level of authority to the reports which the authors would not claim for themselves. Robin Higham argues, "official histories are often regarded as the first, but not the last word."¹³ In this sense, Project CHECO offers some distinctive contributions to the USAF historical record in Vietnam. CHECO captured sentiments and source material that may have otherwise eluded the USAF's historical consciousness. History professionals at the time recognized that CHECO helped define what would be available for later authors to consult, defining the "nature of the net you cast."¹⁴ Tragically the majority of the CHECO reports remained classified for years after the war's termination, restricting their insights to a cloistered group of researchers who had the clearance and motivation to seek them out. Nevertheless, CHECO consumers across time have appreciated the project's candid accounts. General J.P. McConnell, CSAF during the latter years of the war, preferred CHECO reports above other sources of information on air operations because of their "unfiltered" interpretation of events.¹⁵ Contemporary authors echo his sentiment. Mark Clodfelter remarked, "CHECO reports are excellent sources – in many cases better than the 'official' Air Force Histories. The CHECO authors were more apt to be objective and critical than some of the official reports."¹⁶ Stephen Randolph, who cites from CHECO reports prolifically in his book *Powerful and Brutal Weapons*, referred to them as an "essential gateway for understanding the air war."¹⁷ In the opening to his treatise on historical objectivity, Peter Novick asserts that the academic community generally views the body of work on a historical subject as a "boat tacking rather than sailing in a straight line toward the truth."¹⁸ By this standard CHECO charted a well-defined course for the

¹³ Robin Higham, ed., *Official Histories: Essays and Bibliographies from Around the World* (Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University Library, 1970), 3.

¹⁴ Minutes of the First Meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Air Force Historical Program, 4-5 October 1968, K168.27-46, IRIS No. 1117108, AFHRA, 26.

¹⁵ Oral History Interview of Brigadier General Brian S. Gunderson by Hugh N. Ahmann, 22-23 October 1987, K239.0512-1770, IRIS No. 114709, AFHRA, 137.

¹⁶ Mark Clodfelter, email to the author, 5 December 2012.

¹⁷ Stephen Randolph, interview with the author, 22 February 2013.

¹⁸ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream, The Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession*, 2.

future history of air operations in Vietnam, creating an authoritative “first word” on a formative chapter of Air Force history.

CHECO as Operations Analysis

Project CHECO represented a new type of operations analysis, which proved to be of exceptional near term utility for Air Force leadership. In a war inundated with statistical analysis, CHECO reports transformed the numbers into an accessible narrative. During the war Thomas Thayer, Alan Einthoven’s DoD Chief of SEA Operations Analysis, lamented, “quantification became a huge effort, but analysis remained a trivial one.”¹⁹ CHECO reports filled this void in a unique way that wove quantitative analysis with first hand testimony and the headquarters perspective. CHECO found a way to meet the challenge former Air Force historian Barry Watts describes as “tapping into the subjective but often unreported understanding and concerns of those engaged directly in combat operations.”²⁰ CHECO authors compiled a micro-level view of tactical and operational events that is not apparent in statistical compendiums or long-term strategic level studies. At times the authors spelled out tactical level lessons or identified the appearance of trends, but they intentionally avoided the explicit lists of formal “lessons learned” which were the signature of typical operations analysis material. Marc Bloch states, “individuals never perceive more than a tiny patch of the vast tapestry of events, deeds, and words which form the destinies of a group.”²¹ CHECO reports produced an interim product that placed air operations into context for commanders, expanding the perception of consequential events beyond their immediate circumstances.

Unfortunately the aspirations for CHECO’s impact outstretched its actual influence, and the Air Force did not necessarily use CHECO reports as a diagnostic tool. In some limited cases, CHECO reports elicited changes in tactical procedures by highlighting best practices. John Schlight’s report on the “Rescue at Ban Phanop” and the “Short Rounds” reports are noteworthy examples of this trend. However, the founding documents of the CHECO program had much loftier goals, expecting the reports to be an implement for refining strategic doctrine. Judging by the doctrine

¹⁹ Dennis J. Vetock, *Lessons Learned: A History of US Army Lesson Learning* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army Military History Institute, 1988), 96.

²⁰ Barry D. Watts, “Unreported History and Unit Effectiveness,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1 (January 1989): 98.

²¹ Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1953), 50.

manuals published shortly after the war, neither CHECO nor the Vietnam experience in general had a large influence on Air Force thinking. The Air Force eliminated all references to counterinsurgency in Air Force Manual 1-1, opting for a brief mention of special operations. Instead of preserving the lessons from a decade of limited war, the doctrinal focus shifted toward major combat operations in Europe, deterrence, and nuclear warfare.²² In most cases, the Air Force viewed CHECO reports as nothing more than a classified news report on Air Force operations. However, in some circumstances, Air Force leadership used CHECO reports to back policy positions in their conflicts with other services and government officials. In his remarks to the 1967 Worldwide Air Force History Conference, Major General William Garland reasoned, “The intelligentsia use history to support their arguments, so we must do the same.”²³ Air Force leadership used the CHECO reports on Operation Ranch Hand and Richard Kott’s “The Role of Gunships in SEA” to validate their positions and preserve sacred programs. At the operational level General William Momyer used the CHECO series on the “Single Manager for Air” in battles with the Marine Corps and the Navy over theater-wide command and control of air assets. Furthermore, staff level edits of CHECO reports were often motivated by political agendas to advance the service’s standing with a high-level audience. In these cases CHECO reports were transformed from objective analytical products into parochial contrivances.

The USAF’s failure to capitalize on CHECO’s analytical contributions stems from three interrelated causes. First, the Air Force never created a central repository for consolidating information of this sort into a comprehensive assessment of air operations.²⁴ This issue was not unique to the way the Air Force handled CHECO reports. It was indicative of a wider USAF problem. On this topic, Donald Mrozek observed, “Merely initiating a bureaucratic process of assembling the data and bringing

²² Raymond W. Leonard, “Learning from History: Linebacker II and US Air Force Doctrine,” *The Journal of Military History* 58, no. 2 (April 1994): 271 and Dennis Drew, “U.S. Airpower Theory and the Insurgent Challenge: A Short Journey to Confusion,” *The Journal of Military History* 62, no. 4 (October 1998): 809-832.

²³ Notes on the 1967 Worldwide Air Force Historical Conference, 18-19 October 1967, K239.151-11, IRIS No. 481255, AFHRA.

²⁴ Minutes of the First Meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Air Force Historical Program, 4-5 October 1968, 24-25.

them into some preliminary historical order did not automatically constitute learning.”²⁵ Second, CHECO suffered a fate similar to other products of its genre in which “the central message was lost in the medium of its transmittal.”²⁶ The CHECO reports were united in their critical and objective approach but not in their implications. By design, the reports were vignettes of the USAF story. They attacked the challenge of doctrinal change in piecemeal fashion, making their individual calls for reform easier to ignore. In the absence of an organizational commitment to piecing them together, the singular voice of Project CHECO demanding a codified doctrine for airpower in a counterinsurgency fell silent. Finally, the USAF’s approach to doctrinal evaluation was fundamentally flawed. Project CHECO’s foundational guidance directed the authors to defend existing doctrine and demonstrate the extent to which it was applicable in a counterinsurgency, with only vague instruction to “refine, if necessary.”²⁷ Donald Mrozek argues that statements such as this are “far more than an academic exercise in semantics – it underscores a particular way of using the past that contradicts the essential complexity of history. The mere construction of a process whereby historical experience is employed to validate a doctrine implicitly asserts that doctrine is the constant and that events are subordinate . . . experience risks becoming a footnote on theory.”²⁸ This shortcoming was not a function of how the CHECO authors approached their subject matter; all indications point to an appropriate leverage of critical thought. The larger fault lies with Air Force leadership, who championed reports that reinforced preconceived notions of airpower doctrine while casting aside, or at best marginalizing, the nonconformists.

Reflecting on his CHECO experience, Ken Sams acerbically remarked, “I think CHECO failed, if you can measure it by the only criterion that really matters, and that’s has it influenced our policy today, and it hasn’t.”²⁹ Although Sams’ assertion is correct, it is disingenuous for historians to presume that their insights are the last bastion of hope for an ailing organization. The CHECO monographs entered a tense political

²⁵ Donald J. Mrozek, *The US Air Force After Vietnam, Postwar Challenges and Potential for Responses* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1988), 7.

²⁶ Luvaas, “Lessons and Lessons Learned,” in *The Lessons of Recent Wars in the Third World*, 67.

²⁷ Terms of Reference for CHECO Study on the Role of Air Power in the Southeast Asia Conflict, 6 May 1965, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 517531, “Role of Airpower in the Southeast Asia Conflict CHECO Information, Mar – May 1965,” AFHRA.

²⁸ Mrozek, *The US Air Force After Vietnam*, 7.

²⁹ Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 29 November 1987, 53.

environment exacerbated by the USAF's cultural predispositions, which had equal bearing on the organization's receptiveness to criticism. In addition, any implicit recommendations found in CHECO's pages faced a wall of bureaucratic inertia. As Donald Mrozek points out, "a tactic can be changed faster in the mind than in the field and a strategy can be jotted down faster on paper than it can be translated into force structure and deployment. Vietnam illustrated that ideas and execution can be persistently out of phase."³⁰ The CHECO monographs were also the product of the Air Force History community, which was perpetually expected to justify its existence. Warren Trest boasts of the CHECO program, "They did not write history for history's sake. They did not collect documents for the shelf. . . Their legacy is one of production and utility."³¹ Tragically, CHECO's "legacy of utility" rapidly faded after the Air Force mined the reports for their immediate value. The nation committed itself to no more Vietnams, and the Air Force sincerely believed that it would never fight a war like that again, making CHECO's insights anachronistic or irrelevant. As a result the CHECO reports have been left to age like fine scotch in the cardboard casks of the Air Force archives, quaffed only by discriminating scholars aware of the rich history sealed in their pages.

CHECO and Air Force Identity

In the introduction to his study of the British Expeditionary Force's official history of WWI, Tim Travers states, "Military history is not a separate entity. Warfare and thinking about warfare are socially produced and vary with the evolution of society."³² As such, Project CHECO is a glimpse into the intellectual climate of the Vietnam-era Air Force that initiated and sustained the CHECO concept. Beyond the unique combination of history and ops analysis, CHECO was exceptional because it was the first time the Air Force attempted to tell its own story.³³ Air Force history was traditionally covered by salaried civilians or academics with a loose affiliation to the organization, but in this circumstance history was written by serving officers with

³⁰ Donald J Mrozek, *Airpower and the Ground War in Vietnam*. (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1988), 2.

³¹ Warren A. Trest, "Projects CHECO and Corona Harvest: Keys to the Air Force's Southeast Asia Memory Bank," *Aerospace Historian*, vol. 33, no. 2 (June 1986): 120.

³² Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front, and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), xxii.

³³ John Schlight, email to the author, 21 February 2013.

extensive experience in the events they describe. CHECO reports have as much to say about the Air Force process of identity formation as they do about their immediate subject matter.

