

Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base Historical Brief



Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base is a base of the Royal Thai Air Force. It is the home of the 1st RTAF Wing, consisting of 3 (101, 102, 103) squadrons. The base is located about 5 miles (8 km) south of Nakhon Ratchasima (also known as Khorat or Korat), the third largest city in Thailand, and 157 miles (250 km) northeast of Bangkok. Korat has a single 9,800 + foot runway with a single, full-length parallel taxiway. Korat was a front-line facility of the United States Air Force (USAF) during the Vietnam War from 1962 through 1975. The USAF forces at Korat were under the command of the United States Pacific Air Forces (PACAF). It was the primary Headquarters (HQ) for the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing. Various parking areas and aprons alternately held both permanent and TDY/transient aircraft of all types.

Vietnam War

The mission of the base was to conduct operations in support of U.S. commitments in Southeast Asia (North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos). During the Vietnam War, pilots from Korat RTAFB primarily flew interdiction, direct air support, armed reconnaissance and fighter escort missions. The USAF mission at Korat began in April 1962, when one officer and 14 airmen were temporarily assigned to the base as the joint U.S. Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG). U. S. Army personnel were already stationed at Camp Friendship, a post adjacent south of the air base.

In July, 1964, approximately 500 persons were assigned to Korat to start the beginning of a tactical fighter operation. The constructions of essential base facilities were initiated and completed by October 1964. In response to the Gulf Of Tonkin Incident on 31 July 1964, the 6441st Tactical Fighter Wing at Yokota AB, Japan deployed 18 F-105D "Thunderchiefs" of the 36th Tactical Fighter Squadron to Korat on 11 August and commenced operations the following day.

The 36th TFS remained at Korat until 29 October then returned to Japan. It was replaced by the 469th Tactical Fighter Squadron, also flying F-105D's, which was deployed from the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing, then at McConnell AFB, KS.

From 30 October through 31 December 1964, F-105's from the 80th Tactical Fighter Squadron was deployed from the 41st Air Division, Yokota AB, Japan.

In December 1964, the 44th Tactical Fighter Squadron deployed to Korat from Kadena AB, Okinawa. The 44th would rotate pilots and personnel to Korat on a TDY (Temporary Duty) basis until 1966.

6234th (Provisional) Tactical Fighter Wing

In April 1965, the 6234th Air Base Squadron was activated at Korat as a permanent unit to support the TDY fighter units (44th and 469th TFS) and their operations. This squadron was in existence until the end of April when it was deactivated and the 6234th Combat Support Group, the 6234th Support Squadron, and the 6234th Material Squadron were designated and organized as a result of a 3 May 65 Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) special order.

The 6234th Tactical Fighter Wing (Provisional) was activated in April 1965 with Colonel William D. Ritchie, Jr. as Commander. The Wing had the responsibility for all Air Force units in Thailand until permanent wings were established at other bases.

From February through December 1965, F-105D's of the 67th Tactical Fighter Squadron was deployed to Korat from the 8th TFW, Kadena AB, Japan. From February through August 1965, F-105D's of the 12th Tactical Fighter Squadron was deployed to Korat from the 8th TFW, Itazuke AB, Japan.

On 12 June 1965, the 357th Tactical Fighter Squadron arrived from McConnell AFB, KS with additional F-105D's. On 8 November 1965 it was reassigned to Takhli RTAFB, Thailand, Thailand. The 469th TFS remained on TDY at Korat until 15 November 1965 when it was permanently assigned to the 6234th. On 25 July 1965, the 68th Tactical Fighter Squadron was deployed to Korat from the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, George AFB, CA. The 68th TFW flew the F-4C "Phantom". It returned back to George AFB on 6 December.

On 20 November 1965, the 421st Tactical Fighter Squadron was permanently assigned to Korat from the 835th Air Division. It was equipped with the F-105D.

In 1965, the 6234th TFW and its subordinate units operating F-105s and F-4Cs flew 10,797 sorties totaling 26,165 hours. The wing's efforts merited the Presidential Unit Citation in March 1968.

388th Tactical Fighter Wing

On 8 April 1966 the 6234th (P) TFW was redesignated the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing. The 388th had deployed the 469th TFS to Korat in 1964 and was deactivated. Upon activation the 388th absorbed the personnel and resources of the 6234th.

