

# Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base Historical Brief



During the Vietnam War the facility was known as **Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base**, serving as a front-line base of the United States Air Force and was the Asian Headquarters for Air America.

## Vietnam War

### USAF Use

The first USAF unit assigned at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force was the **333d Air Base Squadron** in October 1964. Prior to the formation on of the squadron, support personnel were provided by temporary duty personnel from the **35th Tactical Group** at Don Muang Royal Thai Air Force Base.

On 18 July 1965, the 333rd Air Base Squadron was redesignated the **6232nd Combat Support Group** (CSG). This unit reported directly to the Commander, 13th Air Force and to the 6234th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW) at Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base, at that time the only tactical wing in Thailand. The formation of the group at Udorn RTAFB was brought about because of expanding Air Force programs, an increase in assigned personnel and increased base support requirements. The majority of personnel at Udorn RTAFB, prior, to the formation of the group, were temporary duty assignments. Shortly before the group was activated a gradual input of permanent party personnel was made to replace those on temporary duty.

On 15 November 1965 the 6232nd CSG was given the responsibility of reporting directly to the Deputy Commander 2nd Air Division/13th Air Force rather than directly to the Commander, 13th Air Force. The 6232nd CSG was redesignated the **630th Combat Support Group** on 8 April 1966, with a reporting responsibility to the Deputy Commander, 7th Air Force/13th Air Force (7/13AF), headquartered at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base.

On 18 September 1966, the **432nd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing** (TRW) was organized and the 630th CSG was placed under the new wing and redesignated the 432nd CSG. The 432nd wing originally had two tactical reconnaissance squadrons (TRS), the 11th and 20th, flying the RF-4C and RF-101 respectively.

The mission of the wing was to provide intelligence information about hostile forces through tactical reconnaissance and use its fighter elements to destroy the targets earmarked by the intelligence data provided. The wing had numerous missions in the support area also. As the command base for 7/13AF in Thailand, Udorn RTAFB played a lead role in accomplishing the objectives of the United States in fulfilling its policy in Southeast Asia.

On 30 October 1967, the RF-101 squadron was deactivated and replaced by another RF-4C squadron, the 14th TRS. These two squadrons accounted for more than 80 percent of all reconnaissance activity over North Vietnam. In addition to the two RF-4 squadrons, the wing also had a tactical fighter squadron

(TFS), the 13th. This squadron employed the F-4D fighter-bomber aircraft on strike missions over North Vietnam. The 13th TFS was credited with two MIGs kills.

On 31 October 1968, the **7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron**, which had been assigned as a temporary duty unit, became part of the 432nd wing. With the addition of this C-130 squadron, the 432nd TRW became the most diversified unit of its size in the Air Force.

At the peak of operations in 1969, the units assigned to Udorn RTAFB were the following:

**Host Unit** - 432nd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing - Headquarters 7/13th Air Force

- 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron (ACCS) - 4 C-47Ds, 2 AC-47Ds, 1 AC-119G, 6 C-130Es
- 11th, 14th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadrons - 40 RF-4Cs,
- 13th, 555th Tactical Fighter Squadrons - 35 F-4Ds
- Det 4, 405th Fighter Wing - 6 F-102s, 4 CH-3Bs

On 10 November 1970, the 11th TRS was deployed to Shaw AFB, South Carolina ending a distinguished tour of service with the 432nd TRW. The departure of the 11th left the wing with two fighter squadrons, one reconnaissance squadron and the airborne command and control squadron. On 1 April 1972 the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron was deployed to Korat RTAFB.

## Air America



Udorn RTAFB was Asian Headquarters for Air America. Air America provided essential resources for the Secret War in Laos and elsewhere. Its predecessor, Civil Air Transport (CAT), started operations from Udorn on 11 September 1955 with the arrival of Three C-46's delivering food and emergency aid into Indochina. By the end of September, CAT had flown more than 200 missions to 25 reception areas, delivering 1,000 tons of emergency food. Conducted smoothly and efficiently, this airdrop relief operation marked the beginning of CAT's-and, later, Air America's-support of US assistance programs in Laos.



## **Air America Ramp at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base**

Air America's roles supportive of covert and overt situations related to hostilities in Asia and elsewhere worldwide provided buffers and solutions to problems the United States faced in various locations. Operations were focused in Laos as part of the Secret War the United States carried out against the Phatet Lao communist rebels operating in the country. Udorn RTAFB also served as the location of "Headquarters 333", the Thai organization in charge of their forces in Laos.

During the war in Laos, Air America was called upon to perform paramilitary tasks at great risks to the aircrews involved. Although lacking the discipline found in a military organization, the personnel for the air proprietary nonetheless continued to place their lives at hazard for years. Some Air America pilots flew in Laos for more than a decade, braving enemy fire and surmounting challenging operational conditions with rare skill and determination.

On 27 January 1973, the Paris agreement on Vietnam was concluded, providing for the withdrawal of American troops. The following month, a cease-fire agreement was signed in Vientiane, leading to the formation of a coalition government for Laos. On 3 June 1974, the last Air America aircraft crossed the border from Laos into Thailand. The end went well, Air America's operations office in Vientiane informed Washington and the departure of Air America from Laos was without incident. Operations in Vietnam continued until the fall of Saigon in April 1975.

