

The 35th Fighter Wing is the vital link at a base combining elements of four US services and Japan's air self-defense forces.

Misawa's Weasels

Four of the 35th Fighter Wing's F-16s soar above the volcanic crater lake Toya, part of the Shikotsu-Toya National Park on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. The snow-capped extinct volcano Yotei-zan rises in the distance.



Staff photo by Guy Aceto

Photography by Guy Aceto, Art Director, and Paul Kennedy



Located along the northern edge of the Japanese island of Honshu, Misawa AB is home to more than 3,000 members of the Japan Air Self-Defense Force and members of each branch of the US military, with USAF's 35th Fighter Wing as host unit. It's a mix that makes Misawa the only combined-service installation in the western Pacific and an important air base on the Asian rim.

The wing has been integral to the effort to develop the weapons and tactics that are part of their current Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses mission. The F-16CJ aircraft that the wing flies today are direct descendents of the "Wild Weasel" F-105s and F-4s that were used at George AFB, Calif., in the early 1970s to train aircrews for SEAD operations in both the Pacific and European theaters.



At right, a Japanese policeman assists US security forces at the Misawa AB main gate. Japanese civilian guards assigned to the 35th Security Forces Squadron wear the distinctive USAF beret with security flash and the DoD Special Police badge.



The job on the flight line is essentially the same no matter where you're stationed, but the Japanese culture and lifestyle make a three-year tour at Misawa—located in an agricultural area 400 miles north of Tokyo—unique for most airmen and their families. Service and support organizations have an important role, providing everything from language lessons to an award-winning commissary, dining facility, and outdoor-recreation organization. Misawa also uses a Spouses Together and Ready program. A STAR representative conveys to the squadron commander the concerns of family members and in turn passes along information.



The 35th Fighter Wing originally was activated at Johnson AB, Japan, in August 1948 and, under several subsequent designations, participated in the Korean War and the Vietnam War. The wing was briefly inactivated in July 1971, then activated as the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing at George AFB in October 1971. Wing units participated in Operation Desert Storm in 1991.



The next year, with the closure of George AFB, the wing once again was inactivated for a short time. It was reborn in May 1993 as the 35th Wing at NAS Keflavik, Iceland, where members flew F-15s. In September 1994, the 35th inactivated once again, then a day later returned to Japan to activate as the 35th Fighter Wing at Misawa AB.



The 35th FW and JASDF units regularly participate in joint exercises like Cope North to enhance air operations. Whether training with local fire departments or using the capabilities of a Japanese E-3 Hawkeye airborne warning and control aircraft (left), Misawa's personnel demonstrate the value of an integrated force.



At left, Capt. Valerie Tigno gives Dana McIntyre's son, Jackson, a checkup at Misawa's 25-bed medical facility.

Besides accomplishing its daily medical care, the wing's medical group created the only USAF Class C laboratory licensed to process blood products. It also has DoD's only complete blood program, housing under one roof a donor center, trans-shipment center, and frozen blood depot. Additionally, the group has agreements with local medical facilities to provide diagnostic services, such as MRIs and CAT scans, for US personnel. This enables the unit to cut costs by about 30 percent while still providing necessary services to base personnel and their families.

Because of frequent deployments on top of regular flying activities, the survival equipment personnel keep busy. At right, Amn. Torin W. Cutsinger, a survival equipment apprentice, makes some repairs. Below, winter in northern Japan means a heavier anti-exposure flying suit. Misawa averages about 10 feet of snow annually.



At left, A1C Scott A. Wold and SSgt. Dale E. Ludwig inspect an ejection seat's parachute and harness system. Regular and detailed inspection is important to make certain this equipment works as expected. The specialists in the survival equipment shop perform detail work that may go unnoticed—until an aircrew finds itself in an emergency.



The 35th Maintenance Squadron originally was expected to support just the F-16s at Misawa. Today, it provides intermediate level F-16 engine support for "Vipers" from Kunsan and Osan ABs, South Korea, as well. The squadron's "hush house" (at top) is the most modern facility around and is able to test the engines more thoroughly than the other bases.



Responsible for more than 150 F-16 engines from the three air bases, squadron personnel take from 18 to 36 days to overhaul an engine, and on any given day they have about 20 in various stages of repair. These skilled and meticulous maintainers disassemble the engines, making upgrades or replacing parts, reassemble the engines, and test them in the hush house.



Above, A1C Rachel Keenan works on one of the huge engines. At far left, A1C Charles Blessing starts an inspection of one of the sets of fan blades. At left, A1C Jennifer Denton finds the next tool she'll need to finish the day's work.





An array of "golf balls" marks the Misawa Cryptologic Operations Center (left) and the 3rd Space Surveillance Squadron (below). An all-services operation, MCOC conducts information operations and supports the High-speed Anti-Radiation Missile targeting systems of the wing's F-16CJs. The 3rd SSS collects data to catalog and identify Earth-orbiting objects.



During a preflight mission briefing at the 13th Fighter Squadron, Capt. Steve Hickey points out where the next sortie will be headed. A number of instrumented ranges are available, including some on the Korean peninsula. Upgrades and realistic training help keep the teeth of the new Weasels sharp.



Photo by Paul Kennedy



The 35th FW is one of four fighter wings in USAF carrying out the Wild Weasel mission, and its SEAD expertise is much needed in today's hot spots. In March, eight F-16CJs and about 150 support people from the 14th FS and 35th Maintenance and Supply Squadrons deployed to Southwest Asia for Operation Southern Watch, enforcement of the no-fly zone over southern Iraq. It was the fourth time since 1996 that the wing had sent its jets into the Persian Gulf region. Because of the Balkan War, wing personnel stayed at Prince Sultan AB, Saudi Arabia, until June, when wing personnel from the 13th FS and 35th MXS traded places with them. At left is an F-16CJ, ready to go.



With more than half of one squadron's aircraft and personnel deploying to the Persian Gulf at one time, the 35th decided to consolidate the remaining squadron assets with its other fighter squadron to form a "super squadron." During the deployment, the home-based super squadron enabled the units to spread the workload at Misawa.



Photos by Paul Kennedy



Pilots from the 13th FS flew 14th FS aircraft and vice versa, and ground crews from the two squadrons worked together to turn jets. Another plus was that squadron members were able to share ideas more easily—enhancing and standardizing operations for both units.



The combat-ready 35th Fighter Wing and the joint services operations at Misawa play an important role in helping DoD project the forward presence that maintains stability in the Asian-Pacific region. ■