The 388th TFW initially consisted of two F-105 Thunderchief squadrons, the 421st and 469th. On 15 May the 44th TFS was permanently attached to the 388th. The 421st & 469th Tactical Fighter Squadrons flew single-seat F-105D's, while the 44th flew the two-seat F-105F. Also on 15 May, an F-4C squadron, the 34th Tactical Fighter Squadron and an F-105F squadron, the 13th Tactical Fighter Squadron were deployed and permanently attached to the 388th from the 347th TFW, Yokota AB, Japan and Kadena AB, Okinawa.

By 1967, Korat RTAFB was home to as many as 34 operating units and about 6,500 USAF airmen. Korat also housed components of the Royal Thai Air Force, and a compliment of Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) Bristol Freighters. The annual cost for base operations and maintenance was about \$12,000,000. The monthly average expenditure for munitions was on the order of \$4,360,000. The 388th TFW lost 48 aircraft in combat during 1967. Seven others were lost due to non-combat reasons. 43 Pilots and Electronic Warfare Officers (EWO) were listed as killed (KIA) or missing in action (MIA). 15 were rescued.

On 23 April 1967, the 421st TFS was redesignated the 44th Tactical Fighter Squadron. In October 1967 the 44th TFS absorbed the mission and makeup of 13th TFS. The 13th was transferred to Udorn RTAFB to become an F-4D Phantom unit. With these reorganizations, the 44th TFS now possessed both D and F model Thunderchiefs. The squadron's primary mission became one of flying escort to the wing's regular strike force to suppress Anti Aircraft Artillery (AAA) and surface-to-air missile (SAM)s.

On 20 October 1967, due to the high attrition rate it was suffering, the 13th TFS was transferred to Udorn RTAFB as an F-4D Phantom II squadron. Its aircraft and personnel were absorbed by the 44th TFS.

On 17 November 1968, an F-4E Phantom Squadron from Eglin AFB, FL, replaced the single-seat F-105E Thunderchiefs of the 469th TFS. The new Phantom squadron, the first E-models in Thailand, retained the designation 469th TFS. These F-4E's flew with the F-105F's with the older F-105's being a 'target' for the SAM operators; while the F-4's would take out the SAM radar once it locked onto the F-105.

On 10 October 1969, the F-105s of the 44th TFS were transferred to Takhli RTAFB. The 44th flew out of Takhli until 10 December 1970 when it was deactivated. However, in November 1970, F-105s returned to Korat when the 6010th Wild Weasel Squadron, flying specially equipped F-105G model Thunderchiefs, was formed. It was redesignated the 17th Wild Weasel Squadron on 1 December 1971.

In November 1970, the 42nd Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron (TEWS), which flew EB-66s, transferred to Korat from Takhli. The EB-66C/E flew radar and communications jamming missions to disrupt enemy defenses and early warning capabilities.

In February 1972, the 67th TFW returned to Korat from Kadena AB, this time being equipped with the EF-4C aircraft. The EF-4C was the initial Wild Weasel version of the Phantom. It was a modified version of the F-4C, designed in parallel with the F-105G Wild Weasel program. The EF-4Cs suffered from certain deficiencies which limited their combat effectiveness. For example, they were unable to carry the Standard ARM. Consequently, the EF-4C was seen only as an interim Wild Weasel aircraft, pending the introduction of a more suitable type.

In April 1972, the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron (ACCS) arrived at Korat from Udorn RTAFB and began flying missions in its EC-130E "Hercules" aircraft, which were equipped with command and control capsules. The 7th ACCS played an extremely important role in the conduct of air operations. During the action in Southeast Asia, the squadron had a minimum of two aircraft airborne 24 hours a day directing and coordinating the effective employment of tactical air resources throughout SEA.

On 12 June 1972, the 35th TFS flying F-4D's was deployed from the 3rd TFW, Kusan AB, South Korea. They remained until 10 Oct 1972 when they returned to Korea.

On 29 September 1972, the 354th Tactical Fighter Wing, based at Myrtle Beach AFB SC, was ordered to deploy 72 A-7D Corsair II of the 355th Tactical Fighter Squadron and the 356th Tactical Fighter Squadron to Korat for a 179-day Temporary Duty (TDY).

By mid-October, 1,574 airmen from Myrtle Beach had arrived. The A-7D assumed the SAR (Search and rescue) role. In addition, the 354th deployed some personnel to Bien Hoa AB, South Vietnam. The 354th generated about 50 sorties each day.

