

YOKOTA AIR BASE HISTORY



Yokota Air Base (YAB) has a rich history that spans more than seven decades.

Imperial Japanese Army Air Period: 1940-45



Yokota was originally constructed by the Imperial Japanese Army as Fussa Air Field which was activated on 15 Aug 1940. During WWII it was a training base and secret aircraft test and development center, with the US only learning of its existence through reconnaissance in late 1944. As a result, the base suffered minimal damage during WWII. This allowed the Americans to use many of YAB's wartime facilities such as the old operations building (1945 photo), a structure that survived until fairly recently.

Occupation Period: 1945-51

The first Americans to arrive at YAB — a handful of 1st Cavalry Division soldiers led by a 1Lt — took possession of the base on 3 Sep 45, and Maj Benjamin Hayes accepted the surrender sword from Maj Gen Yamaguchi Tsuchio on 6 Sep. About ten days later the first American airplanes landed at Yokota: C-46s from the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th Combat Cargo Squadrons ferrying supplies and men for the Occupation. By the end of 1945 the original runway had become unusable, and for nearly a year construction crews rebuilt and extended the runway for B-29s. During this time units assigned to YAB flew out of nearby Tachikawa and Johnson Air Bases. On 15 Aug 46 YAB was declared operational and officially dedicated by 5th AF commander Maj Gen Kenneth Wolfe (photo) who arrived in a B-17, followed by fifteen A-26s from the 3rd Bomb Group that became the base operating unit. Soon after various other units began flight operations here, including recon, air rescue, and weather.



Dependents began arriving at YAB in Aug 1946, but had to live in hotels while waiting for on-base housing to be completed. Children initially attended school in Yokota's chapel. Along with *Stars and Stripes*, YAB's chief form of information was the base paper then called *Third Strike* (it

was briefly renamed *Plane Talk* and then *Flight Lines* in 1950, *Afterburner* in the mid-1950s, and *Fuji Flyer* in 1970). FEN Tokyo (now AFN) radio went on the air in Sep 1945, and though there were on-base movie theaters there was still no TV at this time. Phone calls home remained a rare luxury for decades.



Korean War Period: 1950-53

At the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 Yokota's fortunes changed dramatically. Among the numerous bases in Japan YAB was chosen as HQ for the newly formed FEAF Bomber Command, and was also home to B-29 squadrons that flew regular missions to Korea (1953 photo, Maj James Howell). The Yokota-based bombing missions continued for three years, helping to bring about the ceasefire that eventually allowed South Korea to freely develop into the economic powerhouse it is today.



Cold War Period: Post-Korean War to 1965

The AF's dominant symbol of the Cold War, SAC, made its appearance at YAB in 1956 when it established a detachment of the 3rd Air Division to handle B-36, B-47, and B-52 bomber rotations. At the same time YAB had significant fighter (1954 photo, F-86D), recon, and light bomber operations.



The 56th WRS chased typhoons from YAB using WB-29s, WB-50s, and later WC-130s and WB-47s. Meanwhile, the first C-130s, used for recon (6091st SRS), arrived here in April 1961. In 1962 F-102 "Delta Daggers" from the 40th FIS (emblem) and the YAB flightline were filmed for the Japanese monster movie *Mothra*, though the F-102 footage was not used.



Starting during the Korean War and into the present, Yokota's residents have actively cultivated positive relations with our Japanese hosts through open houses (1961 poster), participation in festivals and friendship societies, supporting charities such as orphanages, and assisting nearby communities in times of drought and other natural disasters. Local community relations have been a long and important part of Yokota's history.



Vietnam War Period: 1965-73

YAB was also a fighter base for much of the Vietnam War (6441st TFW and 347th TFW), regularly deploying F-105s, and later F-4s, to Southeast Asia. The F-4s departed for good in 1971, leaving YAB without fighters or bombers for the first time in its history. Moreover, when the 67th TRS and 56th WRS left YAB in the early 1970s another era closed.

