

# Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base Historical Brief



**Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base** is a Royal Thai Air Force facility, which is also being used as a civil airport. It is located near the city of Ubon Ratchathani, in the Ubon Ratchathani Province, about 250 miles northeast of Bangkok. During the Vietnam War it was a front-line base of the United States Air Force.

The host wing at Ubon was the **8th Tactical Fighter Wing**, arriving in November 1966. Comprising the flying units were four F-4D "Phantom" tactical fighter squadrons. Also assigned to the wing was the **16th Special Operations Squadron**, which flew AC-130 "Spectre" gunships. The **13th Bomb Squadron** was assigned from September 1970 until April 1972, flying the B-57G. The 13th flew mostly night interdiction missions against North Vietnamese truck traffic on the Ho Chi Minh trail. At the peak of operations in 1969, the units assigned to Ubon RTAFB were the following:

## Host Unit - 8th Tactical Fighter Wing

- 16th Special Operations Squadron - 4 AC-130As, 1 AC-123K, 7 C-130As
- 25th, 433rd, 435th Tactical Fighter Squadron - 70 RF-4Ds
- Det 3, 38th Air Rescue And Recovery Squadron (ARRS) - 2 HH-43s, 12 O-2s
- Tenant units at Ubon RTAFB included the **23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron** flying the OV-10. The 23rd's "Rustic FAC's" flew missions in support of ground forces, interdiction missions and armed convoy support. Another tenant, the **3rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group** performed a vital support role in crash rescue, aircrew recovery and evacuation missions.
- The 222nd Tactical Fighter Squadron, Royal Thai Air Force, performed their mission with T-28, C-47 and HH-34 helicopters.

## USAF Withdrawal

With the Paris Peace Accord of 1973 ending the war in Vietnam, the need for large numbers of USAF aircraft in Thailand was reduced. On 31 July 1974 the base was closed for good and the facility turned over to the Thai government.

## Major Units

- Det 3, 3rd ARRГ
- 8th Tactical Fighter Wing
- 25th Tactical Fighter Squadron
- Det 5, 6th Aerial Port Squadron
- Det 17, 10th Weather Squadron
- 1982 Communications Squadron
- 4th Tactical Fighter Wing (TDY)
- 433rd Tactical Fighter Squadron
- 435th Tactical Fighter Squadron
- 497th Tactical Fighter Squadron
- 16th Special Operations Squadron

- Det 3, 621st Tactical Control Squadron
- OL-1, 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron

Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base is the home of the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing - "Wolfpack". Comprising the flying units of the Wolfpack are four F-4D Phantom tactical fighter squadrons. Also assigned to the wing is the 16th Special Operations Squadron, which flies the AC-130 gun ships. The 13th Bomb Squadron (B-57G's) was assigned from September 1970 until April 1972. The 13th flew mostly night interdiction missions against NV truck traffic on the Ho Chi Minh trail. Tenant units at Ubon RTAFB include the 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron flying the OV-10. The 23rd's "Rustic FAC's" fly missions in support of ground forces, interdiction missions and armed convoy support. Another tenant, the 3rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group performs a vital support role in crash rescue, aircrew recovery and evacuation missions. The 222nd Tactical Fighter Squadron, Royal Thai Air Force, perform their mission with T-28, C-47 and HH-34 aircraft.

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 8th Tactical Fighter Wing, originally activated in 1931 as the 8th Pursuit Group, has a long history of contributions to the military forces of the United States. It has participated in campaigns in every war since its activation and has been awarded numerous decorations for duty in New Guinea, the Philippine Islands, Japan, Korea, and more recently, Southeast Asia. Returning from Japan in July 1964, the 8th TFW began conversion to the McDonnell F-4C Phantom II at George AFB, Calif. In a short 18 months, it was reorganized, equipped with a full complement of aircraft, passed its first Operational Readiness Inspection, and sent to Southeast Asia in two operational units, the 68th and 431st Tactical Fighter Squadrons.