The 354th TFW at Korat was actually a composite wing. Along with the Myrtle Beach personnel, elements of the 23rd Tactical Fighter Wing from England AFB LA and the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing from Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ were deployed to support the A-7D aircraft. These airmen rotated on 179-day TDY assignments to Korat from these CONUS bases until early 1974.

In February 1973, after the end combat operations in Vietnam, the 67th TFS with its EF-4C "Wild Weasels" were withdrawn and returned to Kadena.

USAF Withdrawal

After the end of combat operations in August 1973, the 388th TFW entered into intensive training program to maintain combat readiness and continued to fly electronic surveillance and intelligence missions. Also, it was announced by the United States and Thailand that of the 43,000 Americans and 500 aircraft stationed in Thailand, about 3,500 men and 100 aircraft would be withdrawn.

The F-4 and A-7 aircraft practiced bombing and intercept missions in western Thailand. A large exercise was held on the first Monday of every month, involving all USAF units in Thailand. "Commando Scrimmage" covered skills such as dog fighting, aerial refueling, airborne command posts and forward air controllers. These exercises were taken very seriously. The A-7D aircraft were pitted against the F-4 aircraft in dissimilar air combat exercises.

The drawdown at Korat RTAFB began in mid-1974.

On 15 March 1974, the EB-66's of the 42nd Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron were reassigned to Clark AB, Philippines.

The 354th TFW ended its rotating deployments to Korat on 23 May 1974 and returned its A-7D squadrons (353rd and 355th TFS) and aircraft to Myrtle Beach SC.

The EC-130s and personnel of 7th ACCS moved to Clark AB, Philippines on 22 May 1974.

Two F-111A squadrons, the 428th Tactical Fighter Squadron and 429th Tactical Fighter Squadron of the 347th Tactical Fighter Wing were transferred to Korat from Takhli RTAFB on 12 July 1974.

On 19 July 1974, the 16th Special Operations Squadron was assigned to Korat from Udorn RTAFB. This was an AC-130 "Spectre" gunship squadron which was TDY in Thailand from the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing at Kusan AB, South Korea.

On 15 November 1974, the F-105F/G's of the 17th WWWS were withdrawn and transferred to George AFB, CA.

In March and April 1975, aircraft of the 388th TFW provided air cover and escort during the evacuation of Americans from Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and of Americans and selected Vietnamese from Saigon, South Vietnam.

On 15 May 1975, aircraft assigned to Korat (3rd TFS A-7D, 34th TFS F-4E, 428th TFS F-111A and 16th SOS AC-130) provided air cover in what is considered the last battle of the Vietnam war, the recovery of the SS Mayagüez after it was hijacked by Cambodian communists.

The United States ended its involvement in Southeast Asia by treaty and disengagement rather than by military victory. After the fall of Saigon, relations between Washington and Bangkok turned sour. In May 1975, the Royal Thai Government asked the United States to remove all of its combat forces (27,000 troops, 300 aircraft) by 1976.

On 30 June 1975, the 347th TFW F-111A's and their two squadrons (428th and 429th TFS) were deactivated. The F-111's returned to the US. The 347th became an F-4 Wing at Moody AFB, GA. At the end of 1975, there were only three combat squadrons at Korat, consisting of 24 F-4D's of the 34th TFS, 24 A-7D's of the 3rd TFS, and 6 AC-130 "Spectre" aircraft of the 16th Special Operations Squadron. The 16th SOS returned to the states, transferring to Eglin AF Aux Airfield #9 (Hurlburt Field), FL, on 12 Dec 1975.

The 3rd TFS was transferred to Clark AB, Philippines on 15th December. At Clark, the 3rd TFS was dissolved and some of the A-7's returned to Nellis AFB, Nevada, assigned to the 4450th Tactical Group. At Nellis, the A-7's were flown by the 4451st Tactical Squadron (P-Unit). They were flown as the cover story for the development of the F-117A, being used for pilot training before any F-117A's had been delivered, later the A-7D's were used to chase F-117A tests and other weapon tests at the Nellis Range.

The 34th TFS was deactivated and its F-4E aircraft were assigned to ANG and reserve squadrons. On 23 December 1975, the 388th TFW made a name-only transfer to Hill AFB, Utah. The USAF retained a small flight of security police at Korat to insure base security and to deter theft of equipment until the final return of the base to the Thai government.

The USAF officially turned Korat over to the Royal Thai Government on 26 February 1976.

