

Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base

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Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base (**TRTAFB**) (IATA: **TKH**, ICAO: **VTPI**) is a Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) facility in central Thailand, approximately 144 miles (240 km) northwest of Bangkok in Takhli district, Nakhon Sawan Province, near the city of Nakhon Sawan.

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Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base



Part of Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF)

Coordinates 15°16′05″N 100°17′32″E﻿ / ﻿15.26806°N 100.29222°E﻿ / 15.26806; 100.29222

Type Air Force Base

Site information

Condition Military Air Force Base

Site history

Built 1955

In use 1955-Present

Battles/wars 
Vietnam War

Airfield information

IATA : TKH^[1] – ICAO : VTPI

Summary

Coordinates 15°16′05″N 100°17′32″E﻿ / ﻿15.26806°N 100.29222°E﻿ / 15.26806; 100.29222

Map

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Units

Takhli is the home of the Royal Thai Air Force Wing 4, 3d air division. Squadrons assigned are:

- 401 Light Attack Squadron, flying L-39 Albatross
- 402 Reconnaissance Squadron, flying Lear Jet 35A and IAI201
- 403 Fighter Squadron, flying F-16A/B

History

Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base was established in the 1950s as a RTAF base. In the late 1950s, the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) used Takhli as operating base for CIA resupply of Tibetan freedom fighters. CIA-operated C-130A Hercules transports flew men and supplies over Indian airspace, with the consent of Prime Minister Nehru, for parachute drops into Communist Chinese-occupied Tibet.^[2]

Political considerations with regards to Communist forces engaging in a civil war inside Laos and fears of the civil war spreading into Thailand led the Thai government to allow the United States to covertly use five Thai bases beginning in 1961 for the air defense of Thailand and to fly reconnaissance flights over Laos.

Under Thailand's "gentleman's agreement" with the United States, Royal Thai Air Force Bases used by the USAF were commanded by Thai officers. Thai air police controlled access to the bases, along with USAF Security Police, who assisted them in base defense using sentry dogs, observation towers, and machine gun bunkers. All United States Air Force personnel were fully armed after 1965.

The USAF airmen at Takhli were under the command of the United States Pacific Air Forces (PACAF). Takhli was the location for TACAN station **Channel 43** and was referenced by that identifier in voice communications during air missions.

The APO for Takhli was APO San Francisco, 96273



Direction	Runways		Surface
	Length		
	ft	m	
18/36	9,850	3,000	Concrete

United States Advisory Forces

The initial squadrons and units deployed to Takhli were placed under the command and control of the Thirteenth Air Force, headquartered at Clark AB in the Philippines. Thailand-based aircraft flew missions mostly into Laos until the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which expanded the air war into North Vietnam.

In 1962, the U.S. Military Assistance Group in South Vietnam was upgraded to U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), a promotion which gave it authority to command combat troops. Shortly thereafter, the **Military Assistance Command, Thailand (MACT)** was set up with a similar level of authority in order to aid Thailand, (America's) ally and historic friend in resisting communist aggression and subversion.

The United States Air Force component of the U.S. Pacific Command was Pacific Air Forces (PACAF). Thirteenth Air Force was headquartered at Clark Air Base, Philippines. Seventh Air Force, another Numbered Air Force of PACAF was headquartered at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, South Vietnam, although the Seventh controlled many units based in Thailand. Thai sensitivities about units based in Thailand reporting to a headquarters in South Vietnam caused a shift whereby the Seventh Air Force was ostensibly subordinate to Thirteenth Air Force for administrative matters (and therefore referred to as 7/13 Air Force). The commander, Seventh Air Force, played a dual role as MACV's deputy for air operations.

In July 1962, the **6011th Air Base Squadron** was organized, the first "host" unit at Takhli RTAFB.

F-100 Super Sabre deployments

The first United States Air Force personnel began arriving at Takhli RTAFB on 10 February 1961 when the 27th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW) from Cannon AFB, New Mexico began deploying F-100D Super Sabres to the base to try to restrain the Pathet Lao who were overrunning most of northwestern Laos. At Takhli, base support for the rotating TAC F-100 squadrons was provided by the 6011th ABS. In an organizational change, the **331st Air Base Squadron** replaced the 6011th ABS at Takhli in July 1963 as the host unit at Takhli. The 331st ABS came under the command and control of 35th Tactical Group at Don Muang Royal Thai Air Force Base, near Bangkok.

