War in Southeast Asia
Uses of Air Power

Missions, Campaigns, & Planes
Vietnam: Part II: Uses of Airpower

**OBJECTIVE:** Know how airpower was used during the war in Southeast Asia.

**Samples of Behavior:**
- Describe how airpower was used in Southeast Asia to **interdict** the Ho Chi Minh Trail
- Describe the US Air Force’s **efforts to gain air superiority** during the Vietnam conflict
- Describe and give an example of the **tactical airlift missions** flown during the Vietnam conflict
Samples of Behavior (Continued):

- Describe the US Air Force’s Search and Recovery mission in Vietnam
- Describe “Rolling Thunder,” “Linebacker I,” and “Linebacker II” – strategic bombing campaigns against North Vietnam
- Describe the uses and the effectiveness of the B-52 in the Vietnam conflict
Overview

- Background of Airpower in Vietnam
- Major Missions
- Video & 3 Major Strategic Campaigns

- KC-135
- B-52
- F-4
- AC-130
- F-105
- C-123
- O-1
- F-111
- F-111
Uses of Air Power

Background

- After Tonkin, US air units built up rapidly
  - 10 major US air bases in South Vietnam
  - Also flew from 6 bases in Thailand
  - B-52s flew mostly from Guam
  - Navy flew from carriers in Gulf of Tonkin
- Most air power supported ground ops
- Air superiority over South never a concern
- In-country operations centered around interdiction, close air support, airlift, recce, search and rescue and air refueling
Uses of Air Power
1964 to 1968

- Forestall suspected enemy offensives
- Defend and supply isolated outposts
- Interdict the Southern end of the Ho Chi Minh Trail
  - Series of roads and paths through the dense jungle
  - North Vietnam’s primary supply route into South Vietnam
Uses of Air Power
During Vietnamization (1969-1973)

- Train the South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF)
- Support the South Vietnamese Army
- Forestall suspected enemy attacks against withdrawing American units
Missions (Functions)

- CounterAir
- Counterland
  - Interdiction
  - Close Air Support (CAS)
- Reconnaissance (Recce)
- Refueling
- Etc....

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

What kind of aircraft starts with A-, B-, C-, F-, K-, R-, etc.

What’s important is the mission…not the airplane’s original design
Missions: Interdiction

Operations to divert, disrupt, delay, or destroy the enemy’s surface military potential before it can be used effectively against friendly forces.

- Aircraft: F-4 Phantom, F-100 Super Sabre, F-105 Thunderchief (Thud), AC-130 Gunships
- Best known interdiction aircraft was B-52 Stratofortress
  - Nuclear bomber modified to carry conventional bombs

B-52 conventional bombing missions in Vietnam were called Arc Light
Missions:
Close Air Support

*Air operations against hostile targets in close proximity to friendly forces*

- Aircraft: A-4 Skyhawk, F-4, F-100, A-37 Dragonfly, A-1 Skyraider and AC-47, 119, 130 Gunships ("Puff the Magic Dragon" or Spooky or Dragonship, Shadow or Stinger, Spectre)
  - Gunships, cargo aircraft armed with rapid-fire machine guns and canon... very effective
- Forward Air Controllers (FACs) used to locate and mark targets for faster flying jets (O-1 Bird Dog, O-2 Skymaster, OV-10 Bronco)

*But FACs didn’t mark targets for the big boys...*
Close Air Support (Cont)

- B-52 Arc Light aircraft sometimes used for CAS
- Used extensively for CAS at Khe Sanh
  - Flew 2,548 sorties and dropped bombs within 300 yards of US Marine perimeter
- B-52 credited with saving Khe Sanh and repelling the Tet and Easter Offensives
Missions: Tactical Airlift

- Aircraft: UH-1 Hueys, C-7 Caribou, C-123 Provider and C-130 Hercules
- Airlift vital because roads weren’t secure
- Missions often flown while under attack
  - Supplies often air-dropped (or LAPES) because of enemy fire and poor landing facilities
- A major factor in keeping Khe Sanh alive
Missions: **Reconnaissance** (Recce)