KORAT ROYAL THAI AIR FORCE BASE

The following are from a document called: Fact Sheets and Histories of the United States Air Force at Royal Thai Air Force Bases, dated 12 August 1976, and published by the 13th Air Force Office of History. (TLC Brotherhood Website)

The primary mission of USAF units at Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base is to conduct operations in support of U.S. commitments in Southeast Asia. The base is home of the 388th Tactical Fighter which is equipped with F-4E, F-105, RB-66 and C-130 aircraft.

Other primary aircraft are the EC-121s of the College Eye Task Force, 552nd Airborne Early Warning and Control Wing, and HC-130s and HH-43s of Detachment 4, 3rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group. The Royal Thai Air Force 3rd Wing is the host unit at Korat, flying the UH-1H and H-34 helicopters.

MAJOR UNITS:

Det .4, 3rd ARRS
Det 1, 601st. Photo Flight
388th Tactical Fighter Wing
388th Combat Support Group
1998th Communications Squadron
American Forces Thailand Network
483rd Electronics Installation Sq.HQ.
552nd Airborne Early Warning and Control Wing

AIRCRAFT ASSIGNED: F-4E, F-105, EB-66, C-130, HC-130, HH-43, EC-121.

PERSONNEL STRENGTH: 4,500 U.S. military

HOSPITAL FACILITIES:- 15 bed dispensary

RUNWAY LENGTH: 9,840 feet

MILES FROM BANGKOK: 165 miles northeast of Bangkok

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE AT KORAT ROYAL THAI AIR FORCE BASE

Currently hosting 30 units and agencies of six major USAF commands Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base has come a long way since April 1962. At that time, one officer and 14 airmen were temporarily assigned to the base as the joint U.S. Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG). In July, 1964, approximately 500 persons were assigned to Korat to start the beginning of a tactical fighter operation. The operational mission commenced 15 August 1964; and by October of the same year, essential USAF base facilities were completed. By late February 1965, the tactical fighter strength increased to two squadrons flying the Republic F-105 "Thunderchiefs", both assigned to the Pacific Air Forces. A Tactical Air Command. McDonnell F-4C "Phantom" rotational unit replaced one of the squadrons a month later.

USAF tactical operations in Thailand later came under the jurisdiction of the 6234th Tactical Fighter Wing activated at Korat. For a year, the wing and its subordinate units operating F-105s and F-4Cs flew 10,797 sorties totaling 26,165 hours. The wing's efforts merited the Presidential Unit Citation in March 1968.

In April 1966, the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing was reactivated. Historically known for its B-17 Flying Fortress operation in Europe during World War II, the wing absorbed personnel and resources of the 6234th. The 388th TFW utilized three F-105 Thunderchief squadrons. These initially were the 13th TFS, 421st TFS and the 469th TFS. Prior to the bombing halt 1 November 1968, tactical fighter squadrons assigned to the 388th contributed to the air strikes over North Vietnam.

For three years, Thunderchiefs from Korat and its sister wing at Takhli Royal Thai Air Force base carried more than 75 per cent of all ordnance delivered north of the demilitarized zone. Combat operations expanded at Korat in late 1967 with the arrival of EC-121 "Constellations" of the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing and Det 1, 552nd Airborne Early Warning and Control Wing. The* 553rd "Bat Cats" were a new organization, formed trained and deployed from Otis AFB, Mass., while Det 1, from McClellan AFB, Calif., had been in Southeast Asia since April 1965. The EC-121s provided airborne radar coverage and surveillance in support of aircraft flying combat operations. The 553rd was inactivated in December 1979 while its subordinate unit, the 553rd Reconnaissance Squadron continued operating out of Korat for another year.

On 17 November 1968, an F-4E Phantom Squadron from Eglin AFB, Fla., replaced the F-105 Thunderchiefs of the 469th TFS. The new Phantom squadron, the first E-models in Thailand, retained the designation 469th TFS. All F-105s at Korat transferred to Takhli RTAFB in October 1969.

In November 1970, F-105s returned to Korat when the 6010th Wild Weasel Squadron, flying specially equipped Thunderchiefs, was formed. It was redesignated the 17th Wild Weasel Squadron on 1 December 1971 and today is the only permanent F-105 unit in Southeast Asia. Also in November 1970, the 42nd Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron, which flies EB-66s, transferred to Korat from Takhli.

In April 1972, the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron arrived from Udorn RTAFB and began flying missions in its C-130 aircraft, which are equipped with command and control capsules.

Today, the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing is composed of two F-4E squadrons, one F-105 squadron, an EB-66 unit and the C-130 squadron.