The 27th TFW kept a rotational deployment of three squadrons of F-100s in Takhli until November 1965 when F-105 Thunderchiefs began to arrive on a permanent basis. During February 1963, the rotational squadrons of F-100s from Cannon was reduced to six aircraft, with the deployments from Cannon ending in March 1964 and the squadrons deploying instead to Da Nang Air Base in South Vietnam.

In addition to the aircraft from Cannon AFB, the 510th Tactical Fighter Squadron of the 405th Fighter Wing from Clark Air Base, Philippines was deployed to Takhli in response to an increasing threat along the Laotian border. This deployment was named **FIELD GLASS**. The first recorded combat loss was an F-100D (56-3085), shot down on 18 August 1964 over Laos. The Clark F-100s remained at Takhli until 20 August 1965 on a rotating basis.

F-100 Super Sabre squadrons deployed to Takhli were



North American F-100D-85-NH Super Sabre Serial 56-3460 of the 523d Tactical Fighter Squadron. On 9 June 1964 this aircraft was lost 420 miles west of Shannon, Ireland

- 522d Tactical Fighter Squadron (27th TFW)

Deployed: 13 February-c. 7 March 1961; 5 February-15 June 1962; 12 December 1962-c. 15 February 1963; 16 March-6 May 1964; 8 August-15 November 1964; 15 August-25 November 1965

- 523d Tactical Fighter Squadron (27th TFW)

Deployed: 5 September-20 November 1961; 12 October 1962-c. 15 January 1963; 17 September-20 November 1963; 12 June-4 September 1964; 22 March-30 June 1965

- 524th Tactical Fighter Squadron (27th TFW)

Deployed: 10 February-16 June 1961; 30 October-14 November 1961; 9 June-c. 27 June 1963; 21 January-19 March 1964; 1 December 1964 – 28 March 1965

- 510th Tactical Fighter Squadron (405th TFW)

Deployed: 11 May - 8 June 1962

In November 1965 the last rotating F-100 squadron departed Takhli, to be replaced by the Republic F-105D "Thunderchief".

F-105 Thunderchief deployments

In May 1964 Takhli became a forward deployment base for rotational F-105 Thunderchief squadrons, when the 36th Tactical Fighter Squadron (8th TFW), was deployed to Takhli from Itazuke AB, Japan between May 1964-June 1964. The squadron again deployed to Takhli between 26 August-28 October 1965 (6441st TFW). Another PACAF squadron, the 80th Tactical Fighter Squadron, deployed to Takhli between 27 June-26 August 1965 from the 6441st TFW, at Yokota AB, Japan.

Tactical Air Command began deploying F-105 squadrons in March 1965 as follows:

- 563d Tactical Fighter Squadron (23d TFW, McConnell AFB), March 1965-August 1965
- 562d Tactical Fighter Squadron (23d TFW, McConnell AFB), August 1965-Dec 1965
- 334th Tactical Fighter Squadron (4th TFW, Seymour Johnson AFB), August 1965-February 1966
- 335th Tactical Fighter Squadron (4th TFW, Seymour Johnson AFB), November 1965-December 1966

In May 1965 the **6441st TFW (Provisional)** became the host unit at Takhli. On 8 July 1965 the **6235th Tactical Fighter Wing** was activated to replace the 6441st TFW.

The F-105 was destined to become a major participant in the war in Vietnam, and the primary aircraft flown from Takhli during the Vietnam War. The permanent assignment of the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing to Takhli in December 1965 ended the temporary squadron rotations from CONUS TAC bases.



522d Tactical Fighter Squadron F-100DS at Takhli, 1963



F-105D Serial 61-0169, 563d TFS (1965). Shot down 28 Oct 1967, pilot made POW.

Air Refueling Mission

In the early 1960s, Tactical Air Command (TAC) fighter-bombers were equipped with hose-and-drogue tankers such as converted KB-50s, whereas boom tankers such as KC-97s and KC-135s had been assigned to Strategic Air Command. In August 1964, **Det 1., 421st Air Refueling Squadron** was organized at Takhli from Yokota Air Base Japan. The 421st flew the KB-50J.



