



APRIL 10, 1967

## B-52S ARRIVE IN THAILAND

Week of April 14

On April 10, 1967, a handful of U.S. Air Force B-52 Stratofortresses landed at U-Tapao Air Base, Thailand, after flying sorties in support of Operation JUNCTION CITY—the operation to locate and destroy the headquarters of South Vietnam’s Communist insurgency. Those B-52s that landed in Thailand became the first to be permanently based in Southeast Asia. Strategic Air Command moved them there from Guam so they could be closer to their targets, in response to General William C. Westmoreland’s increasing requests for strikes by the Stratofortresses. B-52s remained based at U-Tapao Air Base through the remainder of the war.

The Air Force introduced the massive Boeing-built B-52 Stratofortress, nicknamed the “Buff,” in 1955. Designed during the height of the Cold War, these heavy bombers were built to carry nuclear weapons and provide the United States with a critical nuclear deterrent aircraft—one that could reach the Soviet Union from American bases if necessary. It was 160 feet long, had a wingspan of 185 feet, and carried a payload of up to 70,000 pounds at over 600 miles per hour across a range of nearly 9,000 miles. No one in U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam had true operational control over the B-52s. Instead, commanders had to request them from Strategic Air Command (SAC), which retained command of the Buffs, a fact that especially frustrated General Westmoreland. SAC, however, was worried about committing too many of the bombers to the Vietnamese theater. The more B-52s that were based in Southeast Asia, the fewer that were available to maintain the United States’ continuous nuclear deterrent, placing increased pressure on a vital arm of the nation’s nuclear triad.

During the early part of the Vietnam War, U.S. military commanders requested the capability of calling on B-52s for tactical air support and strike sorties in support of the ground war. These B-52 missions became known as “Arc Light” strikes. B-52s, however, had not been designed with such missions in mind, and thus had to be re-fitted to carry non-nuclear, conventional “iron” bombs.

The first Stratofortresses to arrive in-theater were based at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam. By 1965, at the beginning of U.S. combat operations in Vietnam, approximately 30 B-52s were on hand at Andersen. But U.S. commanders, insisting on the utility of Arc Light strikes in support of ground troops, gradually made demands for more and more B-52 sorties, which strained Andersen Air Force Base’s resources. This strain led to the decision to move a handful of B-52s to Thailand in order to reduce the distance, cost, and effort required for Arc Light missions.



B-52s were lost during the war. Of those, 18 were lost as a result of combat, mostly due to North Vietnamese surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) during the 1972 LINEBACKER operations. The Stratofortress remains active and operational today and is now in its sixth decade of service in the United States Air Force.<sup>1</sup>

[See original article.](#)

<sup>1</sup>John T. Correll, *The Air Force in the Vietnam War* (Arlington, VA: Aerospace Education Foundation, 2004); Spencer C. Tucker, *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War* (2nd edition; Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 24; John Schlight, *A War Too Long: The USAF in Southeast Asia, 1961–1975* (Washington, D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1996), 31; John Schlight, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive, 1965–1968* (Washington, D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1999), 256; “B-52: Five Decades and Counting,” <http://www.boeing.com/defense/b-52-bomber/> (accessed 4/12/16).

# PHYLLIS ANN CHANGES TO COMPASS DART

## INCREASED CLOSE TACTICAL SUPPORT

The 360th Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron and the 6994th Security Squadron celebrated their 1-year birthday on 8 and 15 April, respectively. By the end of April 1967, forty-three EC-47 aircraft had been received in country: 13 at Ton San Nhut, and 15 each at Nha Trang & Pleiku. The project name PHYLLIS ANN was changed to COMPASS DART (CSAF MSG AFRDRMT 76508 Mar 67) without change to the mission: **providing close tactical support for major operations by locating and identifying enemy forces.** In the first 6-months of 1967, COMPASS DART units recorded 5,251 ARDF missions flown, with about 55% (2924) for close tactical support and 45% (2327) tasked to gain and maintain continuity on priority targets. COMPASS DART missions acquired 24,327 transmitter locations, over 30% were identified to specific VC/NVA units, of which about 45% were designated MACV priority targets.

### 6994<sup>th</sup> Scty Sq Anniversary

TSGT OLESON

1830-1930 Cocktail Hour  
1930-2030 Dinner  
2030-2050 Guest Speakers  
2050-2200 Music on the patio  
2200 Fini

17 APRIL 1967

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Invite to 1st Anniversary Party at TSN



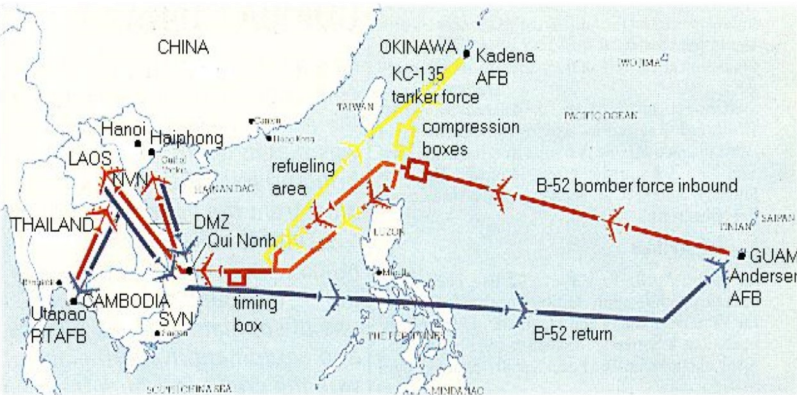
TAN SON NHUT AIR BASE  
VIET NAM

Operations after-action-reports increasingly affirmed that ARDF enemy fix location results were being studied and integrated into successful operations plans for the combatant forces. Operation Summerall was one of these in April 1967. The 101st Airborne Division, who executed the search and destroy operation, commented: *“ARDF support was a great factor in planning and executing the operation. ARDF once again proved the most valuable source of useable intelligence.”* Another specific example of COMPASS DART close tactical support was reported in late April for Operation Francis Marion that immediately followed Operation Sam Houston. *“On 30 April, a target associated with the 630th Military Front was located. The 4th Infantry Division made contact with the enemy at the location. They confirmed 12 NVA troops killed in action. Pursuing the enemy forces, which was established to be company size, they inflicted more than 90 casualties on the fleeing force, destroyed 200 bunkers and tunnels, and captured a large number of weapons.”* [Read a full report.](#)

