

## Don Muang Royal Thai Air Force Base Historical Brief



During the Vietnam War, Dong Muang was used as a major command and logistics hub of the United States Air Force. USAF Arrival At Don Muang

The official American military presence in Thailand started in April 1961 when an advanced party of the USAF **6010th Tactical (TAC) Group** arrived at Don Muang at the request of the Royal Thai government to establish an aircraft warning system. Also in April 1961 a small detachment of F-102 "Delta Daggers" were sent to Don Muang under **Operation Bell Tone**. Their mission was to bolster the defense capabilities of the Royal Thai Air Force.

Then in November 1961, Four RF-101C reconnaissance aircraft of the **45th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron** and their photo lab arrived. The RF-101's were sent to assist Royal Thai AF RT-33 aircraft in performing aerial recon flights over Laos. Two milestones occurred early in 1962. The **Military Assistance Group in South Vietnam** was renamed U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) on 6 February. The other being a joint communication from Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Koman on 6 March in which the United States "firm intention... to aid Thailand, its ally and historic friend in resisting communist aggression and subversion". As a result, the **Military Assistance Command, Thailand (MACT)** was set up on 15 May 1962 at Don Muang. In November 1962 the **2nd Air Division** assumed control of the 6010th TAC Group. In August the group was redesignated the **35th Tactical Group**.

The 35th TAC group consisted of the following units:

- 35th Air Base Squadron - Located at Don Muang.
- 331st Air Base Squadron - Located at Takhli RTAFB.
- 332nd Air Base Squadron - Located at Ubon RTAFB.
- Det #1, 35th Tactical Group - Located at Korat RTAFB.

In July 1965 the 35th TAC Group was redesignated the **6236th Combat Support Group** and again in April 1966 it was redesignated the **631st Combat Support Group**. In March 1965 there were 1342 enlisted men stationed at Don Muang RTAFB, with their primary mission to provide support for all USAF units and detachments assigned to the base or other bases in Thailand.

Units assigned to Don Muang RTAFB by 1969 were the following:

**Host Unit** - 631st Combat Support Group - 2 C-47s

- Det #4 315th Air Division - 7 C-130Es
- 509th Fighter Interceptor Squadron - 5 F-102s
- 452nd Air Refueling Squadron - 4 KC-135s

### USAF withdrawal from Don Muang

By 1966 the USAF and Thai Air Force had established a major presence in Thailand, with the Americans operating out of six Royal Thai Air Bases. At Dong Muang the USAF had stationed KC-135 air refueling tankers from Strategic Air Command (SAC) for refueling tactical combat aircraft over the skies of

Indochina. Thailand was officially neutral in the Vietnam War and the visibility of the large USAF Boeing tankers in its capital was causing political embarrassment to the Thai government.

The USAF 7th Air Force wanted to have additional KC-135's in Thailand and the solution reached was to expand the Naval airfield at U-Tapao and base the tankers there. Expansion of U-Tapao began in October 1965, with the completed new facility opening at the end of 1967. The 11,000-foot runway became operational on 6 July 1966. U-Tapao received its first complement of USAF Strategic Air Command (SAC) KC-135 tankers in August 1966. By September, the base was supporting 15 tankers. The opening of U-Tapao also allowed the United States to route most of its logistics requirements in Thailand to be routed through that facility rather than having large cargo aircraft arrive in the Thai capital. By 1970 most USAF operations had moved out of Don Muang, however administrative personnel coordinating activities along with Military Assistance Command, Thailand (MACT) staff were assigned to the base until 1975.

### **DON MUANG 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)

### **HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATE AIR FORCE AT DON MUANG RTAFB 1961-1970**

An advanced party of the 6010 TAC Group arrived at Don Muang RTAFB at the request of the Royal Thai government to establish an aircraft warning system in April, 1961. Four RF-101C aircraft of the 45<sup>th</sup> TRS and their photo lab arrived in November of 1961 to fly RECCE flights over Laos.

In November of 1962 the 2nd Air Division assumed control of the 6010<sup>th</sup> TAC Group. In August the group was redesignated the 35<sup>TH</sup> TAC GROUP. The 35<sup>th</sup> TAC group consisted of the following:

- 35<sup>th</sup> ABS-Don Muang
- 331<sup>st</sup> ABS-Takhli
- 332<sup>nd</sup> ABS-Ubon
- DET1 35<sup>th</sup> TAC GP- Korat

In July 1965 the 35<sup>th</sup> TAC Group was redesignated the 6236<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Group and again in April, 1966 was redesignated the 631<sup>st</sup> CSG. In March of 1965 there were 1342 enlisted men stationed at Don Muang RTAFB. The primary mission of Don Muang was to provide support for all USAF units and detachments assigned to the base or other bases in Thailand.

Other units attached to Don Muang RTAFB were the following:

- 509 FIS - 4 F-102s
- 4252<sup>nd</sup> ARS - 4 KC-135s Tiger Cub
- 315<sup>th</sup> AD - 4 C-130s

Don Muang was also Thailand's international airport, served by PAA, Swiss Air, Lufthansa and others. Don Muang was also a training base for the RTAF. More important was Bangkok's harbor. A deep water SEATO port. Up through 1966 many of the USAF logistics requirements flowed through this port to upcountry bases transported by Don Muang's Transport Units. Most operations moved out of Don Muang sometime in 1970 to up country bases. It is very important to remember that from early 1961 through 1970 Don Muang served as a gateway to the north.