F-105s from the 354th and 333d TFS refueling from a Takhli KC-135

In order to make TAC's fleet of fighter-bombers capable of using the boom-equipped KC-97 or KC-135 tankers, the last few F-105Ds off the production line (production block -31) were given the capability of refuelling from either a flying boom or a hose-drogue type of tanker. This was done by fitting a flush-mounted retractable door-type receptacle in front of the windshield which could accept a flying-boom type of midair-refuelling probe. Some earlier F-105Ds were retrofitted with these receptacles. The 421st stayed at Takhli until 15 January 1965 when it was inactivated. The aerial refueling mission was taken over by a detachment of the **4252d Strategic Wing** from Misawa Air Base with KC-135s replacing the KB-50s.

In September 1965, increasing demands for aerial refueling in Southeast Asia led to the deployment of Strategic Air Command KC-135 tankers to Takhli under the designation of King Cobra to supplement those at Don Muang Air Base in refuelling the Thai-based fighters.

In January 1967, the SAC **4258th Strategic Wing** assumed full responsibility for the Takhli KC-135 tankers formerly belonging to the 4252d SW at Kadena AB, Okinawa. At years end, the tanker force numbered 5 at Takhli. In February 1968, the KC-135s were transferred to Ching Chuan Kang Air Base Taiwan.

355th Tactical Fighter Wing

On 8 November 1965 the **355th Tactical Fighter Wing** made a permanent change of station (PCS) from McConnell AFB to Takhli without personnel or equipment as the host unit at the base. The provisional 6235th TFW was inactivated and the equipment and personnel at Takhli were absorbed into the new wing structure. Previously, all of the 355th's squadrons at McConnell had been deployed to various bases in Southeast Asia, two of which were reassigned to Takhli (357th, 354th TFS) and brought back under its control. Squadrons of the 355th were:

- 333d Tactical Fighter Squadron: 8 December 1965 - 15 October 1970 F-105D/F (Tail Code: RK) (Reassigned from 4485th Composite Wing, Eglin AFB, Florida.)
- 354th Tactical Fighter Squadron: 28 November 1965 - 10 December 1970 F-105D/F (Tail Code: RM) (Reassigned from 8th TFW, Kadena AB, Okinawa)
- 357th Tactical Fighter Squadron: 29 January 1966 - 10 December 1970 F-105D/F/G (Tail Code: RU) (Reassigned from 6234th TFW, Korat RTAFB)



4th TFW F-105Ds at Takhli in 1965

The following rotational TDY squadrons transferred their aircraft to the newly assigned permanent squadrons at Takhli

- 334th Tactical Fighter: 2 September 1965 - 5 February 1966 F-105D/F)

Temporarily attached from 4th TFW, Seymour Johnson AFB, North Carolina
Inactivated in place, 5 February 1966, aircraft reassigned to 354th TFS.

- 335th Tactical Fighter: 6 November 1965 - 8 December 1965 F-105D/F)

Temporarily attached from 6441st TFW, Yokota AB, Japan.
Inactivated in place, 8 December 1965, aircraft reassigned to 333d TFS.



F-105Ds from the 334th TFS at Takhli, 1966

Operation Rolling Thunder

Under Operation Rolling Thunder IV in 1966, F-105s from Takhli played a role in bombing closer than ever before to downtown Hanoi, in an attack on a petroleum-oil-lubricants (POL) storage facility four miles from the center of downtown. Ninety five percent of the tank farm was destroyed, and the smoke column from burning fuel rose to 35,000 feet. During the mission 18 trucks were destroyed by 20mm Vulcan cannon strafing after the bombing and one MiG was shot down.

The 355th TFW participated in major strikes against North Vietnamese logistics. Among the targets hit by the 355th were the Yen Bay Arsenal and storage complex, Viet Tri rail and highway bridge, Hanoi petroleum storage complex, Dap Cau rail and highway bridge, Phuc Yen petroleum storage, and Thai Nguyen rail station and yard. In May 1967, the 355th TFW received its first Presidential Unit Citation for action from 1 January 1966 to 10 October 1966.

During this time, the wing flew 11,892 sorties, downed 2 MiGs, and damaged 8 more. Although the F-105 was not designed to be primarily a dogfighter, the aircraft was successful in downing at least 27.5 confirmed North Vietnamese MiGs in aerial combat. On 10 March 1967 Air Force Captain Max C. Brestel, flying from Takhli, became the only F-105 pilot to shoot down two MiGs during the Vietnam War.