These squadrons, along with two others, the 45th and 47th TFS, flew combat missions from Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB) in a rotational duty status. The first two MIG-17s to be destroyed in Southeast Asia were shot down by pilots flying F-4Cs from Ubon. In mid-November 1966, the 8th TFW was alerted for movement to Southeast Asia. Upon arrival at Ubon RTAFB the wing was composed of the 433rd and 497th TFS, with the 8th Field Maintenance Squadron, 8th Organizational Maintenance Squadron, 8th Armament and Electronics Maintenance Squadron and the 408th Munitions Maintenance Squadron as supporting units. The four fighter squadrons that deployed to Ubon before the arrival of the 8th TFW were returned to the US. to serve as training units.

In February 1966, the 555th Tactical Fighter Squadron, also equipped with F-4Cs, became part of the wing and in July 1966, the 435th TFS, equipped with F-104s, was added to the wing structure, although still operating from Udorn RTAFB. By the end of June 1966, after only six months in the theater, the wing had flown more than 10,000 combat sorties, achieving a 99 per cent sortie rate for which they received many commendations. More than 13,809 aircraft sorties were recorded by December 1966, and the 555th "triple nickel" squadron became the first squadron with five MIGs kills- to its credit, to achieve "ace" status since the Korean War. At the end of December 1967, the 555th TFS had 18 MIGs kills while its sister squadron, the 433rd TFS, had 12 MIG's on its records, The wing, chalking up a total of 30 MIG's, emerged as the top Killing-killing unit as 1967 ended. Significant events occurred in 1967, which resulted in the 8th TFW becoming the first Air Force fighter unit to bomb an enemy airfield Major Thomas D. Hirsch, 555th TFS, was credited with destroying five enemy MIG's on the ground during the attack. Colonel Robin Olds, who joined the wing as its commander earlier in 1966, became the leading MIGs killer of the Vietnam war with four MIGs kills to his credit. Twenty new F-4D aircraft arrived at Ubon in May 1967. This gave the wing the distinction of being the first in Southeast Asia to be operationally equipped with F-4Ds. Using these aircraft, Wolfpack pilots struck the previously untouched Canal des Rapides Bridge and the Paul Doumer bridge, near Hanoi plus many other strategic military and

industrial targets. The final phase out of the F-4C was completed by the end of 1967 and the wing became fully equipped with the F-4D. By the end of August the wing logged more than 50,000 combat sorties since its arrival in Southeast Asia. These sorties ran the gamut from MIGs combat air patrol to interdiction missions. The wing's flexibility in response to mission changes also added immeasurably to its effectiveness in interdicting movement of enemy supplies, manpower and equipment into South Vietnam.

On 28 May 1968, the 555th TFS deployed to Udorn RTAFB. The 25th TFS, formerly with the 33rd TFW, Eglin AFB, Fla., replaced the "triple nickel" as the fourth F-4D fighter-bomber squadron at Ubon. By the end of May, eight, and a half MIG's added to the wing's roll of kills. The total of 38 1/2 insured retention of its title of top MIG-killer of the Vietnam War. With the arrival of the 16th Special Operations Squadron in October 1968 flying the AC-130 gun ships the wing's mission was greatly enhanced. When the bombing of North Vietnam was halted in 1968, the wing's mission turned to interdiction missions against the flow of supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. During 1970 the wing recorded destroying nearly 15,000 trucks, earning them a new title of "top truck killers".

In 1970, the 8th TFW received the American Fighter Pilots' award of "Most Outstanding Tactical Fighter Wing in Southeast Asia for 1970". In early 1971, the 8th TFW received the Maj. Gen. Robert F. Worley Memorial Trophy, sponsored by the American Fighter Pilots' Association, as the "Most Outstanding Tactical Fighter Wing in Southeast Asia." in May 1972, the aircrews of the 8th TFW were commended by General John W. Vogt, 7th Air Force Commander, for the destruction of the Thanh Hoa Bridge, 215 miles north of the demilitarized zone, after resumption of bombing of North Vietnam. The 8th TFW played a leading role in the destruction of rail and road communications in North Vietnam after resumption of the bombing in the north.