On the other hand, MATS (now AMC) activated a squadron here in the early 1960s, followed by a group in 1966, and has been at the base ever since. The first UH-1s arrived at Yokota in 1971 and have been flying DV airlift continuously through the present. On the entertainment front YAB's Vietnam period saw an influx of famous names including Sammy Davis Jr. (1973 photo), Tony Bennett, Neil Sedaka, Nancy Sinatra, Muhammad Ali, Johnny Cash, and Joe Namath.



Kanto Plain Consolidation

In the early 1970s the Air Force decided to return most of its Kanto-area properties to the Japanese government, consolidating all administration, operations, housing annexes, and schools at Yokota. Flight operations ceased at Tachikawa AB (now Showa Park) in 1969, and the AF released that huge base to GOJ in 1977. Meanwhile, Grant Heights, Green Park, and Johnson AS housing areas were shuttered in 1973. This consolidation occurred alongside residential development of the East Side where the Garden Units opened in 1972, while the towers were constructed during 1973-76 (photo). 5th AF moved to Yokota from Fuchu AS in late 1974 after its new HQ building and general quarters were completed.



To the Present

The frenzy of activity at Yokota during the Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War, and consolidation period contrasts greatly with the relative calmness and stability much of the last four decades. Nevertheless, the base saw significant construction during the late 1970s, 1980s, 1990s (Wing HQ and Ops bldg, South and West Side Towers and Garden Units, YCC), and most recently JASDF's ADC project from 2007-12. In Sep 1975 YAB received an airlift mission with the activation of 345th TAS, a mission that continues to the present under the 36th AS. On 1 Oct 1989 MAC's 374th Tactical Airlift Wing arrived from Clark AB, Philippines. In 1992 that organization was re-designated as the 374th AW and turned over to PACAF, replacing the long-standing 475th ABW as base operating unit.

A salient feature of the last three decades has been Yokota's involvement in numerous humanitarian operations, including Baby Lift and New Life (1975), Sea Angel (1991), Fiery Vigil (1991), Pacific Haven (1996), Indian Ocean Tsunami Relief (2004-05), Caring Response (2008), and Operation Tomodachi in 2011 (photo).



Although the 374th shares a lineage with the 374th Troop Carrier Group back to WWII, its history as a wing dates to 1948. At that time the 374th Troop Carrier Wing operated from Harmon Field, Guam (Aug 1948 – Mar 1949), flying C-54s and providing troop transport in the Pacific and Far East. The unit moved to Japan in March 1949 when it assumed control over Tachikawa AB through 1 Jan 1956. When the Korean War broke out in June 1950 the wing performed combat airlift, airdrops, and aeromedical evacuation in Korea, and also flew courier flights throughout the Pacific area. At the end of the war the 374th transported the first of several groups of repatriated POWs from Korea to Japan in April 1953 (**Op LITTLE SWITCH**), and subsequently transported UN POWs (**Op BIG SWITCH**) from North Korea.

In 1954 the 374th operated in Indo-China, flying in observers, maintenance personnel, and liaison officers, as well as evacuating wounded French troops. 374th Airmen also trained JASDF C-46 pilots from Nov 1954 to May 1955. On 1 Jul 1957 374 TCW was transferred to Military Air Transport Service (MATS) and was inactivated. On 8 Aug 1966 the wing was reactivated at Naha AB, Okinawa, assuming a mission heavily involved in airlift to Southeast Asia, as well as intra-theater airlift for elements of the Pacific Command.

The wing phased down for another inactivation in early 1971, but on 31 May the 374th replaced the 314th Tactical Airlift Wing at Ching Chuan Kang AB in Taichung, Taiwan and remained heavily committed in support of Southeast Asian operations. One of the wing's humanitarian missions—flood relief in the Philippines—earned it a **Philippine Republic Presidential Unit Citation** in 1972. The wing also provided support in Mar 1973 for **Op HOMECOMING**, the repatriation of US POWs from Hanoi. The 374th moved to Clark AB, Philippines in Nov 1973.