On the very same day that Captain Brestel got his double, Captain Merlyn H. Dethlefsen won the Medal of Honor for actions including taking out two SAM sites during a mission from Takhli. His flight leader was shot down, his wingman was shot up and had to abort, and his own aircraft was severely damaged by AAA on a mission to bomb the Thai Nguyen steel works north of Hanoi. Major Dethlefsen took over command of the flight and attacked the defensive positions around the target. He evaded several MiG fighters and successfully destroyed two missile sites. His back-seater was awarded the Air Force Cross for this mission.

On 19 April 1967, Major Leo K. Thorsness won the Medal of Honor on another F-105 mission from Takhli. The major destroyed one SAM site with a missile, bombed another, shot down a MiG, damaged another, and repeatedly chased or lured other MiGs away from an ongoing rescue mission for his wingman, who had been shot down by AAA fire. Thorsness' back-seater, Captain Harold E. Johnson, was awarded the Air Force Cross for the mission. Less than two weeks after this mission, the two were shot down by an Atoll missile from a MiG-21, and became prisoners of war. They were not released until 1973.

On 11 August 1967, the 355th conducted a raid on the Hanoi railroad and highway bridge. Thirty-six strike aircraft led by the 355th dropped 94 tons of bombs and destroyed one rail span and two highway spans on the northeast side of the bridge. The superstructure was damaged and the highway portion on the north side of the bridge, where it crossed the island in the river, was cut. This stopped the movement of an average of 26 trains per day with an estimated capacity of 5,950 short tons. Two aircraft were damaged, but no pilots were lost.

On 8 October 1967, a flight of F-105s from the 355th TFW attacked and destroyed, on the ground, 2 Mil Mi-6 and 4 Mil Mi-4 Soviet-built helicopters. On 24 October, the 355th led a strike against the Phúc Yên Air Base 18 miles north of Hanoi and the largest in North Vietnam. The airfield, which had been untouched prior to the raid, was left unserviceable. On 14 December, under heavy anti-aircraft fire, the wing attacked the Paul Doumer Bridge, a vital link between Hanoi and China. For the third time, the bridge came down.

In November, 1967, Gerald Gustafson received the Air Force Cross after he refused to leave his comrade until other escort aircraft could be vectored in to give the wounded pilot assistance in reaching his home base safely.

In January 1970, the 355th TFW received its 2nd Presidential Unit Citation for action from 11–12 August 1967 and 24–28 October 1967.

In July, the 355th TFW received its record 3rd Presidential Unit Citation for action from 12 April 1968 through 30 April 1969. During this time frame, the wing dropped 32,000 tons of ordnance on 2,100 targets while flying 17,000 combat sorties.

Wild Weasels

The first “Wild Weasel” aircraft came to Takhli in 1966. The Wild Weasel concept was originally proposed in 1965 as a method of countering the increasing North Vietnamese SAM threat, using volunteer crews. The mission of the Wild Weasels was to eliminate Communist surface-to-air missile sites in North Vietnam.

This nickname refers to a mission which was carried out by a number of different aircraft types over the years. The first at Takhli were F-100 Super Sabres, which like all Wild Weasels had the unique job of baiting surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites to fire at them. Then all they had to do was evade the missile and lead an attack on the radar facility that guided the SAMs. Sometimes they, or the strike aircraft with them, would fire a radar-seeking AGM-45 Shrike missile which followed the SAM site's radar beam right back down to the transmitting antenna. When these relatively early-technology missiles missed, as often happened, or when the aircraft ran out of missiles, Wild Weasels would attack SAM sites with bombs or their M-61A1 20mm Vulcan cannon.

The F-105G was the designation given to Wild Weasel F-105Fs which were fitted with greatly improved avionics. The designation EF-105F was temporarily applied to these aircraft, but their designation was eventually changed to F-105G. The first F-105Gs went to the 357th TFS at Takhli RTAFB during the second half of 1967. The electronic warfare officer (EWO) in an F-105G (also known as the "back-seater"; "GIB", for guy-in-back; or "bear", for trained bear) ran all the new electronic equipment for locating SAM or anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) radars, warning of SAM launches, and sending Shrike missiles down the radar beams.



Republic F-105F-1-RE Thunderchief
Serial 63-8319 from the 44th TFS
Later, this aircraft was reconfigured to
the F-105G "Wild Weasel"
configuration.

The 12th Tactical Fighter squadron of the 18th Tactical Fighter Wing, which had been detached to Korat RTAFB from Okinawa, was also equipped with the F-105G and was temporarily reassigned to Takhli in June 1967. A third Wild Weasel squadron, the 44th TFS was reassigned to the 355th from Korat when the decision was made in October 1969 to make the 388th TFW at Korat an all F-4 wing.

