

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BOLD

USAF'S 80TH FIGHTER SQUADRON

READY TO TAKE THE FIGHT NORTH

Being part of the 7th Air Force, the 80th FS is one of the USAF squadrons that is closest to the North Korean border. Closest to an area related to very significant international tensions. While the escalation between the leaders of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States of America is rhetorical only, the actions taken by both Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump have kept the entire world gasping for their breath every now and then. The *Juvats / Headhunters* of the 80th Fighter Squadron keep training to be ready to support combat operations if called upon.

by Stefan Goossens / 4Aviation 



NO NEED TO DOUBT WHAT THE WOLF
PACK IS THERE FOR. A BUILDING ON BASE



80th Fighter Squadron – short history

The 80th Fighter Squadron *Juvats* flies the F-16CM/DM Block 40 out of Kunsan Air Base in the Republic of Korea. It comes under the command of Lt. Col. William D. 'Lewd' Lutmer. Together with 35th Fighter Squadron *Pantons* it is assigned to the 8th Operations Group of the 8th Fighter Wing, the *Wolf Pack*.

The unit stood up during World War II as the 80th Pursuit Squadron (interceptor). The unit was inactivated in 1945 before coming to life again at Itazuka AB, Japan in 1947. While in Japan again after the Korean war the squadron flew the F-86F, F-84G, F-100 and the F-105 before receiving the F-4C Phantom at Yokota Air Base (67/68). On 15 February 1971 the squadron moved to Kunsan.

At that point the unit began its process of inactivation. This process was halted and the unit saved after former *Headhunter* Lt. Gen. Jay T. 'Cock' Robbins intervened. The unit was re-staffed with new personnel, mainly from the 391st TFS. The 3rd

Tactical Fighter Wing became the parent unit. This wing was replaced by the 8th TFW on 16 September 1974.

In 1981 the 80th converted to the F-16A/B. In 1987 the A/B model F-16s were replaced by C/D Block 30 models. By 2008 these had been replaced by Block 40 versions, which the unit is currently still operating.

Headhunters, Juvats and Conan

When active in New Guinea in 1943 one of the first commanders (Capt Edward 'Porky' Cragg) decided to name the unit *Headhunters*. A name to remember the New Guinea natives that rescued downed P-38 pilots. Many pilots were returned to the Allied lines by sympathetic natives, thus saving them from the Japanese. The unit badge is also a direct reference and a tribute to the 'friends down in the jungle'.

The official squadron motto is *Audentes Fortuna Juvat* (Latin which is commonly translated into *Fortune favours the bold*). This motto was 'illegally' adopted from

the 391st TFS. The motto remained unofficial until 1986.

On how the nickname *Juvats* was born, the Official 80th FS Headhunters/*Juvats* Association website mentions; "The 391st Tactical Fighter Squadron's insignia was a tiger's head on an inverted triangular green background. Below the patch, on a rocker, was the 391st motto *Audentes Fortuna Juvat* [...] This motto subsequently became the new *Headhunters* motto. As the new *Headhunters* were removing their old 391st patches, they would grasp the triangular patch by the upper left hand corner to tear them off. All would tear off except the word *Juvat*. It caught on immediately."

The unit also took inspiration from the movie *Conan the Barbarian* when it comes to the unofficial motto (*What is good?*). The quote is derived from the movie quote "What is best in life?" When asked this question, Conan replies

"Crush your enemies [...]", while making a gesture with his arms, resembling two snakes facing each other. This "crush'em" gesture is currently used frequently by the airmen in the squadron and acknowledged by the ones the gesture is aimed at.

8th Fighter Wing and Kunsan Air Base

The 8th Fighter Wing is the host unit at Kunsan Air Base. The wing is known as the *Wolf Pack*, hence the *WP* code worn by all F-16s of both 8th Operations Group squadrons (35th and 80th). The nickname *Wolf Pack* stems from the time when



F-16C DEPARTING OSAN AB AFTER THE 2009 AIR POWER DAY



80TH FS TOOK INSPIRATION FROM THE MOVIE CONAN THE BARBARIAN FOR THE



USAF FILE PHOTO. RELATIVELY NEW, SINCE 121 IS STILL THE 80TH FS CO'S AIRCRAFT

Col Olds was the wing commander. The wings motto; Defend the Base, Accept Follow-On Forces, Take the Fight North.