## **Palace Lightning - USAF Withdrawal**

Udorn had come a long way since the first American personnel arrived in the early 1960's. With the fall of both Cambodia and South Vietnam in the spring of 1975, the political climate between Washington and Bangkok had become very sour. Royal Thai Government wanted the USAF out of Thailand by the end of the year. **Palace Lightning** was the plan which the USAF would withdraw it's aircraft and personnel from Thailand.

On 14 November 1975 it was announced the Udorn RTAFB was being closed. The last USAF personnel departed in January 1976 and the facility turned over to the Thai government.

## **Major USAF Units at Udorn**

- Det 1, 39th ARRS
- Det 5, 38th ARRS
- Deputy Chief, JUSMAG
- 10th Weather Squadron
- 1974th Communications Group
- 621st Tactical Control Squadron
- Det 1, 56th Special Operations Wing
- 432nd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing
- 50th Tactical Control Maintenance Squadron

## **UDORN 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)

Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base is the home of the 432nd Tactical Fighter/Reconnaissance Wing, and is the only wing of its kind in Southeast Asia. The 432nd is made up of one RF-4C tactical reconnaissance squadron (14th TRS) and two F-4D tactical fighter squadrons (13th and 555th TFS). The 432nd squadrons work well together in an integrated search and destroy mission. The reconnaissance squadron finds and photographs lucrative targets for the fighter squadrons to neutralize. Udorn is also the headquarters of the Deputy Commander, Seventh Air Force/Thirteenth Air Force. Operational control of Thailand-based USAF units is maintained by- Seventh Air Force, while logistics and administration are handled by Thirteenth Air Force. The Royal Thai Air Force's 223d Tactical Fighter Squadron is the host unit at Udorn. The squadron's T-28 "Trojan" fighters engage in interdiction missions.

## **THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE AT UDORN ROYAL THAI AIR FORCE BASE**

The first unit assigned at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force was the 333d Air Base Squadron. The formation of this unit took place in October 1964. The squadron was subordinate to the 35th Tactical Group, Don Muang Air Port. Prior to the formation on of the squadron, support personnel were provided by temporary duty personnel from the 35th Tactical Group. On 18 July 1965, the 333rd Air Base Squadron was redesignated the 6232nd Combat Support Group (CSG). This unit reported directly to the Commander, 13th Air Force and to the 6234th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW) at Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base, at that time the only tactical wing in Thailand. The formation of the group at Udorn RTAFB was brought about because of expanding Air Force programs: an increase in assigned personnel and increased base support requirements. The majority of personnel at Udorn RTAFB, prior, to the formation of the group, were temporary duty assignments. Shortly before the group was activated a gradual input of permanent party personnel was made to replace those on temporary duty.

In 1965 a program of building a cantonment area for U.S. Air Force personnel was underway. The area was to be completed as soon as possible and to be comprised of office buildings, a supply area and billets. Personnel, prior to moving into this area, were billeted in the Thai area of the base.

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On 18 September 1966, the 432nd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing (TRW) was organized and the 630th CSG was placed under the new wing and redesignated the 432nd CSG. The 432nd wing originally had two tactical reconnaissance squadrons (TRS), the 11th and 20th, flying the RF-4C and RF-101 respectively. On 30 October 1967, the RF-101 squadron was deactivated and replaced by another RF-4C squadron, the 14th TRS. These two squadrons accounted for more than 80 percent of all reconnaissance activity over North Vietnam. In addition to the two RF-4 squadrons, the wing also had a tactical fighter squadron (TFS), the 13th. This squadron employed the F-4D fighter-bomber aircraft on strike missions over North Vietnam. The 13th TFS was credited with two MIGs kills.

On 25 April 1968, Lieutenant General Benjamin O. Davis Jr., Commander of 13th Air Force, presented the 432nd TRW the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with "V" device for meritorious achievements during the period 18 September 1966 to 18 September 1967. On 28 May 1968, the 555th TFS arrived at Udorn from Ubon RTAFB, adding to the 432nd TRW's distinction of being an Air Force wing with a dual reconnaissance- fighter mission. The 555th, better known as the Triple Nickel was credited with 27 MIG kills, the last seven victories scored while at Udorn.

On 31 October 1968, the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron, which had been assigned to the base as a temporary duty unit, became part of the 432nd wing. With the addition of this C-130 squadron, the 432nd TRW became the most diversified unit of its size in the Air Force. At the end of 1968, Udorn

housed 14 different combat flying units, representing every phase of tactical air power. On 25 February 1970, Major General Robert L. Petit, Deputy Commander, 7/13 Air Force, presented the 432nd TRW the Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary gallantry in connection with military operations from 19 September 1967 to 1 November 1968.

On 10 November 1970, the 11th TRS was deployed to Shaw AFB, S.C. ending a distinguished tour of service with the 432nd TRW. The departure of the 11th left the wing with two fighter squadrons, one reconnaissance squadron and the airborne command and control squadron. On 1 April 1972 the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron was deployed to Korat RTAFB. The mission of the wing is to provide intelligence information about hostile forces through tactical reconnaissance and use its fighter elements to destroy the targets earmarked by the intelligence data provided. The wing has numerous missions in the support area also. As the command base for 7/13AF in Thailand, Udorn RTAFB plays a lead role in accomplishing the objectives of the United States in fulfilling its policy in Southeast Asia.