The detachment from the 12th TFS returned to its main unit at Korat and the 44th TFS was returned to Korat in September 1970 from the 355th TFW to the 388th TFW when the decision was made to consolidate the units of the Wild Weasel mission.

B-66 Destroyer Operations

As part of the electronic countermeasure (ECM) weaponry that the USAF employed against North Vietnamese air defenses, variants of the Douglas B-66 were adapted to serve in the electronic countermeasures role as radar jamming aircraft. They were redesignated EB-66B. These aircraft came to Takhli in 1966, taking on electronic warfare missions and photo reconnaissance missions. These old planes were originally medium-range nuclear bombers derived from the Navy A-3 Skywarrior.

All of the bombing equipment was removed and replaced by electronic jamming equipment. The tail turret was removed, and automatic jamming equipment was fitted in its place. Numerous antennae protruded from the aircraft, and chaff dispensing pods were carried. They were used during the Vietnam War as electronic warfare aircraft, joining strike aircraft during their missions over North Vietnam to jam enemy radar installations. They were not "Wild Weasel" aircraft, since they did not have provisions to attack the radar installations directly.

On 1 October 1965, the **41st Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron (TEWS)** arrived from Shaw Air Force Base South Carolina with a squadron of EB-66s that had been stationed in France as part of the 10th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing at RAF Alconbury.

During January 1966 the 42d Electronic Countermeasures Squadron (ECS) squadron arrived from Chambley-Bussieres Air Base, France flying RB-66C and WB-66s variants of the B-66 on photo reconnaissance and electronic warfare missions.

The B-66s were used to locate and identify North Vietnamese radar sites that directed missiles and AAA fire, so that strike aircraft could avoid them. The RB-66C had no offensive capability, so it could not attack the radar sites directly. They were fully mission-capable, with up to twice the radar-jamming punch of a B-52 "buff". They were very helpful to F-105 strike missions. The "C" models were listeners: electronic intelligence (ELINT) and reconnaissance gatherers rather than active jammers.

Operation Ranch Hand



Douglas E/RB-66B-DL Destroyer
Serial 54-440 from the 42d Tactical
Electronic Warfare Squadron.



F-105s with an EB-66 from the 355th
TFW on a bomb run over enemy
territory

The herbicide spraying missions began in Vietnam in 1961, and it has recently been revealed that some took place from Thai bases, including Takhli, as early as 1966. This pre-dates the air force receiving permission to use herbicides for clearing areas on and around Thailand bases for area and perimeter defense, which was given in 1969. The missions in 1966 defoliated areas surrounding parts of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, near the Vietnam border and north of the DMZ, and had the approval of both the Thai and Laotian governments.

C-123 aircraft were used on the missions. The missions were extensive enough to have required pre-positioning or maintaining stocks of the herbicides.

It seems likely that Orange would have been the agent of choice for these missions, since it was the best choice for area defoliation. White was also used, but required up to four times the application rate of Orange, and Blue was primarily used for crop destruction. Instances of herbicide use on Takhli are finally being reported today.

F-111 Combat Lancer

The General Dynamics F-111 was one of the most controversial aircraft that ever flew. Perhaps no other aircraft before or since has been so bitterly criticized in the media. The first production F-111A deliveries to the Air Force took place on 18 July 1967 to the 428th, 429th and 430th Tactical Fighter Squadrons of the 474th Tactical Fighter Wing based at Cannon AFB, New Mexico. In early 1968, the squadron was reassigned to Nellis AFB, Nevada.

Shortly thereafter, the Air Force decided to rush a small detachment of F-111As to Southeast Asia under a program known as **Combat Lancer**. Six 428th TFS F-111As were allocated to the Combat Lancer program, and departed Nellis AFB for Takhli on 15 March 1968. These swing-wing all-weather day-or-night fighter-bombers were to get their first combat test and evaluation to see if they could actually replace the aging F-105s.

By the end of that month, 55 night missions had been flown against targets in North Vietnam, but two aircraft had been lost. 66-0022 had been lost on March 28, and 66-0017 on March 30. Replacement aircraft had left Nellis, but the loss of a third F-111A (66-0024) on April 22 halted F-111A combat operations. However, the aircraft remained poised for combat, but they saw little action before their return to the United States in November.