The Air Force chartered Project CHECO with the intent to validate a self-image from the past, with a view to what the products could provide in the present and future. The USAF's forward thinking mindset originated in the earliest philosophical works on airpower. In his 1921 treatise, *The Command of the Air*, Giulio Douhet argued, "clinging to the past will teach us nothing useful for the future, for that future will be radically different from anything that has gone before . . . Victory smiles upon those who anticipate the changes in the character of war, not upon those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur."³⁴ A little over 50 years later the Air Force had a slightly adapted vision of history's value. In 1973, Brigadier General Brian Gunderson, the Chief of the USAF Historical Division, stated, "We are seeking to make history useful rather than simply a matter of interest. Remember that history is the study of change, and change nowadays is so rapid we must try to predict it in order to control it."³⁵ Gunderson later described efforts to overcome the general antipathy in the Air Force toward history, because most felt the organization was too young to have a heritage that mattered.³⁶ These philosophical undercurrents explain both the initial enthusiasm for creating CHECO and the project's prompt fade to obscurity in an organization that apparently had not accumulated enough experience to warrant serious reflection on the past. The CHECO authors labored to produce material that they justifiably considered valuable contributions to the USAF's historical legacy, but the organization as a whole regarded the work as a mere "matter of interest." In 1986 Dennis Drew noted that the Air Force had yet to publish a multi-volume official history of the Vietnam War, "with the exception of a few isolated volumes on disparate subjects."³⁷ Unfortunately, the Air Force remains sufficiently disinterested in Vietnam to continue neglecting this task.

³⁴ Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 26–30.

³⁵ Ted R. Sturm, "Shaping Things to Come," *Airman*, vol. XVII, no. 9 (September 1973): 8.

³⁶ Oral History Interview of Brigadier General Brian S. Gunderson by Hugh N. Ahmann, 22-23 October 1987, 144.

³⁷ Dennis M. Drew, *Recapitalizing the Air Force Intellect, Essays on War, Airpower, and Military Education* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2008), 38.

The CHECO reports themselves offer another interesting glimpse of Air Force values. John Lewis Gaddis states, “Historians choose which facts are significant but we’ll be remembered for what we consider significant about ourselves by what we choose to leave behind in documents and artifacts.”³⁸ A quick survey of report topics yields insight into their originators’ concepts of relative importance. The vast majority of CHECO reports covered tactics, technology, or operational profiles. The Vietnam-era Air Force was most comfortable with these topics, and it is significant that there are few reports that attempt to make connections to the broader strategic issues. Authors who wrote about campaigns with strategic implications, such as Linebacker II, tended to dodge any challenges to the conventional wisdom, electing to focus on the operational and tactical lessons instead. Although the reports are remarkably candid, there were some topics that remained off-limits. In addition, the CHECO authors did not assign blame to specific leaders or organizations even when it was justified. Individual and organizational faults only come to light in the hands of later historians. While one would expect this of an institutional history produced by serving officers, it seems to have been an especially sensitive phenomenon during the Vietnam War. In short, the CHECO message is as much about what the authors did not say as it is about their printed words.

The preeminent philosopher of history, E.H. Carr, said, “The historian is an individual human being. Like other individuals he’s also a social phenomenon, both the product and the conscious or unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs.”³⁹ The CHECO authors straddled an acute divide between two distinct societies in the Air Force – the tactical operator and the strategic decision maker. Acting on behalf of warfighters, the CHECO authors attempted to capture the truth at 400 knots over North Vietnam or 50 feet above the Ho Chi Minh Trail. They also endeavored to bridge the divide with decision makers through contextual connections to operational level realities. In spite of CHECO’s best efforts, there seemed to be a persistent disjunction between the two perspectives within the Air Force. The Air Force failed to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the challenges it faced in Southeast Asia in part because it was unreceptive to the spokesmen charged with shedding light on the complete picture.

³⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23.

³⁹ Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?*, 42.

Nevertheless, Project CHECO's story exists well beyond the material its authors published between their yellow covers; it illuminates the mutual interaction between individuals shaped by their organization's culture who attempted in turn to provide a true reflection of the group's image.

Epilogue

In the wake of Vietnam, Dennis Drew wrote an essay titled "Two Decades in the Airpower Wilderness," which charted the paths that led the Air Force into an identity crisis during the 1980s.⁴⁰ According to Drew, the USAF's Vietnam experience created a "crisis in confidence," brought on by an experience that did not jive with a narrow interpretation of the USAF's role in a limited war.⁴¹ In 2014 the Air Force will end the combat mission in Afghanistan, a conflict that has supplanted Vietnam as "America's Longest War," and many of the same dynamics are leading the USAF back into no man's land.

As the Air Force and the joint community at large attempt to distill meaning from their Afghanistan experience, the primary lesson seems to be "never again." The diminished appetite for counterinsurgency after Vietnam has morphed into a slightly modified rejection of stability operations.⁴² In June 2012 the Joint Staff released a compendium of lessons from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) titled "Decade of War." The document is a summary of the key insights from 46 different studies completed by the Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis division of the Joint Staff.⁴³ While the Air Force has implemented many of the corrections to these specific failures and others identified by operational studies, critics describe the reforms as "provisional" and note that they will not likely persist as the USAF pivots to Asia.⁴⁴ Time will tell if their prophecies hold water, but the USAF's prospects for capturing its historical experience seem dubious at best.

⁴⁰ Dennis M. Drew, *Recapitalizing the Air Force Intellect*, 31–41.

⁴¹ Drew, *Recapitalizing the Air Force Intellect*, 35.

⁴² James Dobbins, "Learning Curve," *Foreign Policy*, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/03/13/learning_curve (accessed 14 March 2013).

⁴³ Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis, Joint Staff-J7, "Decade of War, Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations," <http://blogs.defensenews.com/saxotech-access/pdfs/decade-of-war-lesson> (accessed on 14 March 2013).

⁴⁴ James Dobbins, "Learning Curve," *Foreign Policy*.

As the doctrinal lessons from OEF threaten to fade into obscurity, the USAF's historical consciousness of the event may do the same. Although USAF historians are compiling terabytes of digital information on the war in Afghanistan, there has not been a concerted effort to transform this raw data into anything approaching the analytical monographs produced by CHECO. At the AFCENT level the history office consists of a single civilian staff historian, a deputy, and a secretary. In theater there are two historians at the CAOC and selected operational units are manned with embedded civilian historians. Their primary duty is to publish annual histories on their associated units, and the command-level office completes special studies on a time available basis. According to the current AFCENT historian, the branch has produced two special studies, on CAS and UAVs respectively, with two more in progress. On the surface it would seem that electronic records simplify the research process, but the overwhelming volume of information demands more effort to classify and analyze the data. In addition, air power employment has grown in scale and technical complexity since Vietnam, significantly complicating mastery of the myriad of tactical details and overarching airpower expertise necessary to construct an informed historical study. The current chief inherited a program that was nine years behind on AFI-mandated unit histories and notably commented that their office is "resource constrained."⁴⁵ These deficiencies are no doubt a symptom of the USAF's continuous ambivalence toward capturing past experiences, especially in circumstances where the organization does not appear to be the lead service or the outcome is somewhere between ambiguous and outright failure.

Given these circumstances it is not surprising that the Air Force has so much trouble defining itself. At a recent Air Force Association conference, former Air Force Secretary F. Whitten Peters commented, "The Air Force is not good at telling its own story."⁴⁶ Lani Kass, a former Air Force policy advisor who also attended the conference, lamented the phrase "all in" which has plagued the USAF identity for the duration of its experience in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴⁷ It is a veiled attempt to bolster the USAF's ego while assuming a supporting combat role, a fact the Air Force is not comfortable admitting. John Tirpak noted, "What the Air Force brings to the fight and why its

⁴⁵ Kathi R Jones, Chief, Office of History USAFCENT/HQ, email to the author, 5 April 2013.

⁴⁶ John A. Tirpak, "Airmen Absent," *Air Force Magazine*, vol. 96, no. 4 (April 2013): 34.

⁴⁷ Tirpak, "Airmen Absent," 35.

contribution is critical are important facts that will probably only increase in relevance in the coming years. However, the Air Force's aversion to telling its story broadly means Congress and the American people are getting the USAF story elsewhere."⁴⁸

Unfortunately, the USAF's neglect of its narrative is due in equal part to the fact that the organization frequently lacks the initiative or the raw materials to do its own soul searching. The distinguished military historian Sir Michael Howard observed, "All societies have some view of the past, one that shapes and is shaped by their collective consciousness, that both reflects and reinforces the value systems which guide their actions and judgments; and if professionals do not provide this others less scrupulous or well qualified will."⁴⁹ More to the point, the Air Force should not rely on outsiders to provide the primary view of the past that shapes its "collective consciousness." If Project CHECO has one unambiguous lesson for the present it is this: The Air Force will not collect the dividends of self reflection without investing the internal intellectual capital necessary to form a comprehensive image and the honesty to accept the product returned at face value.

⁴⁸ Tirpak, "Airmen Absent," 34.

⁴⁹ Michael Howard, *The Lessons of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 13.

APPENDIX A

CHECO Report Table

Source: Research Guide to CHECO Reports of Southeast Asia, 1961-1975, K238.197-2,
Iris No. 1116957, AFHRA.

Number	Classification	Title	Author	Publication Date	Pages
1	U	CHECO - Abstract - History: War in Vietnam, 1961 – 1963	Martin, Donald F.	31-May-64	5
2	U	CHECO - Part I - Summary, Oct 1961 - Dec 1963	Martin, Donald F. Clever, Carl O.	31-May-64	96
3	U	CHECO - Part II - The Threat, Oct 1961 - Dec 1963	Martin, Donald F. Clever, Carl O.	31-May-64	54
4	U	CHECO - Part III - Political / Policy Influences, Oct 1961 - Dec 1963	Martin, Donald F. Clever, Carl O.	31-May-64	193
5	U	CHECO - Part IV - Command Structure / Relationships, Oct 1961 - Dec 1963	Martin, Donald F. Clever, Carl O.	31-May-64	250
6	U	CHECO - Part V - Air Operations, Oct 1961 - Dec 1963	Martin, Donald F. Clever, Carl O.	31-May-64	250
7	U	CHECO - Part VI - Support Activities, Oct 1961 - Dec 1963	Clever, Carl O.	31-May-64	78
8	U	Southeast Asia Studies and Interviews by Joseph W. Grainger and Others	Grainger, Joseph W.	6-Jun-64	300
9	U	Expository Paper #1 – Punitive Air Strikes	N/A	11-Mar-65	14
10	U	Expository Paper #2 – Possible Communist Counter to Punitive Air Strikes	N/A	21-Apr-65	10
11	U	Expository Paper #3 – CAS	N/A	18-May-65	16
12	U	First SAC B-52 Saturation Bombing in South Vietnam	MacNaughton, Robert L.	29-Jun-65	50
13	U	BARRELL ROLL 7	MacNaughton, Robert L.	3-Jul-65	11
14	S/NF	Escalation of the War in SEA, Jul - Dec 1964	Sams, Kenneth	15-Jul-65	254
15	U	First Test and Combat Use of the AC-47	Sams, Kenneth	8-Dec-65	25
16	U	Nguyen Cao Ky	Sams, Kenneth	14-Dec-65	21
17	U	The Battle of Binh Gia, 27 Dec 1964 - 1 Jan 1965	Sams, Kenneth	27-Dec-65	8
18	U	The Siege of Plei Me, 19 - 29 Oct 1965	Porter, Melvin F.	24-Feb-66	30
19	U	SILVER BAYONET, 9 - 28 Nov 1965	Porter, Melvin F.	28-Feb-66	23

