



Postcard from Bangkok

AFM contributor **Dietmar Fenners** was in Thailand for the annual National Children's Day in January when all the air force, army and navy bases open their doors to the public. The main event for the Kong Thap Akat Thai (Royal Thai Air Force, RTAF), takes place at Don Muang air base in Bangkok and featured an extensive flypast.



Above: The 102 Squadron Fighting Falcons flew a mock dogfight over the base together with T-50TH serial KhF2-1/61 (c/n 18-0001), coded 40101. Intended to replace the Aero L-39, four T-50THs were ordered in 2015 and eight more were added in July 2017. The first two Golden Eagles were delivered to Thailand in January 2018 and commissioned into service that April. Currently, eight are in service with 401 Squadron 'Dragon' at Takhli air base. Under a contract signed last May, Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI) will upgrade Thailand's fleet of T-50THs, adding radar (most likely the Israeli Elta EL/M-2032), radar warning receiver and countermeasures dispenser. Above right: Airbus Helicopters H225M serial H11-6/59 (c/n 3010), coded 20306, of 203 Squadron 'Scorpion' from Lop Buri. Approval to purchase an initial four Cougars, in (combat) search and rescue configuration, was announced in August 2012, and options on a further six were discussed, based on further funds becoming available. A contract for the first four was confirmed the following month. Another pair of Cougars was then added to the order, for delivery in 2017, and this revised contract was made public in October 2014. In February 2015 Airbus Helicopters announced that an initial EC725 (now known as H225M) for the RTAF had been handed over at the company's facilities in Marignane, France. In September 2018 the company announced the sale of four more aircraft to Thailand, to provide a fleet of 12 by next year. Aircraft seven and eight were delivered the following month.



Above: One of three Fairchild Hiller AU-23As involved in the flypast - serial JTh2-33/19 (c/n 2092, ex 74-2092), coded 42092, of 501 Squadron 'Mosquito' from Prachuap/Khiri Khan air base is seen here with launchers under the wing for 70mm (2.75in) smoke rockets. Beginning in the early 1970s, the RTAF received 34 Peacemakers - a further example being lost during crew training in the United States pre-delivery. The most recent attrition losses occurred on September 6, 2005 and March 5, 2019. The current fleet is thought to total 11 aircraft, with 13 examples having been lost to attrition. **Left:** The event at Don Muang started at 0815hrs on January 11 with a flyby of F-16AM serial Kh19-27/38 (c/n HN-03), coded 40309/90022, from 403 Squadron 'Cobra' at Takhli. This airframe was recently reported as in use as an instructional airframe at Takhli. It was one of the 12 single-seat Block 15 OCU jets delivered in the mid-1990s (together with six two-seat F-16Bs) under the Peace Naresuan III deal and was later upgraded to F-16AM standard. The first of a dozen F-16As to be inducted into the MLU programme was a Block 15 jet that had been delivered in 1995. After being upgraded it was accepted during a ceremony at Thai Aviation Industries' facilities in November 2012. The modernisation adds AN/APG-68(V)9 radar, AN/APX-113 combined interrogator and transponder, AN/ALQ-213 electronic warfare management system and AN/ALE-47 countermeasures dispenser. All photos Dietmar Fenners



Above left: Two 102 Squadron 'Star' F-16A ADFs arrived from Korat, including this jet, c/n 61-384/M19-12. Although coded 10213/KRT, its full RTAF serial is unknown. The air arm took delivery of 15 ex-USAF F-16A ADFs, produced in Fiscal Years 1980 to 1982, and supplied to Thailand between August 2002 and April 2003. A mid-air collision resulted in the loss of two aircraft on February 14, 2011, with both pilots ejecting to safety. Another F-16A of this variant may have been damaged beyond economical repair when it ran into a drainage ditch at Korat on June 24, 2015. The pilot ejected and escaped serious injury, but photographs showed the aircraft suffered structural damage. As well as the single-seat ADF jets, 102 Squadron also took receipt of a single ex-USAF F-16B 'twin-sticker' from Fiscal Year 1982. **Above right:** All three protagonists have just landed after a mock dogfight over Don Muang. The same display was performed again in the afternoon. In the centre is F-16 ADF c/n 61-371/M19-6, coded 10207/KRT, from 102 Squadron 'Star' at Korat. **Below:** RTAF F-5T Tigris serial Kh18Kh-20/24 (c/n TU.1003), coded 21120/91683, from 211 Squadron 'Hawk'. This is former F-5E 79-1683. An initial batch of 16 F-5Es was delivered to the RTAF from mid-1978. Another batch of 19 arrived between 1979 and 1981, followed by a final delivery of five ex-USAF aircraft acquired in 1988. Under the F-5T Tigris programme launched in 2003, Elbit Systems performed upgrades to 12 F-5Es (plus three two-seat F-5Fs), adding the Elta EL/M-2032 radar and Rafael Python 4 air-to-air missiles. In the next phase of modernisation, seven surviving F-5E and F-5T aircraft began to be upgraded to F-5TH Super Tigris standard from 2015, with four more contracted in 2017. A joint Thai Aviation Industries and Elbit Systems project, the Super Tigris was formally inducted in November 2019, by 211 Squadron at Ubon Ratchathani air base. It includes the Litening III targeting pod, Python 5 and Derby missiles, Sky Shield jamming pod, new mission computer, new head-up display, colour multifunction displays and enhanced countermeasures systems. A pair of two-seaters is also being upgraded to F-5TH Super Tigris standard.