It turned out that the three F-111A losses were not due to enemy action but were caused by wing and tail structural defects. One of the Combat Lancer crashes had been traced to a malfunction of the aircraft's tail servo actuator. The USAF later discovered (as a later returning prisoner of war would confirm) that a tailplane problem could cause a sudden and uncontrollable pitch-up and roll. This failure in the flying controls system caused the aircraft to break up in flight. The other two crashes in Vietnam were traced to poor mounting of the M61A1 cannon and to pilot error.

Son Tay Raid



428th TFS Combat Lancer F-111A
over Southeast Asia 1968



Combat Lancer F-111A being loaded
with bombs March 1968

In November 1970, Special Forces and Air Force Special Operations personnel of the **Joint Contingency Task Group** and two MC-130 Combat Talon aircraft staged at Takhli in preparation for Operation Kingpin, the attempt to rescue U.S. prisoners of war at Son Tay, North Vietnam.

Takhli served as a staging area for the raiders who were about to try to rescue 90 American prisoners of war (POWs) from the Son Tay prison camp in North Vietnam. The raiders traveled in closed vans from a sealed hangar to their barracks in an old CIA compound in a remote corner of the base. On Thursday, 19 November, they rode in those vans to the firing range to test-fire all their weapons one last time, 65 men, and 111 weapons including M-16s, CAR-15s, .45s, M-79s, M-60s, and 12-gauge shotguns.

At 20:30 Friday night, 20 November, they took off in a C-130 bound for Udorn RTAFB. There they boarded CH-53 helicopters for the mission. Everything about this daring, complex and innovative mission worked, except that when they hit the prison camp the prisoners had already been moved elsewhere. The discussion of why the prisoners were moved continues even today.

1971 closure

Takhli began closing down in late 1969, as a part of a general withdrawal of American forces from Southeast Asia.

- The 41st TEWS was inactivated 31 October 1969.
- The 42d TEWS (B-66) squadron was transferred to Korat in August 1970.
- Det 1, 12 TFS was discontinued and the aircraft rejoined the rest of the squadron at Korat with their F-105G Wild Weasel aircraft in September.

On 6 October the wing's last F-105 combat mission of the war, an airstrike in Laos, was flown by "DINO" flight, led by Col. Waymond C. Nutt.

The 357th and 333d TFSs (F-105) were reassigned to the 23d Tactical Fighter Wing at McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas. The 44th TFS was reassigned to the 18th Tactical Fighter Wing at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa. The 354th TFS was inactivated in place, then reactivated without equipment or personnel at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona.

The 355 TFW ceased combat operations at Takhli on 7 October, and on the 12th, the wing retired its colors with a 12-aircraft flyover of F-105s. The 355th Tactical Fighter Wing was reactivated on 1 July 1971 at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. The last USAF personnel left Takhli RTAFB by April 1971.

1972 Reopening

On 30 March 1972, the North Vietnamese Army sent 120,000 NVA regular troops into South Vietnam. They brought three different kinds of Soviet-built tanks, long-range artillery, radar-controlled AAA, mobile SAM sites and shoulder-launched SAMs with them. It was the first time they had deployed some of this equipment anywhere besides Hanoi. The attack has been called the "Spring '72 Invasion", "Easter Offensive", or "Spring Offensive". In response, the United States Air Force launched Operation Linebacker, the first sustained bombing of North Vietnam by the U.S. since November 1968. Upon re-opening for Linebacker, most of the barracks (dormitory-like buildings) had been stripped of all plumbing and electrical fixtures after the 1968 closing. Most Strategic Air Command (SAC) enlisted personnel were housed in the recovered dorms with one

shower and one toilet set up by the "Red Horse" civil engineer teams and a few operating light bulbs in the large open-bay dorms. Tactical Air Command (TAC) enlisted personnel lived in a large "tent city" made up of line after line of General Purpose medium and large canvas tents.

49th Tactical Fighter Wing

The USAF reacted to the invasion quickly and with many resources. One of these was Operation Constant Guard III, the largest movement that the Tactical Air Command (TAC) had ever performed. In nine days, they deployed 72 F-4D Phantom IIs of the 49th Tactical Fighter Wing from Holloman AFB, New Mexico, to Takhli. The move included more than 3,000 personnel and 1,600 tons of cargo.