Number	Classification	Title	Author	Publication Date	Pages
20	U	Operation HARVEST MOON, 8 - 18 Dec 1965	Sams, Kenneth	3-Mar-66	50
21	U	YANKEE TEAM, May 1964 - Jun 1965	MacNaughton, Robert L.	8-Mar-66	76
22	U	ROLLING THUNDER, Mar - Jun 1965	Project CHECO Team	28-Mar-66	83
23	U	The Fall of A Chau	Sams, Kenneth	18-Apr-66	45
24	C	The Defense of Attopeu, 4 - 5 Mar 1966	Porter, Melvin F.	16-May-66	50
25	C	The Defense of Lima Site 36, 17 - 19 Feb 1966	Porter, Melvin F.	25-May-66	100
26	U	Operation BIRMINGHAM, 24 Apr - 15 May 1966	Sams, Kenneth	29-Jun-66	150
27	U	Attack Against Tan Son Nhut, 13 Apr 1966	Project CHECO Team	8-Jul-66	30
28	S//NF	USAF Operations from Thailand, 1964-1965	Helmka, Robert T. Hale, Beverly	10-Aug-66	165
29	U	US MiG Credits in Vietnam, Feb 1965 - Aug 1966	Stephens, Douglas W.	18-Aug-66	25
30	S//NF	TIGER HOUND	Porter, Melvin F.	6-Sep-66	70
31	U	Operation HAWTHORNE, 2 - 21 Jun 1966	Sams, Kenneth	8-Sep-66	150
32	U	Night Interdiction in SEA	Porter, Melvin F.	9-Sep-66	49
33	U	Operation MASHER and WHITE WING, 24 Jan - 6 Mar 1966	Bates, William E. Sams, Kenneth	9-Sep-66	100
34	U	Evolution of the ROE for Southeast Asia, 1960-1965	Paterson, L.E.	30-Sep-66	86
35	S//NF	ARC LIGHT B-52 Strikes, Jun - Dec 1965	Sams, Kenneth	9-Oct-66	50
36	U	USAF Search and Rescue in SEA, 1961-1966	Anderson, B. Conn	24-Oct-66	400
37	U	USAF Reconnaissance in SEA, 1961-1966	Smith, Mark E.	25-Oct-66	110
38	U	Operation TALLY HO	Trest, Warren A.	21-Nov-66	45
39	U	Operation EL PASO	Trest, Warren A. Bruce, James G., Jr.	30-Nov-66	35
40	U	Ammunition Problems in SEA, 1966	Sams, Kenneth	1-Dec-66	22
41	U	Command and Control, 1965	Sams, Kenneth	15-Dec-66	44
42	S//NF	The War in Vietnam, 1965	Melyan, Wesley R. C.	25-Jan-67	380
43	S//NF	Air Operations in the DMZ Area, 1966	Sheets, Gary D.	15-Feb-67	100
44	U	Assault Airlift Operations	Whitaker, Bernell A. Paterson, L.E.	23-Feb-67	121

Number	Classification	Title	Author	Publication Date	Pages
45	S//NF	Air Tactics Against North Vietnamese Air / Ground Defenses	Porter, Melvin F.	27-Feb-67	67
46	U	Tactical Airlift, Jul - Dec 1966	Whitaker, Bernell A.	28-Feb-67	40
47	U	Control of Air Strikes in SEA, 1961-1966	Trest, Warren A.	1-Mar-67	119
48	U	Night Close Air Support in RVN, 1961-1966	Hickey, Lawrence J.	15-Mar-67	205
49	U	Operation ATTLEBORO, 14 Sep - 26 Nov 1966	Hickey, Lawrence J. Bruce, James G.	14-Apr-67	250
50	U	Second Defense of Lima Site 36, 6 - 7 Jan 1967	Porter, Melvin F.	28-Apr-67	50
51	U	Operations THAYER and IRVING, 8 Sep 1966 - 12 Feb 1967	Hickey, Lawrence J.	12-May-67	99
52	U	Operation ENTERPRISE, The Battle of Doi Ma Creek	Vining, Robert L.	24-May-67	90
53	S//NF	Interdiction in SEA, 1965-1966	Porter, Melvin F.	25-May-67	110
54	S//NF	LUCKY TIGER Special Air Warfare Operations	Trest, Warren A.	31-May-67	117
55	S//NF	LUCKY TIGER Combat Operations	Trest, Warren A.	15-Jun-67	185
56	U	ROLLING THUNDER, Jul 1965 - Dec 1966	Melyan, Wesley R. C. Bonetti, Lee	15-Jul-67	149
57	U	Operation HICKORY	Trest, Warren A. Castellina, Valentino Hickey, Lawrence J.	24-Jul-67	80
58	U	Operation PAUL REVERE and SAM HOUSTON, 10 May 1965 - 5 Apr 1967	Hickey, Lawrence J.	27-Jul-67	108
59	U	COMBAT SKYSPOT	Durkee, Richard A.	9-Aug-67	36
60	C//NF	USAF Posture in Thailand, 1966	Trest, Warren A. Garland, Charles E. Hammons, Dale E.	28-Aug-67	57
61	S//NF	ARC LIGHT, 1965-1966	Melyan, Wesley R. C.	15-Sep-67	330
62	U	Short Rounds, 1965 - May 1967	Porter, Melvin F.	28-Sep-67	57
63	U	Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, Jul 1961 - Jun 1967	Collins, Charles V.	11-Oct-67	79
64	U	The War in Vietnam, 1966	Melyan, Wesley R. C. Bonetti, Lee	23-Oct-67	208
65	C//NF	USAF Operations from Thailand, Air Operations, 1966	Trest, Warren A. Hammons, Dale E.	31-Oct-67	135
66	C//NF	Counterinsurgency in Thailand, 1966	Trest, Warren A. Garland, Charles E.	8-Nov-67	70
67	U	Operation JUNCTION CITY, 22 Feb - 14 May 1967	Hickey, Lawrence J.	17-Nov-67	56

Number	Classification	Title	Author	Publication Date	Pages
68	U	ROLLING THUNDER	Vining, Robert L.	17-Nov-67	56
69	U	Air to Air Encounters over North Vietnam, Jan - Jun 1967	Heffron, Charles H., Jr.	30-Nov-67	70
70	U	Air Operations in the Delta, 1962 - 1967	Vining, Robert L.	8-Dec-67	51
71	U	Ambush at XT686576, 17 Oct 1967	Sams, Kenneth Durkee, Richard A.	29-Dec-67	85
72	U	Operation NEUTRALIZE, 12 Sep - 31 Oct 1967	Trest, Warren A. Castellina, Valentino	5-Jan-68	68
73	U	USAF Search and Rescue, Jul 1966 - Nov 1967	Durkee, Richard A.	19-Jan-68	35
74	U	CHECO Digest, Jan 1968	N/A	31-Jan-68	35
75	U	CHECO Digest, Feb 1968	N/A	27-Feb-68	42
76	C/NF	ARC LIGHT, Jan - Jun 1967	Melyan, Wesley R. C.	22-Mar-68	133
77	U	CHECO Digest, Mar 1968	N/A	31-Mar-68	28
78	U	USAF Civic Action in the Republic of Vietnam, 1966 - 1967	Bonetti, Lee	1-Apr-68	88
79	TS	The Pueblo Incident	Burtenshaw, Edward C. Fulgham, Dan D. Walls, James W.	15-Apr-68	72
80	U	The War in Vietnam, Jan - Jun 1967	Bonetti, Lee	29-Apr-68	142
81	S/NF	The Pueblo Incident, 22 Jan - 29 Feb 1968	Burtenshaw, Edward C. Fulgham, Dan D. Walls, James W.	15-May-68	60
82	U	Viet Cong Offensive in III Corps, Oct - Dec 1967	Thorndale, C. William	15-May-68	26
83	S/NF	Air War in the DMZ, Jan - Aug 1967	Paterson, L.E.	20-May-68	76
84	U	Battle for Dak To, 2 - 3 Nov 1967	Thorndale, C. William	21-Jun-68	29
85	U	Single Manager for Air in South Vietnam, Jan 1967 - Apr 1968	Trest, Warren A.	1-Jul-68	64
86	U	Kham Duc, 10 - 14 May 1968	Thompson, A.W. Sams, Kenneth	8-Jul-68	40
87	U	IGLOO WHITE, Initial Phase	Caine, Philip D.	31-Jul-68	50
88	U	Riverine Operations in the Delta, Feb 1966 - Jun 1968	Clark, Paul W.	1-Aug-68	68
89	U	The Fall of Site 85	Vallentiny, Edward	9-Aug-68	65
90	U	Air Response to the Tet Offensive, 30 Jan - 29 Feb 1968	Thompson, A.W. Thorndale, C. William	12-Aug-68	93
91	U	Short Rounds, Jun 1967 - Jun 1968	Porter, Melvin F.	23-Aug-68	37
92	U	Operation DELAWARE, 19 Apr - 17 May 1968	Thorndale, C. William	2-Sep-68	62
93	U	Khe Sanh (Operation NIAGRA), 22 Jan - 31 Mar 1968	Trest, Warren A.	13-Sep-68	145

Number	Classification	Title	Author	Publication Date	Pages
94	U	Psychological Operations by USAF / VNAF in SVN, Jan 1965 - Jun 1968	Smith, O.R.	16-Sep-68	67
95	U	The EC-47 in SEA, May 1966 - Jun 1968	Hurley, Alfred F.	20-Sep-68	61
96	U	Visual Reconnaissance in I Corps, Jan - Aug 1968	Thorndale, C. William	30-Sep-68	48
97	U	Organization, Mission, and Growth of the Vietnamese Air Force, 1949-1968	Jones, Oakah L., Jr.	8-Oct-68	73
98	U	7 AF Tactical Air Control Center Operations, Nov 1967 - May 1968	Wade, Thomas D.	15-Oct-68	81
99	U	COLLEGE EYE, 4 Apr 1965 - 30 Jun 1968	Reddel, Carl W.	1-Nov-68	100
100	C/NF	USAF Operations from Thailand, Jan 1967 - Jul 1968	Vallentiny, Edward	20-Nov-68	130
101	S	EB-66 Operations in SEA, Jan - Dec 1967	Render, William E.	26-Nov-68	60
102	C/NF	The War in Vietnam, Jul - Dec 1967	Bonetti, Lee Thompson, A.W. Porter, Melvin F. Thorndale, C. William	29-Nov-68	155
103	C	The USAF Helicopter in SEA, 1961 - 1968	Nelson, Donald W.	4-Dec-68	68
104	U	ECM and USAF Penetrations of NVN Air / Ground Defenses, 1966 - 1968	Beard, Vernon C.	7-Dec-68	131
105	U	TRUSCOTT WHITE, Apr - Jun 1968	MacDonough, R.A.	11-Dec-68	30
106	U	The Defense of Saigon, Nov 1967 - Aug 1968	Thompson, A.W.	14-Dec-68	97
107	U	Attack on Udorn, 26 Jul 1968	Vallentiny, Edward Francis, David G.	27-Dec-68	61
108	U	The ABCCC in Southeast Asia, 2 Jan 1964 - Oct 1968	Burch, Robert M.	15-Jan-69	39
109	C	Strike Control and Reconnaissance in SEA, 1962 - 1968	Thompson, A.W.	22-Jan-69	85
110	U	Operation THOR, 1 - 7 Jul 1968	Porter, Melvin F. Thompson, A.W.	24-Jan-69	40
111	U	VNAF FAC Operations in SVN, Sep 1961 - Jul 1968	Vallentiny, Edward	28-Jan-69	53
112	U	FAC Operations in Close Air Support Role in SVN, 1965 - 1968	Overton, James B.	31-Jan-69	58
113	U	Tactical Electronic Warfare Operations in SEA, 1962 - 1968	Burch, Robert M.	10-Feb-69	80