After the war the 374th took part in **Op BABY LIFT** (Vietnamese orphans evacuation), and **Op NEW LIFE** (Vietnamese refugees evacuation) in Apr 1975 for which the unit received an Outstanding Unit Award with Combat V device. During the recovery of the SS Mayaguez from the Cambodians in May 1975, a 374th aircraft dropped a 15k-pound bomb on Koh Tang Island to create a helicopter landing area. The wing became part of the Military Airlift Command (MAC) on 31 Mar 1975, at which time it gained a medical airlift mission in the Far East.

In 1980 the 374th began supporting US Navy elements in the Indian Ocean area. The unit moved to Yokota in 1989, and, similar to its current support of operations in Southwest Asia, from 30 Dec 1990 to 6 Jul 1991 the Wing was involved in **DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM** by deploying C-130s, associated aircrews and support personnel for operations in the SW Asia Theater. The wing provided airlift and medical airlift for the evacuation of Clark AB after the 1991 eruption of Mt. Pinatubo. In Apr 1992 the 374th became an airlift wing under control of PACAF.

In Dec 2004 the 374 AW was the first organization to respond to the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster: The first wing, the first aircraft, and the first mission on the ground. Similarly, C-130s from

the 374th were the first American aircraft to enter Burma (Myanmar) after the May 2008 cyclone, bringing in hundreds of tons of humanitarian supplies to that stricken country. After the 11 March 2011 Great East Japan earthquake disaster 374 AW played a key role in humanitarian airlift support, aerial radiation mapping, and bedding down deployed US service members.

374th Airlift Wing Commanders

Col George R. Durham, Jr	1 Apr 1992
Brig Gen Michael J. McCarthy	11 Jun 1992
Brig Gen Kenneth W. Hess	30 Aug 1994
Col Edward L. LaFontaine	13 Nov 1995
Col Alan J. Briding	28 Feb 1997
Col Mark A. Volcheff	14 Aug 1998
Col Mark R. Zamzow	11 Jan 2000
Brig Gen Mark E. Stearns	25 Oct 2001
Col Mark O. Schissler	15 Jul 2003
Col Scott P. Goodwin	1 Jun 2005
Col John F. Newell III	19 Jul 2007
Col John M. Hicks	14 Apr 2009
Col Paul E. Feather	15 May 2010
Col William M. Knight	23 Mar 2012

HONORS

Campaign Streamers Korea: UN Defensive, UN Offensive, Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) Intervention, First UN Counteroffensive, CCF Spring Offensive, UN Summer-Fall Offensive, Second Korean Winter, Korea Summer-Fall 1952, Third Korean Winter, Korea Summer 1953

DECORATIONS

Presidential Unit Citation Vietnam, 8Aug67 – 7Aug68; AF Outstanding Unit Award w/ Combat "V" Device: 12Feb–17May75; Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards: 8Aug66–7Aug67, 1Jul83–30Jun85, 30Sep92–1Oct94, 1Oct94–30Sep96, 1Oct96–30Sep97, 1Oct98–30Sep00, 1Oct00–30Sep02, 2Nov08–1Nov09; 2Nov09–1Nov11; Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation: 1Jul51–27Jul53; Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross w/ Palm: 1Apr66–28Jan73; Philippine Republic Presidential Unit Citation: 21Jul–15Aug72

WWII BESTOWED HONORS (from 374 TCG)

Campaign Streamers World War II

Air Offensive, Japan, Papua New Guinea, Northern Solomons, Bismarck Archipelago, Western Pacific, Leyte, Luzon, S. Philippines

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations: Papua, [Nov] 1942–23 Jan 1943; Papua, 12Nov–22Dec42; Wau, New Guinea, 30Jan–1Feb43; Philippine Presidential Unit Citation

374th Airlift Wing History Office, 2012

A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE 374TH AIRLIFT WING AND YOKOTA AB



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