On 5 May about 35 members of an PACAF advance party returned to Takhli to prepare the facility for re-opening and activation. Airmen arriving reported that Takhli was a mess, with missing or broken plumbing fixtures, no hot water, and no drinking water - that had to be trucked in from Korat every day. Bed frames had been thrown out of the hootches into the high snake-infested grass, and mattresses or bedding consisted of sleeping bags at best.

On 11 May the first personnel from Holloman began to arrive. Squadrons from Holloman deployed to Takhli were:

- 7th Tactical Fighter (Tail Code: HO - blue stripe)
- 8th Tactical Fighter (Tail Code: HO - yellow stripe)
- 9th Tactical Fighter (Tail Code: HO - red stripe)
- 417th Tactical Fighter (Tail Code: HO - unk stripe)

Along with the F-4s, other units that were deployed to Takhli were:

- 11th Air Refueling Squadron's KC-135s from Altus AFB, Oklahoma
- 4th Tactical Fighter Squadron F-4Es from Da Nang, South Vietnam.
- 8th Tactical Fighter Wing's AC-130 "Spectre" gunships from Ubon RTAFB, which became the Det 1, 16th Special Operations Squadron.

During this deployment the 49th flew more than 21,000 combat hours over just about every battle zone from An Loc to vital installations in the Hanoi vicinity. During five months of combat, the wing did not lose any aircraft or personnel—a testament to the outstanding training and proficiency of all members of the 49th. The unit received an Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Combat "V" Device for its participation.

366th Tactical Fighter Wing

On 30 June the **366th Tactical Fighter Wing** was reassigned to Takhli from Da Nang Air Base South Vietnam, taking over host unit responsibilities from the 49th TFW. Its operational squadrons were:

- 4th Tactical Fighter (Tail Code: LA) (F-4E)
- 421st Tactical Fighter (Tail Code: LC) (F-4E)

From Takhli 366th TFW aircrews flew air superiority missions over Vietnam. In late October the squadrons of the Holloman-based 49th TFW returned home. The Da Nang-based 4th and 421st TFSs were transferred to the 432d TRW at Udon RTAFB on 31 October 1972.

The 366th TFW was inactivated in place on 31 October 1972, being reactivated the same day without personnel or equipment at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho.

474th Tactical Fighter Wing

With the departure of the 366th, the **474th Tactical Fighter Wing (Deployed)** equipped with F-111s arrived at Takhli on Temporary Duty from Nellis Air Force Base Nevada on 27 September 1972.

The 474th TFW flew F-111As. Operational fighter squadrons of the 474th were:

- 428th Tactical Fighter Squadron
- 429th Tactical Fighter Squadron
- 430th Tactical Fighter Squadron

All F-111As of the 474th carried the tail code NA. From Takhli, the 474th participated in Operation Linebacker II when the United States resumed the large scale bombing of North Vietnam. Their first combat mission, started only hours after their arrival at Takhli, resulted in the disappearance of one of the aircraft and another temporary cancellation of F-111 missions. Despite this bad start, F-111s gave a good account of themselves over the next few months, especially in conditions when other aircraft types could not strike.

In early 1973, with the suspension of bombing in North Vietnam and the resumption of peace negotiations, inflight refueling requirements decreased markedly. As a result, in late January 1973 many of the augmented tankers of the **11th Air Refueling Squadron**, which had been rotating aircraft and aircrews from Altus AFB, returned to Oklahoma. The 430th TFS returned to the 474th TFW Nellis on 22 March 1973.

347th Tactical Fighter Wing

On 30 July 1973 the TDY of the 474th TFW ended. The 428th and 429th TFS were assigned to the newly transferred **347th Tactical Fighter Wing** from Mountain Home Air Force Base Idaho which arrived on 30 July 1973.

- 428th Tactical Fighter Squadron (Tail Code: HG - Red Tail Fin)
- 429th Tactical Fighter Squadron (Tail Code: HG - Yellow Tail Fin)

For a brief two-week period the 347th flew combat operations into Cambodia until 15 August, when the last wartime mission of the Vietnam Era was flown into Cambodia for final mission of **Constant Guard IV**. After the cease-fire, the wing was maintained in a combat-ready status for possible contingency actions.

During January 1974 the Secretary of Defense announced a realignment of Thailand resources, with the final pullout of air resources by the end of 1976. In June 1974, four F-111s from the 347th TFW flew from Takhli to Osan Air Base South Korea and conducted live weapons demonstrations for Republic of Korea and US officials at Nightmare Range.