Number	Classification	Title	Author	Publication Date	Pages
114	U	Air Traffic Control in SEA, 1955 - 1969	MacDonough, Robert A. Porter, Melvin F.	14-Feb-69	40
115	U	Tactical Recon Photography Request / Distribution, 1966 - 1968	Thorndale, C. William	15-Feb-69	80
116	U	Impact of Darkness and Weather on Air Operations in SEA, 1965 - 1968	Harrison, Philip R.	10-Mar-69	158
117	U	USAF Support of Special Forces in SEA, Nov 1961 - Feb 1969	Sams, Kenneth Aton, Bert B.	10-Mar-69	97
118	S//NF	Enemy Capture / Release of USAF Personnel in SEA	Overton, James B.	15-Mar-69	275
119	U	USAF Civic Action in the Republic of Vietnam, 1968	Thompson, A.W.	17-Mar-69	36
120	U	Single Manager for Air in South Vietnam, May - Dec 1968	Burch, Robert M.	18-Mar-69	66
121	U	USAF Civic Action in Thailand, 1964 - 1968	Ashby, E.H. Francis, D.G.	22-Mar-69	44
122	U	USAF Posture in Thailand, 1967	Vallentiny, Edward	25-Mar-69	70
123	C//NF	COIN in Thailand, Jan 1967 - Dec 1968	Ashby, Edward H. Francis, David G.	26-Mar-69	63
124	U	Control of Air Strikes, 1967 - 1968	Porter, Melvin F.	30-Jun-69	51
125	U	Interdiction in Route Package One, 1968	Thorndale, C. William	30-Jun-69	81
126	U	Interdiction in SEA, Nov 1966 - Oct 1968	Thorndale, C. William	30-Jun-69	180
127	U	Tactical Airlift Operations, Jan 1967 - Dec 1968	Mets, David R.	30-Jun-69	149
128	U	7 AF Local Base Defense Operations, Jul 1965 - Dec 1968	Lee, Richard R.	1-Jul-69	76
129	U	Air Response to Immediate Air Requests in SVN	Porter, Melvin F.	15-Jul-69	41
130	U	Reconnaissance in SEA, Jul 1966 - Jun 1969	Brynn, Edward P.	15-Jul-69	62
131	U	USAF Search and Rescue, Nov 1967 - Jun 1969	Overton, James B.	30-Jul-69	85
132	U	Air War in the DMZ, Sep 1967 - Jun 1969	Thorndale, C. William	1-Aug-69	67
133	U	Command and Control, 1966 - 1968	Burch, Robert M.	1-Aug-69	43
134	U	III DASC Operations, Jul 1965 - Dec 1968	McDermott, Louis M.	1-Aug-69	50
135	U	IV DASC Operations, 1965 - 1969	Caine, Philip D.	1-Aug-69	61
136	S//NF	USAF Support of Counterinsurgency in BARRELL ROLL Area	Bear, James T. Ashby, Edward H.	1-Aug-69	195

Number	Classification	Title	Author	Publication Date	Pages
137	U	ARC LIGHT, Jun 1967 - Dec 1968	Pralle, James B.	15-Aug-69	69
138	U	Short Rounds, Jun 1968 - May 1969	Schlatter, J.D.	15-Aug-69	49
139	U	TACC Fragging Procedures	Mank, Russell W.	15-Aug-69	46
140	TS	Post-Pueblo USAF Actions - Korea/Japan, Jan 1968 - Jan 1969	Griffith, Maurice L. Trest, Warren A.	25-Aug-69	190
141	U	Air Tactics Against North Vietnamese Air / Ground Defenses, Dec 1966 - Nov 68	Pratt, John C.	30-Aug-69	66
142	U	Air to Air Encounters over North Vietnam, Jul 1967 - Dec 1968	Weaver, Robert B.	30-Aug-69	50
143	S/NF	The Role of USAF Gunships in SEA, 1967 - 1969	Kott, Richard F.	30-Aug-69	87
144	U	Defense of Da Nang, Oct 1968 - Apr 1969	Thorndale, C. William	31-Aug-69	29
145	U	Direct Air Support Centers in I Corps, Jul 1965 - Jan 1969	Alnwick, Kenneth J.	31-Aug-69	75
146	U	Interdiction in III Corps, CTZ, Project DART	Grady, M.J.	31-Aug-69	280
147	U	Riverine Operations in the Delta, May 1968 - Jun 1969	Hawks, Darrell T., Jr.	31-Aug-69	57
148	S/NF	Rules of Engagement, Jan 1966 - Nov 1969	Schlight, John	31-Aug-69	52
149	U	The DASCs in II Corps Tactical Zone, Jul 1965 - Jun 1967	Wohnsigl, John R. Montagliani, Ernie S.	31-Aug-69	35
150	U	Project RED HORSE, Sep 1965 - Jun 1969	Willard, Derek H.	1-Sep-69	97
151	U	OV-10 Operations in SEA, Jul 1968 - Jun 1969	Potter, Joseph V.	15-Sep-69	36
152	U	ROLLING THUNDER, Jan 1967 - Nov 1968	Overton, James B.	1-Oct-69	53
153	U	The Fourth Offensive, 23 Feb - 3 Apr 1969	Aton, Bert B. Montagliani, Ernie S.	1-Oct-69	101
154	U	The Siege of Ben Het, May - Jun 1969	Montagliani, Ernie S.	1-Oct-69	39
155	U	A Shau Valley Campaign, Dec 1968 - May 1969	Aton, Bert B.	15-Oct-69	73
156	U	Jet Forward Air Controllers in SEA, 1967 - 1969	Schlight, John	15-Oct-69	58
157	U	Tactical Control Squadron Operations in SEA, 1962 - 1969	Porter, Melvin F.	15-Oct-69	66
158	S/NF	Air Support of Counterinsurgency in Laos, Jul 1968 - Nov 1969	Sams, Kenneth Pratt, John C. Thorndale, C. William Bear, James T.	10-Nov-69	235

Number	Classification	Title	Author	Publication Date	Pages
159	U	Airmunitions in SEA, 1965 - 1969	Montagliani, Ernie S.	15-Nov-69	55
160	U	USAF SAC Operations in Support of SEA	Trest, Warren A.	17-Dec-69	100
161	U	IGLOO WHITE, Jul 1968 - Dec 1969	Caine, Philip D.	10-Jan-70	61
162	U	SEA Glossary, 1961 - 1970	Kott, Richard F.	1-Feb-70	151
163	U	USAF Posture in Thailand, 1968	Carey, Thomas	1-Feb-70	100
164	S/NF	USAF Posture in Thailand, COIN in Thailand, 1969	Carey, Thomas	1-Feb-70	88
165	U	VNAF Improvement and Modernization Program, 1968 - Apr 1970	Bear, James T.	5-Feb-70	163
166	C/NF	Rescue at Ban Phanop, 5 - 7 Dec 1969	Schlight, John	15-Feb-70	40
167	U	Air Support in Quang Ngai Province	Folkman, David I.	25-Feb-70	72
168	S/NF	The EC-121 Incident, 15 Apr 1969	Barnes, William C.	15-Mar-70	31
169	U	The Air War in Vietnam, 1968 - 1969	Sams, Kenneth Schlight, John Kott, Richard F. Mendelsohn, M.J. Caine, Philip D.	1-Apr-70	153
170	C/NF	Air Operations in Northern Laos, 1 Nov 1969 - 1 Apr 1970	Sams, Kenneth Pratt, John C. Schlight, John	5-May-70	129
171	U	Impact of Geography on Air Operations in SEA	Seig, Louis	11-Jun-70	57
172	U	Forward Airfields for Tactical Airlift in SEA	Johnson, Leo J. Lippincott, Louis Seig, Louis	15-Jun-70	88
173	U	Army Aviation in RVN, A Case Study	Montagliani, Ernie S.	11-Jul-70	81
174	U	USAF Aerial Port Operations	Humphries, Jack T.	5-Aug-70	37
175	U	Tactical Air in Support of Ground Forces in Vietnam	Johnson, Leo J. Folkman, David I. Jr. Wilkinson, Robert E. Sams, Kenneth Mennarchik, Edward D.	1-Sep-70	150
176	U	The Cambodian Campaign, 29 Apr - 30 Jun 1970	Folkman, David I. Caine, Philip D.	1-Sep-70	76
177	U	Second Generation Weaponry in SEA, 1966 - 1970	Porter, Melvin F.	10-Sep-70	77
178	U	The EC-47 in SEA, Apr 1968 - Jul 1970	Porter, Melvin F.	12-Sep-70	77

Number	Classification	Title	Author	Publication Date	Pages
179	C/NF	The Royal Laotian Air Force, 1954 - 1970	Pratt, John C.	15-Sep-70	206
180	U	USAF Tactics Against Air & Ground Defenses in SEA, Nov 68 - May 70	Wright, Monte D.	25-Sep-70	65
181	U	The RAAF in SEA, 1964 - 1970	Bear, James T.	30-Sep-70	65
182	U	COMMANDO VAULT	Porter, Melvin F.	12-Oct-70	32
183	U	The Employment of Air by the Thais and Koreans in Southeast Asia, 1964 - 1970	Bear, James T.	30-Oct-70	46
184	U	Interdiction in Waterways and POL Pipelines	Porter, Melvin F.	11-Dec-70	35
185	S/NF	The Cambodian Campaign, Jul - Oct 1970	Caine, Philip D. Loye, J.F. Jr	31-Dec-70	51
186	U	Air Operations in Northern Laos, 1 Apr - 1 Nov 1970	Blout, Harry D.	15-Jan-71	41
187	U	Interdiction at Ban Bak, 19 Dec 1970 - 5 Jan 1971	Dennison, John W.	26-Jan-71	24
188	U	Short Rounds and Related Incidents, Jun 1969 - Dec 1970	N/A	15-Feb-71	70
189	U	The Defense of Dak Seang, 1 Apr - 9 May 1970	Loye, J.F., Jr. Johnson, Leo J.	15-Feb-71	44
190	U	Lam Son 719, The South Vietnamese Incursion in Laos, 30 Jan - 24 Mar 1971	Loye, J.F., Jr. Johnson, Leo J. StClair, G.K. Dennison, John W.	24-Mar-71	166
191	C	USAF Search and Rescue in SEA, Jul 1969 - Dec 1970	Lynch, Walter F.	23-Apr-71	100
192	C/NF	Air Operations in Northern Laos, 1 Nov 1970 - 1 Apr 1971	Blout, Harry D. Porter, Melvin F.	3-May-71	63
193	U	Aerial Refueling in Southeast Asia, 1964 - 1970	Fessler, George R., Jr.	15-Jun-71	50
194	U	USAF Civic Action in the Republic of Vietnam, Jan 1969 - 31 Mar 1971	Prout, William J.	19-Jun-71	56
195	C	COIN in Thailand, Jan 1969 - Dec 1970	Smith, Don	1-Jul-71	64
196	U	RANCH HAND Herbicide Operations in SEA, 1967 - 1971	Clary, James R.	13-Jul-71	134
197	C	The Royal Thai Air Force, 1911 - 1971	Coffin, Monty D. Manell, Ronald D.	3-Sep-71	158
198	U	Local Base Defense in RVN, Jan 1969 - Jun 1971	Dennison, John W. Porter, Melvin F.	14-Sep-71	72
199	U	CHECO Report Summaries	N/A	15-Sep-71	30