- **Aircraft:** RF-101 Voodoo, RF-4C, RB-57 Canberra and RB-66 Destroyers
- **Used variety of cameras and sensors**
- **Found lucrative targets and assessed battle damage**
- **Key to repelling Tet offensive and protecting Khe Sanh**
Missions: Search and Rescue (SAR)

- Aircraft: HH-3 Jolly Green Giants and HH-53 Super Jolly Greens
- Critical support mission (morale!)
  - Fliers knew every effort would be made to get them out!
- By ‘73, USAF had rescued 3,883 Americans
Missions: Air to Air Refueling (AAR)

- C-130s refueled helicopters, KC-135 Stratotankers refueled fixed-wing aircraft
- Indispensable -- extended the range of combat aircraft
- SAC tankers knew how to “pass gas” … 9 billion pounds of it
Video & 3 Campaigns up North
Campaigns: “Rolling Thunder”

- Officially began March 1965
- Objectives
  - Interdict the flow of supplies from the North
  - Force North Vietnam to stop supporting Vietcong and quit the war
  - Raise South Vietnamese morale

*Air implementation of the Graduated Response*
Rolling Thunder

- Both strategic bombing & interdiction campaign
  - Strategic: aimed at the North’s will to wage war
  - Interdiction: North had few large industries; most of their material came from China and Soviet Union
- Mostly tactical aircraft -- F-105s, F-4s and F-111s
  - B-52s used in ‘66 in Southern part of N. Vietnam

Campaign not only graduated…but highly restricted
Rolling Thunder Restrictions

- Pres Johnson tightly controlled campaign
  - White House selected targets, weapons and flying routes -- with little military input

- Restrictions included:
  - Hanoi, Haiphong, China border -- off limits
  - MIG bases and non-firing SAM sites--off limits
  - Dams, dikes, hydroelectric plants--off limits
Rolling Thunder

- Graduated increases in intensity gave North Vietnamese:
  - Time to recover from damage
  - Time to build world’s most intense antiaircraft defense system
  - Will to fight on and a sense they could survive
Rolling Thunder

- Impacts
  - Frequent halts and restrictions allowed North to reconstitute and resupply forces in South
  - Criticism grew at home and internationally
- America’s longest air campaign...a failure
- Rolling Thunder ended before ‘68 elections
Campaigns:
“Linebacker I”

- North launched Easter Offensive (Mar ‘72)
  - Apparent North not negotiating in good faith

- Objectives of Linebacker I
  - Initially CAS for retreating South Vietnamese forces
  - Changed to interdiction campaign against North Vietnam

Unlike Rolling Thunder... few restrictions
Linebacker I

- Civilian casualties… no longer dictated how missions were flown
- Mined Haiphong Harbor for 1st time to restrict in-coming supplies
- Airstrikes in and around Hanoi/ Haiphong
  - B-52 strikes on Haiphong
- “Smart” bombs used extensively
Linebacker I

- Linebacker I -- most successful bombing campaign of the war
  - More impact in 9 months than 4 years of Rolling Thunder
  - Success aided by nature of Easter Offensive ...a conventional, mechanized attack

- Peace Talks resumed in July 1972
  - Nixon curtailed attacks north of 20th parallel
Campaigns:
“Linebacker II”

- Peace Talks stalled again in Dec ‘72
- Nixon ordered Linebacker II to run concurrent with Linebacker I
- Purpose: Force North Vietnamese to negotiate and sign a peace treaty
- 18 Dec to 30 Dec 1972 -- known as the “Christmas Campaign”
Linebacker II

- Very intense and logistically complex
- Hanoi and Haiphong specifically targeted
- B-52s used for the first time over Hanoi
- By the end, North Vietnam left defenseless
  - 1,200 SAMs were fired
  - 80% of North’s electrical systems and 25% of their POL facilities were destroyed

We had their attention
Linebacker II

- North Vietnam returned to the bargaining table 30 Dec ‘72
- All bombing ceased on 15 Jan ‘73
- Peace treaty was signed on 27 Jan ‘73
- Linebacker II was a clear success

POWs came home…US involvement ended
Summary

- Uses of Airpower
  - Interdiction
  - Close Air Support
  - Airlift
  - Air Refueling
  - Reconnaissance
  - Search and Rescue
- Rolling Thunder
- Linebacker I
- Linebacker II