General Dynamics F-111A Serial 67-081 of the 429th TFS/347th TFW taken at Nellis AFB, Nevada in 1975 still showing its 347th TFW tail code (HG). With its return from its three years deployment to Thailand the aircraft was reassigned to the 474th TFW, staying at Nellis until 1977, when all the F-111s were transferred to the 366th TFW at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho. It remained in service with the 366th TFW until being retired to AMARC on 21 June 1991.

The USAF left Takhli under Operation Palace Lightning in 1974. On 12 July the 347 TFW's F-111's and the AC-130 gunships from the 16th SOS were transferred to Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base, which did not send home the last of its aircraft until December 1975. The F-111s engaged in more than 4,000 sorties with a loss of only six aircraft.

On 31 July 1974 phase down of operations at Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base was completed ahead of schedule, and the base was officially returned to the Thai Government on 12 September. All remaining US personnel departed on 14 September.

Major Aircraft Types Assigned To Takhli

- F-100 Super Sabre (1961–1966)
- F-105 Thunderchief (1963–1970)
- Boeing KB-50 (1964–1965)
- F-104 Starfighter (1965)
- Douglas EB-66 Destroyer (1965–1970)
- KC-135 Stratotanker (1967–1968)
- General Dynamics F-111 (1968, 1972–1974)
- F-4 Phantom II (1972)
- MC-130 Combat Talon

Thai Air Force Use After 1975

After the US withdrawal from Thailand in 1976, the Royal Thai Air Force consolidated the equipment left by the departing USAF units in accordance with government-to-government agreements, and the RTAF assumed use of the base at Takhli. The American withdrawal had quickly revealed to the Thai government the inadequacy of its air force in the event of a conventional war in Southeast Asia. Accordingly, in the 1980s the government allotted large amounts of money for the purchase of modern aircraft and spare parts.

Thirty-eight F-5E and F-5F Tiger II fighter-bombers purchased from the Northrop Corporation formed the nucleus of the Thai air force's defense and tactical firepower. The F-5Es were accompanied by training teams of American civilian and military technicians, who worked with members of the Royal Thai Air Force.

From 13–17 December 1982 **Commando West V** was held. This marked the first visit of a PACAF tactical unit to Thailand since the early 1970s.

Also on 25 November 1983 six F-4Es from the **3d Tactical Fighter Wing's** 3d TFS deployed to Takhli for dissimilar air combat tactics training with the Royal Thai Air Force. The group returned to Clark Air Base on 5 December.

The **90th Tactical Fighter Squadron** from Elmendorf AFB Alaska deployed six F-4Es to Takhli, flying a total of 55 sorties with the Royal Thai Air Force.

In addition to the F-5E and F-5F fighter-bombers, OV-10C aircraft, transports, and helicopters were added to the air force equipment inventory. In 1985 the United States Congress authorized the sale of the F-16 Fighting Falcon fighter to Thailand.



1974 photo of F-111A Serial 67-0102 from the 428th TFS refueling from a KC-135 tanker. Also shown is an F-4E (67-368) of the 58th TFS/8th TFW at Ubon RTAFB (ED) (TDY from Kunsan AB, South Korea) and two F-4Es from the 336th TFW also from Ubon (SJ) (TDY from Seymour-Johnson AFB, North Carolina)

By the late 1980s, Takhli, Korat, and Don Muang RTAFB outside Bangkok, which the Royal Thai Air Force shared with civil aviation, were the primary operational holdings of the RTAF. Maintenance of the facilities at other bases abandoned by the United States (Ubon, Udorn) proved too costly and exceeded Thai needs and were turned over to the Department of Civil Aviation for civil use. NKP and U-Tapao were placed under the control of the Royal Thai Navy. Nonetheless, all runways on the closed or transferred airfields were still available for military training and emergency use.

See also

- United States Air Force In Thailand
- United States Pacific Air Forces
- Seventh Air Force
- Thirteenth Air Force

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2. "Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base". *www.takhli.org*. Retrieved 12 August 2015.

External links

- Takhli Photos 72-74 (http://www.baytownbert.us/Takhli_RTAFB_Thailand/index.html)
- www.Takhli RTAFB.org (<http://www.takhli.org>) Combined Takhli RTAFB Website
- Takhli RTAFB Hootchs (<http://b66.info/takhli-hootch-photos.htm>)
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