Number	Classification	Title	Author	Publication Date	Pages
200	U	Aerial Protection of Mekong River Convoys	Mitchell, William A.	1-Oct-71	26
201	U	Vietnamization of the Air War, 1970 - 1971	DeBerry, Drue L.	8-Oct-71	104
202	U	IGLOO WHITE, Jan 1970 - Sep 1971	Shields, Henry S.	1-Nov-71	138
203	U	Psychological Operations: Air Support in SEA, Jun 1968 - May 1971	Stevens, Eldon L.	1-Nov-71	83
204	U	The VNAF Air Divisions, Reports on Improvement and Modernization, Jan 1970 - Jul 1971	Roe, David H. Pittman, Wayne C., Jr. Yee, Dennis K. Knoke, Paul D. DeBerry, Drue L.	23-Nov-71	163
205	U	USAF Tactical Reconnaissance in SEA, Jul 1969 - Jun 1971	Colwell, Robert F.	23-Nov-71	93
206	U	Fixed Wing Gunships in SEA, Jul 1969 - Jul 1971	Cole, James L., Jr.	30-Nov-71	107
207	U	Attack on Cam Ranh, 25 Aug 1971	Abbey, Thomas G.	15-Dec-71	64
208	U/FOUO	SEA Glossary, 1961 - 1971	Alsperger, Eugene J.	1-Feb-72	179
209	U/FOUO	Evasion and Escape in SEA, 1964 - 1971	Porter, Melvin F.	4-Feb-72	64
210	U	Tactical Airlift in SEA, Jan 1969 - Nov 1971	Merrell, Ronald D.	15-Feb-72	94
211	S	Khmer Air Operations, Nov 1970 - Nov 1971	Nicholson, Charles A.	15-Jun-72	65
212	U	COMMANDO HUNT VI, 15 May - 31 Oct 1971	Layton, Bruce P.	7-Jul-72	134
213	U	Short Rounds, 1971	Adamcik, Frank	15-Jul-72	37
214	S/NF	USAF Control of Air Strikes in Support of Indigenous Lao Ground Forces	Shields, Henry S.	19-Jul-72	130
215	U	PROUD DEEP ALPHA	Porter, Melvin F.	20-Jul-72	62
216	U	OV-1 / AC-119 Hunter-Killer Team, Apr 1970 - Nov 1971	Sexton, Richard R. Hodgson, William M.	10-Oct-72	36
217	U	The USAF Response to the Spring 1972 NVN Offensive: Situation and Redeployment, Mar - July 1972	Nicholson, Charles A.	10-Oct-72	67
218	U	Search and Rescue Operations in SEA, Jan 1971 - Mar 1972	Lowe, Leroy W.	17-Oct-72	88
219	U	Kontum: Battle for the Central Highlands, 30 Mar - 10 Jun 1972	Liebchen, Peter A.W.	27-Oct-72	104
220	U	PAVE MACE / COMBAT RENDEZVOUS, 1967 - 1972	Sexton, Richard R.	26-Dec-72	156

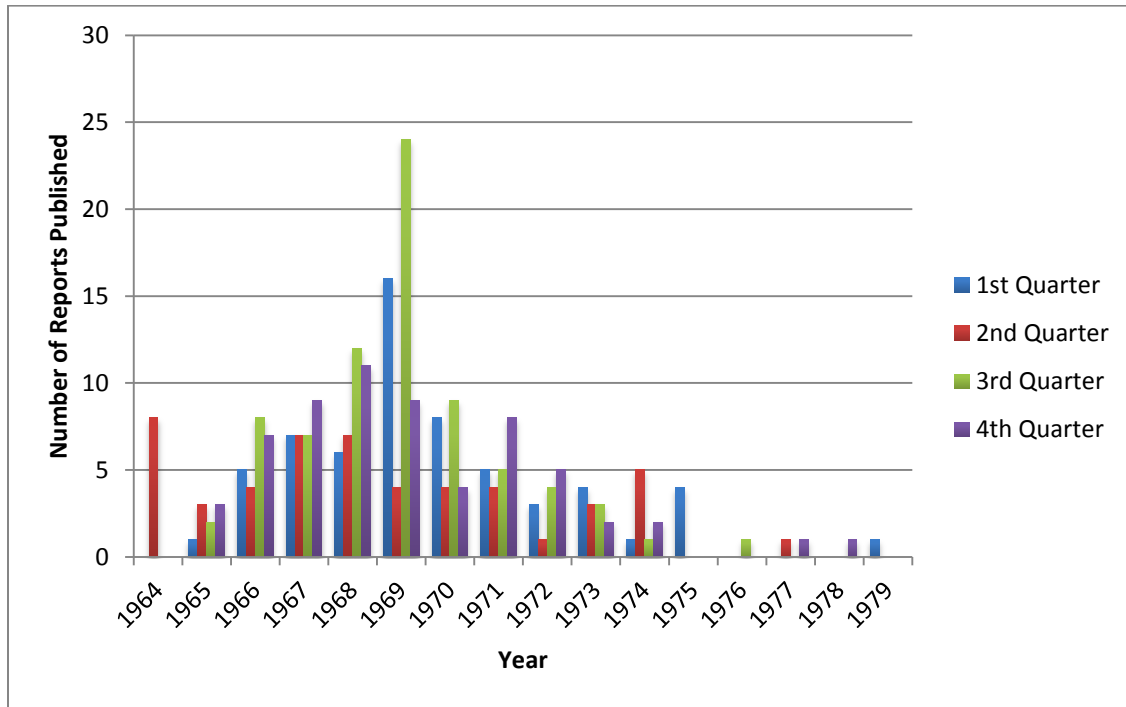
Number	Classification	Title	Author	Publication Date	Pages
221	U	Air Defense in Southeast Asia, 1945 - 1971	Penix, Guman Rigenbach, Paul T.	17-Jan-73	98
222	U	The Battle for An Loc, 5 Apr - 26 Jun 1972	Ringenbach, Paul T. Melly, Peter J.	31-Jan-73	84
223	C/NF	Base Defense in Thailand, 1968 - 1972	Barnette, Benjamin H. Barrow, James R.	18-Feb-73	89
224	U	The 1972 Invasion of Military Region I: Fall of Quang Tri and Defense of Hue	Mann, David K.	15-Mar-73	71
225	U	Rules of Engagement, Nov 1969 - Sep 1972	Elder, Paul W. Melly, Peter J.	1-May-73	78
226	C	Air War in Northern Laos, 1 Apr - 30 Nov 1971	Sexton, Richard R. Lofgren, William W., Jr.	22-Jun-73	113
227	U	MAP Aid to Laos, 1959 - 1972	Liebchen, Peter A.W.	25-Jun-73	200
228	U	BUFFALO HUNTER, 1970 - 1972	Elder, Paul W.	24-Jul-73	42
229	U	PAVE AEGIS Weapons System (AC-130E Gunship)	Thomas Till	30-Jul-73	60
230	U	INK Development and Employment	Barnette, Benjamin H.	24-Sep-73	46
231	U	LINEBACKER: Overview of the First 120 Days	Porter, Melvin F.	27-Sep-73	79
232	U	Guided Bomb Operations in SEA: The Weather Dimension, 1 Feb - 31 Dec 1972	Breitling, Patrick J.	1-Oct-73	45
233	U	Airlift to Besieged Areas, 7 Apr - 31 Aug 1972	Ringenbach, Paul T.	7-Dec-73	74
234	S	The F-111 in SEA, Sep 1972 - Jan 1973	HQ PACAF / SOAD	21-Feb-74	90
235	U	Air Operations in the Khmer Republic, 1 Dec 1971 - 15 Aug 1973	Elder, Paul W.	15-Apr-74	90
236	U	COMBAT SNAP (AIM-9J SEA Introduction)	Sieman, John W.	24-Apr-74	38
237	U	The Bolovens Campaign, 28 Jul - 28 Dec 1971	Porter, Melvin F. Sexton, Richard R. Hukle, Donald G. Ringenbach, Paul T. Zabka, Adolf H. Skipworth, Judith A.	8-May-74	37
238	U	Psychological Operations Against North Vietnam, Jul 1972 - Jan 1973	Tinnins, Jack L.	24-May-74	36
239	U	USAF Quick Reaction Forces	Mann, David K. Brynn, Edward P.	20-Jun-74	38
240	U	Vietnamization of the Tactical Air Control System	Meeko, Joseph G., IV	23-Sep-74	96

Number	Classification	Title	Author	Publication Date	Pages
241	S//NF	The Air War in Laos, 1 Jan 1972 - 22 Feb 1973	Lofgren, William W., Jr.	15-Oct-74	318
242	U	Search and Rescue Operations in SEA, Apr 1972 - Jun 1973	Francis, David G. Nelson, David R.	27-Nov-74	63
243	U	An Overview of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Thailand Through 1973, A Background Survey for Perspective and a Guide to the Literature	Hanrahan, Edward B.	1-Jan-75	147
244	U	Drug Abuse in SEA	Carver, Richard B.	1-Jan-75	90
245	U	Southeast Asia Tactical Data Systems Interface	Machovec, Frank M.	1-Jan-75	62
246	U	VNAF Improvement and Modernization Program, Jul 1971 - Dec 1973	DesBrisay, Thomas D.	1-Jan-75	222
247	U	Joint Personnel Recovery in SEA	Brynn, Edward P. Geesy, Arthur P.	1-Sep-76	80
248	U	Rules of Engagement, Oct 1972 - Aug 1973	Burditt, William R.	1-Mar-77	125
249	U	Short Rounds, Jan 1972 - Aug 1973	Burditt, William R.	1-Nov-77	115
250	U	LINEBACKER Operations, Sep - Dec 1972	Johnson, Calvin R.	31-Dec-78	106
251	S//NF	USAAG / 7 AF in Thailand, Policy Changes and the Military Role, 1973 - 1975	Merita, Claude G.	27-Jan-79	150

APPENDIX B

CHECO Report Statistics

Source: Research Guide to CHECO Reports of Southeast Asia, 1961-1975, K238.197-2, Iris No. 1116957, AFHRA.



APPENDIX C

Project CHECO Organization Diagrams

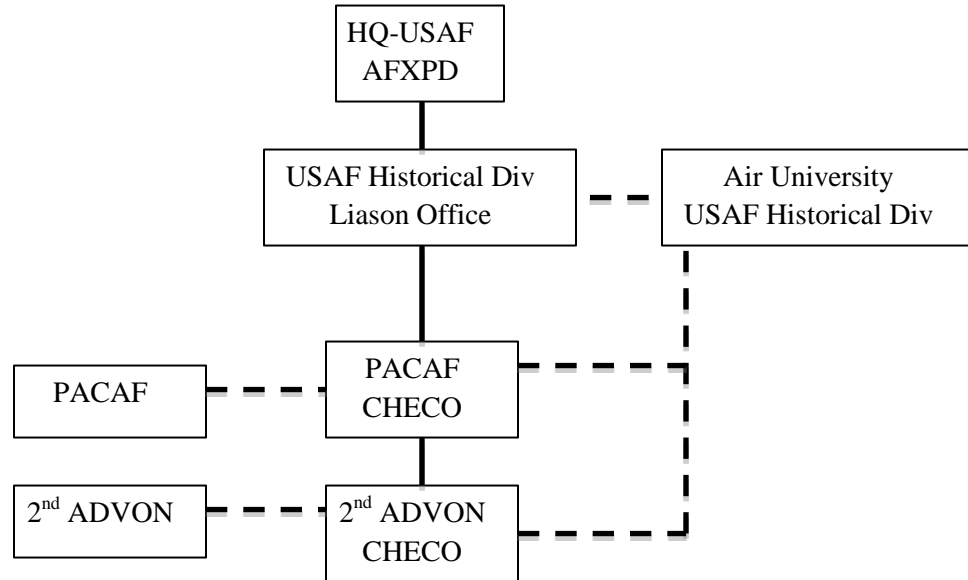


Figure 6: CHECO Organization, 1962 – 1965

Source: CHECO Since 1962, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898522, "CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969," AFHRA.