Operation Junction City continued into April 1967 and was one of the largest operations of the war. Specific ARDF contributions used to plan the operation were hard to come by; however there was again much comment from the field commanders about the usefulness of ARDF. *“The most valuable COMINT product was airborne radio direction finding provided by the 146th Aviation Company and the 6994th Security Squadron. During Phase II of the operation, a total of 1,558 ARDF fixes were received of which 903 were of immediate value to the supported command.”* Another report included, *“The headquarters of the Military Intelligence Bureau COSVN was struck by B-52s on 5 March 1967. Target was located by ARDF.”* (Reference: 6994th Scty Sqdn, History 1 Jan—30 Jun 1967.) (TEWS histories not available for the same period.)

This tactical support for the ground combatants by B-52 ARC LIGHT missions was an unanticipated, and somewhat unwelcomed assignment for the Strategic Air Command. In his Air Force Magazine article, *Arc Light*, January 2009, John T. Correll captures the SAC and General Westmoreland mindsets at the time:

*The long-running B-52 combat operation, code-named Arc Light, encompassed more than 126,000 sorties over Southeast Asia between 1965 and 1973. Andersen (Guam) was Arc Light headquarters and the principal base, but B-52s also flew from two other bases - U-Tapao in Thailand and Kadena on Okinawa. Nothing like Arc Light had been anticipated. The B-52, operational since 1955, was SAC's principal long-range, deep penetration nuclear bomber. It could deliver conventional ordnance, but SAC was not enthusiastic about that. In 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that 30 B-52s be kept available for worldwide contingencies.*



**Arc Light from Guam and U-Tapao**

*In February 1965, as the Vietnam War heated up, 30 B-52s deployed from the United States to Guam and KC-135 tankers were sent to Kadena to support them. The JCS recommended striking North Vietnam with B-52s, but that was ruled out as too provocative by the State Department and the White House. SAC wanted to bring them back home, but was not permitted to do so. They did not remain idle for long.*

*Gen. William C. Westmoreland, commander of Military Assistance Command Vietnam, persuaded the JCS to use these B-52s against Viet Cong base camps in South Vietnam. Earlier strikes by tactical aircraft had been unsuccessful, and the B-52s could put down an even pattern of bombs over a large area.*

*The Arc Light crews were drawn from the Strategic Air Command nuclear alert force and, wherever they were, they remained under control of SAC. Command and control remained with SAC, but MACV could nominate targets. Westmoreland's method was to use B-52s as heavy artillery. He also liked their psychological effect on the enemy. The first indication the Viet Cong had that the B-52s were there was when the jungle erupted around them.*

*Gen. William W. Momyer, commander of 7th Air Force, was "appalled by the enormous tonnage of bombs the B-52s were dropping on the South Vietnamese jungle with little evidence of much physical effect on the enemy, however psychologically upsetting to enemy troops in the vicinity," said Air Force historian Wayne Thompson. However, Gen. Lucius D. Clay Jr., commander of Pacific Air Forces later in the war, acknowledged that the B-52s "gave ground forces the kind of fire support no other army has ever had."* [Read the full report.](#)

### Bombed by a B-52

Then Captain Chuck Miller, who was on the crew that delivered aircraft # 42-100665 to Nha Trang on March 12, 1967, got a first hand look at the “Bufs” and “500-pounders” on Guam during their stop-over on that ferry flight. He submitted the following anecdote about another “encounter” with the mighty B-52s:

*On one of my 115 EC-47 missions we were tasked to do ARDF (airborne radio direction finding) on enemy targets in eastern Laos, near the Vietnam DMZ. This area was outside of our normal ground radar (GCI) flight following, so we were required to check in every 30 minutes with a status report with the airborne command and control center (ABCCC), a C-130 aircraft, call sign “Hillsboro”. Upon arrival into the target area we checked in with Hillsboro and asked if there was any artillery or ordinance advisories for our area of operations. They replied in the negative. As we were flying our random orbit at 9000’ over Laos looking for enemy transmitters to pinpoint, we were suddenly rocked by a wave of concussions. Looking out of the left side of the aircraft, I saw at about half a mile away a line of ground concussions that created two rows of craters like railroad tracks that continued to erupt at a rate of about two explosions per second for nearly sixty seconds of devastation. As we banked quickly away to the right we contacted Hillsboro, who rather sheepishly confirmed that a B-52 on an Arc Light sortie over Vietnam had missed his primary target opportunity and was jettisoning his load of 108 five-hundred pound bombs on a “secondary target of opportunity” in Laos. With his altitude being in excess of 40,000’ the B-52 was as invisible to us as we were to him, but the continuous concussion of his bombs for nearly sixty long seconds gave us a ride of a lifetime hoping and praying that there were not more B-52s dropping bombs through our altitude from over our head! Once again, our biggest recurring threat seemed to be from friendly ordinance, if not mid-air collisions with friendly aircraft.*