The wing now operates from Kunsan Air Base, a base that was built by the Japanese in 1938. After the Korean Conflict until 1965 the base is mainly used as a temporary base for units. Today the base employs around 2,700 people.

The ROKAF calls Kunsan home as well. The base houses the ROKAF 38th Fighter, operating F-16C/D Block 52 aircraft within the 111th Fighter Squadron, nicknamed *Tigers*.

Col. David G. Shoemaker, the 8th FW commander, describes the specifics of the base as follows; "The ironclad alliance between the US and Republic of Korea is evident in everything we do. Here at Kunsan Air Base, we train with the 38th Fighter Group of the ROKAF. We enjoy friendships at a personal level while providing for the collective defense of the peninsula and the region. The USAF and ROKAF also work side-by-side in the Air Component headquarters. The saying "Katchi Kapshida" ("We Go Together") is strong at every level. This is my third yearlong assignment to Kunsan AB in the past 12 years, and the capability of the

ROKAF/USAF has improved exponentially in that time. We've developed our ability to train and fight together through Red Flags and our Peninsula-wide exercises Max Thunder and Vigilant Ace. Our goal is the same: peace on the peninsula. We hone our craft and ensure our readiness to deter attack. But if called upon to defend our neighbors and allies, may God have mercy on the *Wolf Pack's* prey."

Busy Headhunters and busy base

With the threat from the North being ever-present and real, the base is extremely active and always on a high state of readiness. This means lots of regular training missions, day in day out, and lots of exercises for both the 80th and Kunsan Air Base, while constantly focusing on the wing's mission; Defend the Base, Accept Follow-On Forces, Take the Fight North.

In 2017 alone, without pretending the list to be complete, the *Juvats* were involved in;

Buddy Wing 17-3 (six F-16s to Seosan AB ROKAF between 27 and 31 March 2017)

Max Thunder 2017 (the second largest flying exercise on the Korean Peninsula, involving 80 aircraft, both USAF and ROKAF, a Red Flag like exercise at Kunsan, between 17

and 28 April 2017)

Beverly Pack 17-2, (operational readiness exercises, practice the war time mission in a controlled environment, March)

Red Flag Alaska 17-3 (between 27 July and 11 August 2017)

Beverly Pack 17-3 (August 2017)
Buddy Wing 17-6 (Chungju AB ROKAF F-16Cs to Kunsan, September 2017)

Beverly Pack 18-1 (October 2017)

Vigilant ACE 2018 (the largest ever joint air exercise between South Korea and the US, involving 230 aircraft, between 4 and 8 December 2017)

Future

As long as there is no regime change in the North, the *Juvats* (and the entire *Wolf Pack*) will most likely be around. Operating from Kunsan and preparing for a conflict that everybody hopes will never happen. Col. Shoemaker; "Looking into the future, our focus remains unflinchingly on the mission. It does not get much simpler for us here. We know the threat is to the north, and our primary mission statement is to "Take the Fight North." The Airmen here understand that: the engineers and support Airmen who keep the base running; our

maintainers working hard at all hours of the day and night under extreme weather conditions to keep our fighters airworthy and lethal; our fighter pilots who are on their A-game 100 percent of the time... all of our Airmen accomplish these things daily in the face of very real threat a few miles north. In the future, we will remain ready to support combat operations if called upon."

Having these military options available to the US is a must for South Korea, the US and in fact the entire world. Nobody knows how the situation will develop from where it stands now. After their envoy to the DPRK met with the DPRK minister and vice-minister of foreign affairs, the UN recently stated that they agreed that the current situation was the most tense and dangerous peace and security issue in the world today.

Maybe one of the best options suggested recently was in a tweet by Jocko Willink; "Drop 25 million iPhones on them and put satellites over them with free wifi."

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SHOTS OF THE 8TH OG COMMANDER'S AIRCRAFT.



USAF FILE PHOTO OF COL SHOEMAKER.