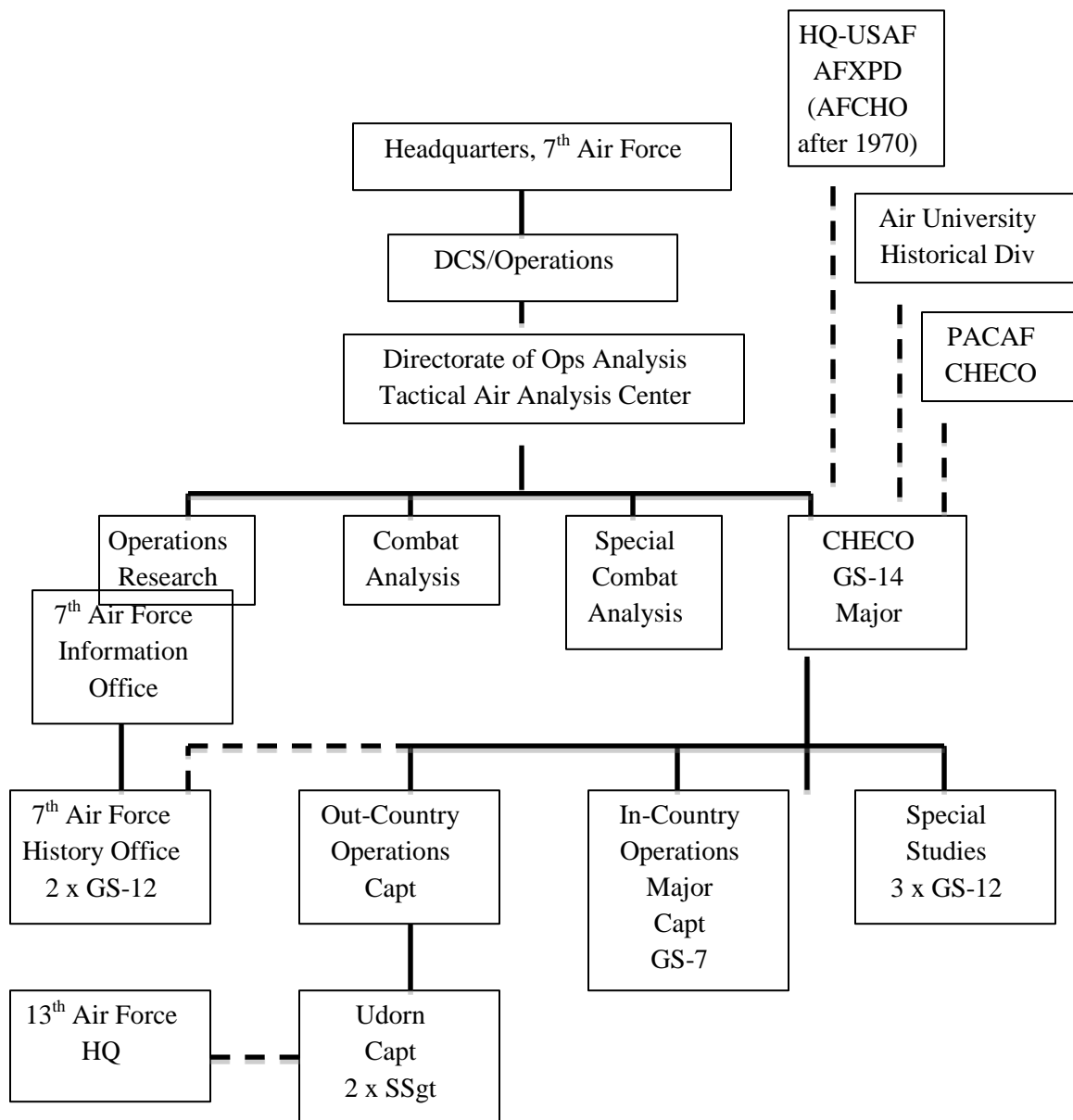


Figure 7: CHECO Organization, 1966 – 1973
 Source: CHECO Since 1962, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898522, “CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969,” AFHRA.

APPENDIX D

CHECO Report Excerpts

SECRET
(This page is Unclassified)
DISTRIBUTION

Hq USAF	
AFCHO	2 Cys
AFXPD	3 Cys
AFXPD-V	1 Cy
AFXOP	1 Cy
BAFAA	1 Cy
Air University	
ASI (HD)	2 Cys
AUL3T-66-7	1 Cy
ACSC	1 Cy
USAF Academy	
TAC (OEH)	1 Cy
MATS (MAFOH)	1 Cy
AFSC (SCHE)	1 Cy
AFIC (MCH)	1 Cy
ATC (ATCOI-E)	1 Cy
SAC (DCH)	1 Cy
USAF (OI)	1 Cy
USAFBOUTHCOM (BOI-E)	1 Cy
SAWC-OEH (Eglin)	1 Cy
5 AF (DOH)	1 Cy
13 AF (DOH)	1 Cy
7th AF (DOH)	5 Cys
Hq PACAF	
C	1 Cy
DOP	1 Cy
EP	1 Cy
DI	1 Cy
DO	1 Cy
IM	1 Cy
DPL	1 Cy
IG	1 Cy
DOPFC	2 Cys

111
SECRET

Figure 8: Distribution List for "The Fall of A Shau"

Source: Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, The Fall of A Shau, 18 April 1966, K717.0413-4 C.1, Iris No. 517249, AFHRA, iii.

UNCLASSIFIED	
DISTRIBUTION LIST	
NO. OF COPIES	NO. OF COPIES
1. SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE	h. AFAAC 1
a. SAFAA 1	(1) AFAMA 1
b. SAFLL 1	(2) AFAMAI 1
c. SAFOI 2	i. AFODC 1
2. HEADQUARTERS USAF	(1) AFOAP 1
a. AFBSA 1	(2) AFDAPS 1
b. AFCCS	(3) AFOCC 1
(1) AFCCSSA 1	(4) AFOCE 1
(2) AFCVC 1	(5) AFOMO 1
(3) AFCAV 1	(6) AFOMDAC 1
(4) AFCVD 1	(7) AFOWX 1
(5) AFCHO 2	j. AFPDC
c. AFCSA 1	(1) AFPDP 1
(1) AFCSAC 1	(2) AFPMDG 1
(2) AFCSAM 1	(3) AFPDW 1
d. AFGOA 2	(4) AFPMRE 1
e. AFIGO	k. AFRDC 1
(1) AFIIN 1	(1) AFRDD 1
(2) AFISI 3	(2) AFRDQ 1
(3) AFISL 1	(3) AFRDR 1
f. AFMSG 1	(4) AFRDF 1
g. AFNIN	l. AFSDC 1
(1) AFNIE 1	(1) AFSLP 1
(2) AFNINA 1	(2) AFSME 1
(3) AFNINCC 1	(3) AFSMS 1
(4) AFNINED 4	(4) AFSPD 1
	(5) AFSSS 1
	(6) AFSTP 1
	m. AFTAC 1
iv	
UNCLASSIFIED	

Figure 9: Distribution List for "USAF Support of Special Forces in SEA"
Source: Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, USAF Support of Special Forces in SEA, 10 March 1969, K717.0414-54 V.1, Iris No. 517331, AFHRA, iv-x.

UNCLASSIFIED

n. AFXDC

(1) AFXOO 1
 (2) AFXDOC 1
 (3) AFXDOO 1
 (4) AFXOOL 1
 (5) AFXOP 1
 (6) AFXOSL 1
 (7) AFXOSN 1
 (8) AFXOSO 1
 (9) AFXOSS 1
 (10) AFXOSV 1
 (11) AFXOTR 1
 (12) AFXOTW 1
 (13) AFXOTZ 1
 (14) AFXPD 6

(a) AFXPPGS 3

3. MAJOR COMMANDS

a. TAC

(1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) DO 1
 (b) DPL 2
 (c) DOCC 1
 (d) DORQ 1
 (e) DIO 1

(2) AIR FORCES

(a) 9AF

1. DO 1
 2. DP 1

(b) 12AF

1. DORF 1
 2. DP 1
 3. DI 1

(c) 19AF

1. DO 1
 2. DP 1
 3. DA-C 1

(d) USAFSOF

1. DO 1
 2. DI 1

(3) AIR DIVISIONS

(a) 831AD(DO) 2
 (b) 832AD(DO) 2
 (c) 833AD(DO) 2
 (d) 835AD(DO) 2
 (e) 836AD(DO) 2
 (f) 838AD

1. DO 1
 2. DOCP 1

(g) 839AD(DO) 2
 (h) 840AD 2

(4) WINGS

(a) 150W(DO) 1
 (b) 4TFW(DO) 1
 (c) 15TFW(DO) 1
 (d) 23TFW(DO) 1
 (e) 27TFW(DOP) 1
 (f) 33TFW(DO) 1
 (g) 49TFW(DO) 1
 (h) 64TFW 1
 (i) 67TRW(C) 1
 (j) 75TRW(DO) 1
 (k) 78FW(WGOC) 1
 (l) 82CSPW(DOCH) 1
 (m) 123TRW 1
 (n) 140TFW(CA) 1
 (o) 313TAW(DOPL) 1
 (p) 316TAW(DOP) 1
 (q) 317TAW(EX) 1
 (r) 363TRW 1
 (s) 454TAW(DO) 1
 (t) 474TFW(TFOX) 1
 (u) 479TFW 1
 (v) 516TAW(DOPL) 1
 (w) 441DCCTW(DOTR) 1
 (x) 4442CCTW(DO) 1
 (y) 4453CCTW(DO) 1
 (z) 4500ABW(DO) 1
 (aa) 4510CCTW(DO16-1) 1

