

The 3rd Air Expeditionary Group formed up in May to provide additional tactical air assets in Korea.

FORWARD DEPLOY

Photography by Guy Aceto, Art Director, and Paul Kennedy

Members of the 3rd Wing, Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, arrive at Kwangju AB, South Korea, to support the deployment of their F-15Es.

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The Balkan War affected forces well outside that immediate theater. The Air Force quickly deployed Pacific Air Forces units and individual troops to form the 3rd Air Expeditionary Group. The purpose was to fill a gap in Korea created by temporary removal of a carrier battle group from the Pacific region. USS Kitty Hawk went to bolster US forces in Southwest Asia when USS Theodore Roosevelt moved to the Mediterranean to support Operation Allied Force. At left, personnel from the 3rd Wing, Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, arrive at Kwangju AB in South Korea via a commercial contract aircraft. In all, some 640 personnel from eight different bases came to Kwangju, which is about 160 miles south of Seoul and serves as a military facility and civil airport. A small detachment of PACAF forces maintains nearly 250 acres of the base year-round.



Recent confrontations between North and South Korea underscore the constant tensions in the area. At the United Nations security area at Panmunjom on the border between the two rival nations, a South Korean soldier (right) helps maintain the watch that has continued since the Korean War ended in 1953.



At Osan AB, South Korea, 38 miles south of Seoul—South Korea's capital—and 50 miles from the border, USAF security forces (left, foreground) use M-113 armored personnel carriers in addition to standard security vehicles to patrol the base. In the background, a Patriot missile battery continuously points north.



Photo by Guy Aceto

Protective revetments harbor Elmendorf's 90th Fighter Squadron F-15Es, the 3rd AEG's fighting component in the Kwangju deployment. The 90th, known as "Pair o' Dice," is the only F-15E unit in PACAF and consequently deploys often. The "Dicemen" trace their heritage to 1917, flying a variety of aircraft and earning distinction in every war through Desert Storm.



Photo by Paul Kennedy



Photos by Guy Aceto

While at Kwangju, the unit's 18 F-15Es participated in Cope Jade, a joint exercise between air, sea, and land forces of the US and South Korea. During their deployment, the Dicemen flew more than 470 sorties. Aircraft joining in Cope Jade also included USAF F-16s (like the one above), F-15Cs, and an E-3 AWACS from units in the area.



In his regulation bicycle helmet, SMSgt. Thomas Pelfrey, 3rd AEF first sergeant, checks out the 90th FS flight line at Kwangju. Pelfrey, as part of the advance cadre of troops at the temporary base, helped ensure base infrastructure was ready for the main force.



South Koreans, at left and below, prepare food for USAF personnel at Kwangju. With their help, the 3rd AEG Services Squadron got the dining facility operating in record time—and with good reviews.



Teamwork. There's no deployment without communications. It was the task of members of the 354th Communications Squadron, Eielson AFB, Alaska, to set up secure satellite communications systems at Kwangju. At right, A1C Christopher D. Bartlett checks out part of the satellite system. As one of the first elements to arrive, the communications team might have expected some initial hardships, but, as one team member noted—giving credit to billeting troops—they were in their rooms within an hour of arrival.



Elmendorf also supplied firefighters for the deployment. The USAF firemen arrived in advance of the 90th's F-15Es. As shown at left, the firefighters got right to work, stationing their boots and fire-retardant clothing at the ready in the base firehouse. The deployment even had its own newsletter, the Pacific Expedition. One issue reminded troops about chapel activities, post office hours, laundry service, equipment in the gym, and provided updates on the availability of TVs and VCRs—a touch of home.



About 110 miles south of Seoul is Kunsan AB, South Korea, home to PACAF's 8th Fighter Wing. The "Wolf Pack," which came to Kunsan in 1974, has two F-16 squadrons, the 35th FS and 80th FS. The wing's heritage dates to World War II, but it was Col. Robin Olds, the unit commander during the Vietnam War, who provided the wing's nickname.



F-16s at Kunsan and Osan, joined the 90th and other US forces in the Cope Jade exercise. The F-16 airmen showed their versatility as they took on roles as both aggressors and allies. One of the chief benefits of the exercise, according to Col. James E. Reed, 3rd AEG commander, was the opportunity to experience and refine the command, control, and communications process for a diverse group of forces.



The 8th FW personnel, unlike their 3rd AEG counterparts, are in South Korea for a one-year tour. Kunsan has all the usual Stateside amenities, from a fitness center to a base exchange food court, with pizza, burger, and ice cream vendors just like home—but on a smaller scale.



Airlifters played a key role in the deployment. Establishing the 3rd AEG at Kwangju required movement of nearly one million pounds by nine C-5s, two C-130s, and a commercial contract aircraft.



Above, a C-130 flight crew from Elmendorf's 517th Airlift Squadron hangs loose on the way from Kunsan back to Yokota AB, Japan. The 517th routinely flies some of the resupply missions between Japan and units in South Korea to supplement the C-130s of the 374th Airlift Wing at Yokota. At right, navigator Capt. Rob Wannner checks the position of an Elmendorf C-130 on one of its supply runs.



The Air Force ensures that troops can take a break from the mission. Basketball is a typical pastime at most American facilities. However, even Kwangju offered more—the 3rd AEG Services Squadron set up a base theater, a recreation center complete with video games, Ping-Pong, and darts, and arranged overnight weekend tours to Osan, a much larger facility and close to Seoul.



Kwangju has only a few permanent aircraft shelters available. Above, protective steel revetments not only provide some protection for the 90th's F-15Es but also create a more secure environment for maintenance crews as they work on the aircraft.



The F-15Es from the Pair o' Dice at Elmendorf could make plans to return to their home base with the end of the Balkan War. However, for one of PACAF's most in-demand units, the next deployment is probably not far off.

Along with the Dicemen from Elmendorf, the 3rd AEG team included forces from Andersen AFB, Guam, Eielson AFB, Alaska, Hickam AFB, Hawaii, Kadena and Yokota ABs, Japan, and Kunsan and Osan.



Forces in South Korea are daily "at the tip of the spear," to quote the Kunsan AB welcome brochure. At left and above, security forces specialists at Kwangju perform flight line security. The potential for hostilities is still high, and USAF forces are at the edge. ■