

USAF's Pacific F-35A deployment gathers pace

THE US Air Force's first operational overseas deployment of the F-35A is up and running at Kadena Air Base, Japan, the service announced on November 21, 2017. Twelve Lightning IIs and more than 300 airmen from the 388th and 419th Fighter Wings at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, will operate from Okinawa for six months as a Theater Security Package (TSP).

The first pair arrived at Kadena on October 30 after participating in the Seoul International Aerospace & Defense Exhibition 2017. The remaining aircraft

arrived on November 2.

During their time at Kadena, the F-35s will integrate with the F-15Cs of the resident 18th Wing and other assets.

"We were very excited to find out we were coming here," said Lt Col 'Scout' Johnston, 34th Fighter Squadron commander. "The airspace is phenomenal. This allows us to have great training opportunities and integration with other air force assets as well as with the navy and marine corps and hopefully with the Japan Air Self-Defense Force."



One of the recent arrivals at Kadena, F-35A 14-5105 'HL' lost a panel during a training flight over the Pacific Ocean about 65 miles east of Okinawa on November 30. Arnold ten Pas

Mirage F1s prepared for ATAC

THE FIRST of 63 former Armée de l'Air Mirage F1s destined for the Airborne Tactical Advantage Company (ATAC) are being sent from storage in Châteaudun, France to SABCA in Belgium. The Belgian company is tasked with refurbishing the first

32 first aircraft prior to shipment to the US. ATAC will complete work on the subsequent jets.

Negotiations between ATAC and the French government for the transfer began in March 2007. "The agreement was signed on August 7 and

by the end of November all the Mirage F1s will have left Châteaudun," said Pierre Duval, who represents ATAC in France.

As well as 63 Mirages, ATAC is acquiring 157 Atar 9K50 engines, 84 Cyrano IV radars, 72 1,200- and 2,200-litre (264- and 484-

gal) drop tanks and around 353,000cu ft (10,000m³) of various parts, tools and test benches.

Of the 63 aircraft, 32 are classed as RDS1 (Retrait De Service, withdrawal from service) and 31 are RDS2. An RDS1 machine can resume flying with minimum work. RDS2 examples are suitable for spare parts or require extensive work before returning to flight. RDS3 types are only suitable for scrap. The 32 RDS1 jets comprise six F1B, 16 F1CT and ten F1CR models. Eight RDS2 jets, therefore, need to be refurbished to meet ATAC's aim of 40 flyable Mirages.

At Châteaudun, the F1s are towed from the storage area to the maintenance and repair hangar where they are demilitarised, including removal of the DEFA cannon and electronic countermeasures

equipment. A team removes the tail, elevators and wing and readies the aircraft for road travel to SABCA. As of early November, all RDS1 examples had left and 20 RDS2s remained.

The Mirages will receive a new avionics suite with GPS, transponder, traffic collision avoidance system and possibly a new radar.

ATAC plans for the F1 to perform a first mission in September 2018. It will be preceded by an initial functional check flight in US airspace around April or May. The US pilots will be trained by South African company Paramount, which recently bought four Mirage F1B two-seaters.

With around 40 Mirages on the flight line, ATAC will be able to provide approximately 8,000 flight hours annually.

Frédéric Lert

Twice a week, two flatbed trucks leave Châteaudun, each carrying a wingless Mirage F1, while a fifth transports the wings, tails and elevators. Frédéric Lert



339 Mira 'Aias' disbands at Andravida

AN OFFICIAL ceremony was held at Andravida air base on October 31, 2017 to mark the disbandment of 339 'Aias' ('Ajax') Mira, one of the two locally based F-4E AUP Phantom II squadrons belonging to the Hellenic Air Force's 117 Combat Wing.

Two F-4E AUP jets were displayed for the occasion. Serial 01504 was fully armed with air-to-air missiles while serial 71744 was partly painted to mark the disbandment. It wore different artwork on each side of the tail highlighting 65 years of operations by 'Aias'. Though 71744 is due for overhaul, it is expected

to return to operational service with 338 Mira, and is likely to retain these 339 Mira markings. Three F-4E AUP jets from 339 Mira flew during the ceremony, performing some flybys.

The standing down of the 'Nine-ers' also marked the expansion of its sister unit. The personnel and F-4s of 339 Mira merged with 338 'Ares' ('Mars') Mira on October 31. The unit will have approximately 25 operational Phantoms in its inventory. There are currently no plans to reduce the number of active aircraft in service.

Paul van den Hurk and Hans Looijmans



Above: Specially marked F-4E AUP serial 71744 at Andravida. While the 'Nine-ers' were primarily tasked with the air defence mission, the expanded 338 Mira will mainly conduct air-to-ground missions. Paul van den Hurk and Hans Looijmans