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

(bb) 4525FWM(FMOA) . . . 1
(cc) 4531TFW(DOI) . . . 1
(dd) 4554CCTW(DOI) . . . 1

(5) TAC CENTERS, SCHOOLS

(a) USAFTAWC

1. DA. 2

(b) USAFTARC

1. DID 2

(c) USAFTALC

1. DCRL. 2

(d) USAFTFWC

1. CRCD. 2

(e) USAFSOC(DO) . . . 2

(f) USAFAGOS(DAB-C) . . 2

b. SAC

(1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) DOPL. 1

(b) DPLF. 1

(c) DM. 1

(d) DI. 1

(2) AIR FORCES

(a) 2AF(DICS) 1

(b) 8AF(C) 1

(c) 15AF. 1

(3) AIR DIVISIONS

(a) 3AD(DO) 3

c. MAC

(1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) MAQID. 1

(b) MAOCO. 1

(c) MAFOI. 1

(d) MACOA. 1

(2) AIR FORCES

(a) 21AF

1. ODC. 1

2. OCXI 1

(b) 22AF

1. ODC. 1

2. OCXI 1

(3) AIR DIVISIONS

(a) 322AD. 1

(4) WINGS

(a) 375AAWG

1. ODC. 1

(b) 89MAWG

1. ODC. 1

(c) 60MAWG

1. ODC. 1

2. OXI. 1

(d) 61MAWG

1. ODC. 1

2. OIN. 1

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

e. ATC

(1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) ATXDC. 1

f. AFLC

(1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) MCFH 1
(b) MCGH 1
(c) MCOO 1

g. AFSC

(1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) SCLAP. 2
(b) SCS-6. 1
(c) SCTPL. 1
(d) SCEH. 2
(e) ASD/ASJT 2
(f) ESD/ESWV 2
(g) ADTC/ADP 2
(h) RADC/EMOEL . . . 2

h. AFCS

(1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) CSOCH. 5

i. USAFSS

(1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) ODC. 1
(b) CHO. 5

(2) SUBORDINATE UNITS

(a) Eur Scty Rgn
 1. OPD-P. . . . 1
(b) 6940 Scty Wg
 1. OOD. 1

j. AAC

(1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) ALDOC-A 2

k. USAFSO

(1) COH 1
(2) OOP 1

l. PACAF

(1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) DP. 1
(b) DI. 1
(c) DO. 1
(d) DPL. 4
(e) CSH. 1
(f) DOTECH. 6
(g) DE. 1
(h) DM. 1

(2) AIR FORCES

(a) 5AF
 1. DOPP. 1
 2. DP. 1

(b) 7AF
 1. DO. 1
 2. DIXA. 1
 3. DPL. 1
 4. TACC. 1
 5. DOAC. 2

(c) 13AF
 1. DDO. 1
 2. DXIH. 1
 3. DPL. 1

(d) 7AF/13AF
 1. CHECO 3

viii

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

(3) AIR DIVISIONS

(a) 313AD(DOP) 2
(b) 314AD(DOP) 2
(c) 327AD 2
(d) 834AD 2

(c) 17AF

1. ODC 1
2. OIC 1

(3) WINGS

(4) WINGS

(a) 3TFW(DCOP) 1
(b) 8TFW(DCOA) 1
(c) 12TFW(DCOI) 1
(d) 14SOW(DCO) 1
(e) 31TFW(DCOA) 1
(f) 35TFW 1
(g) 37TFW(DCOI) 1
(h) 56SOW 1
(i) 315SOW(DCOI) 1
(j) 347TFW(DCOOT) 1
(k) 355TFW(DCOC) 1
(l) 356TFW 1
(m) 388TFW(DCO) 1
(n) 405FW(DCOA) 1
(o) 432TRW(DCOI) 1
(p) 460TRW(DCOI) 1
(q) 475TFW(DCO) 1
(r) 483TAW(DCO) 1
(s) 553RW(DCOI) 1
(t) 633SOW 1
(u) 6400 Test Sq 1

(a) 10TRW(DIN/50A) 1
(b) 20TFW(CACC) 1
(c) 26TRW(C) 1
(d) 36TFW(CADS) 1
(e) 48TFW(DCOTS) 1
(f) 50TFW(CACC) 1
(g) 66TRW(DCOIN-T) 1
(h) 81TFW 1
(i) 401TFW(DCOI) 1
(j) 513TAW(OID) 1
(k) 601TCN 1
(l) 7101ABW(DCO-CP) 1
(m) 7149TFW(DCOI) 1
(n) 7272FTW(CAAC) 1

4. SEPARATE OPERATING AGENCIES

a. AFAFC (SAA-12) 1
b. AFSDC (HCAA) 2
c. ACIC

(1) ACOMC 2

d. ARPC (RPCAS-22) 2
e. AFRES

(1) AFROP 2

f. USAFA

(1) CA 2
(2) CMT 1
(3) DFH 1

g. AU

(1) AUL(SE)-69-108 2
(2) ASI (ASHAF-A) 2
(3) ASI (ASD-1) 1
(4) ACSC-SA 1

(5) OTHER UNITS

(a) Task Force ALPHA
1. DXI 1
(b) 504TASG(CA) 1

m. USAFE

(1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) ODC/OA 1
(b) ODC/OTA 1
(c) OOT 1
(d) XDC 1

(2) AIR FORCES

(a) 3AF(ODC) 2
(b) 16AF 2

1x

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

5. MILITARY DEPARTMENTS, UNIFIED AND SPECIFIED COMMANDS, AND JOINT STAFFS

a.	CINCLANT.	1
b.	CINCLANT.	1
c.	USAFANT.	1
d.	CHIEF, NAVAL OPERATIONS.	1
e.	COMMANDANT, MARINE CORPS.	1
f.	CINCONAD.	1
g.	DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY.	1
h.	JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF.	1
i.	JSTPS.	1
j.	CINCPAC.	1
k.	SECRETARY OF DEFENSE.	1
l.	CINCAFSTRIKE.	1
m.	USCINCEAFSA.	1
n.	USCINCEUR.	1
o.	COMUSFORAZ.	1
p.	COMUSJAPAN.	1
q.	COMUSKOREA.	1
r.	COMUSMACTHAI.	1
s.	COMUSMACV.	1
t.	USCINCSO.	1
u.	COMUSTDC.	1
v.	CINCSTRIKE.	1

6. SCHOOLS

a.	Senior USAF Rep, National War College.	1
b.	Senior USAF Rep, Industrial College of the Armed Forces.	1
c.	Senior USAF Rep, Armed Forces Staff College.	1
d.	Senior USAF Rep, US Naval War College.	1
e.	Senior USAF Rep, Naval Amphibious School.	1
f.	Senior USAF Rep, Marine Corps Education Center.	1
g.	Senior USAF Rep, US Army War College.	1
h.	Senior USAF Rep, US Army C&G Staff College.	1
i.	Senior USAF Rep, US Army Infantry School.	1
j.	Senior USAF Rep, US Army JFG Ctr for Special Warfare.	1

UNCLASSIFIED

x

UNCLASSIFIED

PROJECT CHECO REPORTS

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

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

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

Milton B. Adams

MILTON B. ADAMS, Major General, USAF
Chief of Staff

11

UNCLASSIFIED

Figure 10: PACAF CoS Letter for "USAF Support of Special Forces in SEA"
Source: USAF Support of Special Forces in SEA, 10 March 1969, ii.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Articles

- Brantley, William L. "CHECO Is Its Name." *The Airman* XII, no. 7 (July 1968): 32–35.
- Buckingham, William A., Jr. "Operation Ranch Hand: Herbicides in Southeast Asia." *Air University Review* XXXIV, no. 5 (August 1983): 42–53.
- Drew, Dennis. "U.S. Airpower Theory and the Insurgent Challenge: A Short Journey to Confusion." *The Journal of Military History* 62, no. 4 (October 1998): 809–832.
- Dobbins, James. "Learning Curve." *Foreign Policy*. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/03/13/learning_curve (accessed 14 March 2013).
- Ginsburgh, Robert N. "Strategy and Airpower: The Lessons of Southeast Asia." *Strategic Review* I, no. 2 (Summer 1973): 18–24.
- Herwig, Holger. "Clio Deceived: Patriotic Self-Censorship in Germany After the Great War." *International Security* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 5–44.
- Howard, Michael. "The Use and Abuse of Military History." *Parameters* XI, no. 1 (March 1981): 9–14.
- Krieger, Leonard. "Official History and the War in Vietnam: Comment." *Military Affairs* XXXII, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 16–19.
- Leonard, Raymond W. "Learning from History: Linebacker II and US Air Force Doctrine." *The Journal of Military History* 58, no. 2 (April 1994): 267–303.
- Liefer, Richard. "War History Recorded as Combat Continues." *Air Force Times* XXX, no. 35 (April 8, 1970): 16.
- Luvaas, Jay. "Military History: Is It Still Practicable?" *Parameters* XXV, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 82–97.
- MacDonald, Charles B. "Official History and the War in Vietnam." *Military Affairs* XXXII, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 2–11.
- Newcomb, Harold. "A Memory in Words." *Airman* XXII, no. 6 (June 1978): 2–8.
- Spector, Ronald. "An Improbable Success Story: Official Military Histories in the Twentieth Century." *The Public Historian* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 25–30.
- Stacey, C.P. "Official History and the Vietnam War: A Canadian Comment." *Military Affairs* XXXII, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 11–13.
- Sturm, Ted R. "Shaping Things to Come." *Airman* XVII, no. 9 (September 1973): 7–10.
- Tirpak, John A. "Airmen Absent." *Air Force Magazine* 96, no. 4 (April 2013): 34–36.
- Trest, Warren A. "Projects CHECO and Corona Harvest: Keys to the Air Force's Southeast Asia Memory Bank." *Aerospace Historian* 33, no. 2 (June 1986): 114–120.
- Watts, Barry D. "Unreported History and Unit Effectiveness." *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 12, no. 1 (January 1989): 88–98.
- Werrell, Kenneth P. "Did USAF Technology Fail in Vietnam?: Three Case Studies." *Airpower Journal* XII, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 87–99.

Books

- Ballard, Jack S. *Development and Employment of Fixed Wing Gunships, 1962-1972*. Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1982.
- Bloch, Marc. *The Historian's Craft*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1953.
- Buckingham, William A., Jr. *Operation Ranch Hand, The Air Force and Herbicides in Southeast Asia, 1961-1971*. Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1982.
- Carr, Edward Hallett. *What Is History?* New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1963.
- Cecil, Paul Frederick. *Herbicide Warfare, The Ranch Hand Project in Vietnam*. New York: Praeger, 1986.
- Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Clodfelter, Mark. *The Limits of Airpower, The American Bombing of North Vietnam*. New York: The Free Press, 1989.
- Craven, Wesley Frank and James Lee Cate. *The Army Air Forces in WWII, Volume 1, Plans and Early Operations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948.
- Douhet, Giulio. *The Command of the Air*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2009.
- Drew, Dennis M. *Recapitalizing the Air Force Intellect, Essays on War, Airpower, and Military Education*. Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2008.
- Fuller, J.F.C. *The Foundations of the Science of War*. Ft Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1993.
- Futrell, Robert Frank. *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine. Vol. 2 : Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1961-1984*. Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2004.
- . *The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953*. Washington: Office of Air Force History, 1983.
- Gaddis, John Lewis. *The Landscape of History : How Historians Map the Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Galdorisi, George, and Thomas Phillips. *Leave No Man Behind: The Saga of Combat Search and Rescue*. Minneapolis, MN: MBI Pub. Co., 2008.
- Giulio Douhet. *The Command of the Air*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2009.
- Grey, Jeffrey, ed. *Last Word?: Essays on Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003.
- Haas, Michael E. *Apollo's Warriors, United States Air Force Special Operations During the Cold War*. Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1997.
- Harkavy, Robert E, and Neuman, Stephanie G, eds. *The Lessons of Recent Wars in the Third World, Volume 1*. Lexington, MA: DC Heath and Company, 1985.
- Herring, George C. *America's Longest War : the United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996.
- Higham, Robin, ed. *Official Histories: Essays and Bibliographies from Around the World*. Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University Library, 1970.
- . , ed. *Official Military Historical Offices and Sources, Volume 1*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Pr., 2000.
- . , ed. *The Writing of Official Military History*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Pr., 1999.

- Horwood, Ian. *Interservice Rivalry and Airpower in the Vietnam War*. Ft Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2009.
- Howard, Michael. *The Lessons of History*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991.
- Howe, Barbara J. and Emory L. Kemp, eds. *Public History: An Introduction*. Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1986.
- Liddell Hart, B.H. *Why Don't We Learn from History?* 4th ed. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1946.
- McCarthy, James R. and George B. Allison. *Linebacker II: A View from the Rock*. Maxwell Air Force Base: Airpower Research Institute, 1979.
- Murray, Williamson and Richard Hart Sinnreich, eds. *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Mrozek, Donald J. *Airpower and the Ground War in Vietnam*. Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1988.
- . *The US Air Force After Vietnam, Postwar Challenges and Potential for Responses*. Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1988.
- Nalty, Bernard C. *The War Against Trucks : Aerial Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1968-1972*. Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2005.
- Novick, Peter. *That Noble Dream, The Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Ranke, Leopold von. *The Secret of World History : Selected Writings on the Art and Science of History*. Edited by Roger Wines. New York: Fordham University Press, 1981.
- Schlight, John. *A War Too Long, The USAF in Southeast Asia 1961 - 1975*. Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1996.
- Sharp, U.S.G. *Strategy for Defeat, Vietnam in Retrospect*. Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1978.
- Shaughnessy, Ryan. *No Sense in Dwelling on the Past? The Fate of the US Air Force's German Air Force Monograph Project, 1952-1969*. Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2011.
- Stockfish, J.A. *The 1962 Howze Board and Army Concept Developments*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1994.
- Tilford, Earl H. Jr. *Setup, What the Air Force Did in Vietnam and Why*. Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1991.
- . *The United States Air Force Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia*. Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1992.
- Travers, Tim. *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front, and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1987.
- Vetock, Dennis J. *Lessons Learned: A History of US Army Lesson Learning*. Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army Military History Institute, 1988.

Briefings/Memos/Messages

- CHECO Correspondence, June 1962 – December 1968, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898521 AFHRA.
- CHECO Correspondence, 1964-1969, K717.062-2, IRIS No. 898522 AFHRA.

CHECO Correspondence, 1965-1968, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898524, AFHRA.
 CHECO Correspondence, 1967-1971, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898525, AFHRA.
 CHECO Historical Progress Reports, October 1962 – December 1964, K717.062-1, Iris No. 898520, AFHRA.
 CHECO Re-Organization Correspondence, K717.062-2, Iris No. 898526, AFHRA.
 CHECO Summary for General Slay, K717.062-6, Iris No. 898527, AFHRA.
 CHECO Talking Paper, March 1969, K717.062-5, Iris No. 517535, AFHRA.
 Kenneth Sams Personal File, 1967-1971, K717.062-7, Iris No. 517536, AFHRA.
 Letters of Advice to Col Thomas D. Wade Upon his becoming Head of CHECO Division, 1971, K717.062-8, Iris No. 517537, AFHRA.
 PACAF Message, Subject: Current Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations, 5 October 1962, K717.062-2, Iris No. 517530, AFHRA.
 Project CHECO Correspondence, 1966 – 1968, K717.062-2, Iris No. 517532, AFHRA.
 Research Guide to CHECO Reports of Southeast Asia, 1961-1975, K238.197-2, Iris No. 1116957, AFHRA.
 Role of Airpower in the Southeast Asia Conflict, K717.062-2, Iris No. 517531, AFHRA.

Government Documents

Air Force Manual 210-1, Manual for Air Force Historians, 30 Aug 1963, K168.1321-1, Iris No. 917288, AFHRA.
 AFR 210-3, Air Force Historical Program, 8 April 1969, K168.12210-3, IRIS No. 8472798, AFHRA.

Personal Communication – Interviews/E-mail

Burch, Robert. interview with the author, 28 February 2013.
 ———. email to author, 28 February 2013.
 Caine, Philip. email to the author, 22 February 2013.
 Clodfelter, Mark. email to the author, 5 December 2012.
 Jones, Kathi R., Office of History USAFCENT/HQ, email to the author, 5 April 2013.
 Kott, Richard. email to the author, 8 March 2013.
 ———. email to the author, 12 March 2013.
 Mets, David. email to the author, 23 January 2013.
 Oral History Interview of Brigadier General Brian S. Gunderson by Hugh N. Ahmann, 22-23 October 1987, K239.0512-1770, IRIS No. 114709, AFHRA.
 Oral History Interview of Kenneth Sams by Lt Col John Pratt, 29 November 1987, K239.0512-1856, IRIS No. 1095302, AFHRA.
 Oral History Interview of Robert Frank Futrell by Hugh N. Ahmann and Warren Trest, 1 July 1995, K239.0512-2135, Tape 1, Iris No. 1143653, AFHRA.
 Oral History Interview of Warren Trest by Mr. Edward T. Russell, 10 July 2000, K238.051-3, IRIS No. 1135642, AFHRA.
 Randolph, Stephen P. interview with the author, 22 February 2013.
 Schligh, John. email to the author, 21 February 2013.
 ———. email to the author, 4 March 2013.
 Trest, Warren. email to the author, 1 January 2013.

———. interview with the author, 23 January 2013.

Reports

- Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service, 1946 – 1981, An Illustrated Chronology. Scott AFB, IL: Office of MAC History, 1983.
- Air Force Historical Advisory Committee, 15-16 September 1977, K168.27-46, Iris No. 1117116, AFHRA.
- Air University History, 1 July – 31 December 1975, K239.01, Iris No. 1012225, AFHRA.
- Betts, Russell and Frank Denton. "An Evaluation of Chemical Crop Destruction in Vietnam." Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1967.
- CHECO - Abstract - History: War in Vietnam, 1961-1963, 31 May 1964, K717.0413-30, IRIS No. 1071562, AFHRA.
- Gargano, Tony. "Boxer 22 Bravo," K318.203-79, Iris No. 1024833, AFHRA.
- Headquarters PACAF, Corona Harvest, Air Operations in North Vietnam, 7 May 1975, K717.0423-23 V.2, Iris No. 1051287, USAF Air Operations in Southeast Asia, 1 July 1972 – 15 August 1973, AFHRA.
- Headquarters PACAF, Corona Harvest, Lessons Learned and Recommendations, A Compendium, 16 June 1975, K717.0423-11, Iris No. 1009474, USAF Air Operations in Southeast Asia, 1 July 1972 – 15 August 1973, AFHRA.
- History of the Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, 1 July 1975 – 31 December 1975, K238.01, Iris No. 1143923, AFHRA.
- History of the Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, 1978, K238.01, Iris No. 1143920, AFHRA.
- History of the 22nd Special Operations Squadron, 1-31 December 1969, Appendix V, Tab C, K-WG-56-HI V.2, Iris No. 451135, AFHRA.
- History of the 56th Special Operations Wing, October – December 1969, K-WG-56-HI V.1, Iris No. 451134, AFHRA.
- The Huk Challenge in the Philippines, Unpublished CHECO Draft, 15 March 1969, K717.0413-100, Iris No. 517391, AFHRA.
- Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis, Joint Staff-J7, "Decade of War, Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations," <http://blogs.defensenews.com/saxotech-access/pdfs/decade-of-war-lesson> (accessed on 14 March 2013).
- Minutes of the First Meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Air Force Historical Program, 4-5 October 1968, K168.27-46, IRIS No. 1117108, AFHRA.
- Notes on the 1967 Worldwide Air Force Historical Conference, 18-19 October 1967, K239.151-11, IRIS No. 481255, AFHRA.
- Project CHECO, Expository Paper #1, 11 March 1965, K717.041-1, IRIS No. 898532, AFHRA.
- Project CHECO, Southeast Asia Report, Escalation of the War, July – December 1964, 15 July 1965, K717.0414-17, IRIS No. 1103494, AFHRA.
- Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Escape and Evasion SEA, 1964-1971, 4 February 1972, K717.0414-27, Iris No. 1009759, AFHRA.
- Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, The Fall of A Shau, 18 April 1966, K717.0413-4 C.1, Iris No. 517249, AFHRA.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, First Test and Combat Use of the AC-47, 8 December 1965, M-38245-4-U No. 2, Fairchild Documents, MSFRIC.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Fixed Wing Gunships in SEA, Jul 1969 – July 1971, 30 November 1971, K717.0414-15 V.9, Iris No. 517439, AFHRA.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 – June 1967, K717.0413-20, Iris No. 517272, AFHRA.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Linebacker Operations, September – December 1972, 31 December 1978, K717.0413-102, Iris No. 1029549, AFHRA.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Linebacker: Overview of the First 120 Days, 27 September 1973, K717.0414-42, Iris No. 1009900, AFHRA.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Night Close Air Support in RVN, 1961-1966, 15 March 1967, M-38245-30, Fairchild Documents, MSFRIC.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, OV-1 / AC-119 Hunter-Killer Team, 10 October 1972, K717.0414-34, Iris No. 517461, AFHRA.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, PAVE AEGIS Weapon System (AC-130E), 30 July 1973, K717.0413-37, Iris No. 517463, AFHRA.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, PAVE MACE / COMBAT RENDEZVOUS, 26 December 1972, K717.0414-35, Iris No. 517462, AFHRA.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Rescue at Ban Phanop, 5-7 December 1969, 15 February 1970, K717.0413-72 V.1, Iris No. 517358, AFHRA.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Short Rounds, June 1968 – May 1969, K717.0413-19 C.1, Iris No. 898403, AFHRA.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Tactical Airlift Operations, 30 June 1969, K717.0414-2, Iris No. 898440, AFHRA.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, The Role of USAF Gunships in SEASIA, 30 August 1969, K717.0414-15 V.1, Iris No. 1147636, AFHRA.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, USAF Search and Rescue, 1 Jul 1966 – 31 Dec 1970, 23 April 1971, K717.0414-1, Iris No. 517396, AFHRA.

Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, USAF Support of Special Forces in SEA, 10 March 1969, K717.0414-54 V.1, Iris No. 517331, AFHRA.

Russo, Anthony J. “A Statistical Analysis of the US Crop Spraying Program in South Vietnam.” Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1967.

SAC Operations in Linebacker II, 3 August 1976, K416.04-13 V.10, Iris No. 1028671, AFHRA.

Southeast Asia Studies and Interviews by Joseph W. Grainger and Others, 6 June 1964, K717.0414-59 C.2, IRIS No. 1010376, AFHRA.

Supporting Documents to Herbicide Operations in Southeast Asia, July 1961 – June 1967, K717.0413-20 Vol 3, Iris No. 1010372, AFHRA.

Supporting Documents to Rescue at Ban Phanop, K717.0413-72 V.2, Iris No. 517359, AFHRA.

Supporting Documents to The Role of USAF Gunships in SEASIA, Volume 7, 30 August 1969, K717.0414-15 V.8, Iris No. 898457, AFHRA.

Supporting Documents to USAF Search and Rescue Jan 1971 – Mar 1972, K717.0414-1 V.2, Iris No. 517398, AFHRA.

Warren, William F. "A Review of the Herbicide Program in South Vietnam."
Commander in Chief Pacific Scientific Advisory Group, Working Paper No. 10-68, August 1968, <http://www.ditc.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/779797.pdf> (accessed on 19 March 2013).

7th Air Force, Directorate of Ops Analysis, Linebacker II USAF Bombing Survey, 1 April 1973, K143.054-1 V.34, Iris No. 1011707, AFHRA.

8th Air Force History, 1 July 1972 – 30 June 1973, 23 August 1974, K520.01 V.2, Iris No. 1000759, AFHRA.