



# The Mustang Line



*A pair of heavily armed F-16Cs belonging to the 51st Fighter Wing at Osan Air Base flies over South Korea, with the Sea of Japan in the background. The weapons load carried by these fighters signifies both the versatility of the Fighting Falcon and the magnitude of the threat posed by North Korea.*



**At Osan AB, South Korea, A-10s and F-16s of the 51st Fighter Wing “Mustangs” keep the edge perpetually sharp.**

**Photography by Jim Haseltine**

**T**he United States has been committed to defending South Korea since North Korea's 1950 invasion. The Air Force today maintains a force of roughly 9,000 airmen at Osan Air Base and Kunsan Air Base on the Korean Peninsula. This helps to demonstrate commitment, deter communist North Korea, and, if necessary, provide the means to defeat an invasion.

At right, two F-16s with Osan's 51st Fighter Wing fly over the Pyongtaek Bridge, south of Incheon Airport near Seoul. Both the South Korean capital and Osan are just a few minutes' flight time from the border with North Korea.



The 51st flies both multirole F-16s and ground-attack A-10s. At left, two Warthogs of the 25th Fighter Squadron embark on a training exercise. The A-10 at far left releases a flare while breaking away from the formation, showing its impressive ordnance load.

Best known for its 30 mm, nose-mounted, armor-piercing Gatling gun, the Warthog also has 11 hardpoints on which to mount pods, fuel tanks, and weapons.

At right, A-10s and F-16s traverse South Korean mountain ranges. Airmen typically deploy to Korea for one-year unaccompanied tours. Their relative isolation allows them to focus single-mindedly on their mission.





*Security forces personnel SrA. Casey Bennett (foreground) and A1C Jacob Sprick (in Humvee) stand watch in front of a US Army Patriot missile air defense artillery battery. Osan is within range of North Korean ballistic missiles.*

*Below, fuel technicians refuel an F-16 parked inside a hardened aircraft shelter.*



*Above, a ground crew member marshals fighters into the postflight inspection area.*

*At right, an A-10 undergoes postflight inspection. Ground crews are searching for any damage incurred on the sortie and will "safe" any weapons still hanging on the aircraft.*



*Four A-10 Warthogs of the 25th FS prepare to head out on another mission. The pilots and maintainers at Osan turn in a high sortie rate to keep their skills sharp.*

*At right, an F-16 releases a flare as it peels away from its partner. Should a war break out on the Korean Peninsula, the 36th Fighter Squadron's multirole "Vipers" would be among the first aircraft to see combat.*



*A pair of F-16s patrol South Korean skies near Seoul. In the foreground is the 51st FW's flag aircraft. The F-16's versatility is illustrated by the AIM-120 AMRAAM missiles that offer beyond-visual-range air-to-air capability and the large, external fuel tanks that extend the aircraft's range and endurance.*

*The ground crew member below places a pin in an A-10's Maverick air-to-ground missile, indicating the AGM-65 has been safed after flight. The rocket-powered Maverick is highly regarded as a close air support and interdiction weapon.*



*Above, an A-10 taxis back for its post-mission check.*





*Above, an F-16 and A-10 dispense flares while performing evasive maneuvers on training missions. Flares are a defensive countermeasure to defeat heat-seeking missiles.*

*At right, an A-10 crew chief prepares the egress ladder as the pilot shuts down his engines. Visible in the foreground is the front of an ALQ-184 electronic countermeasures pod, used to foil radar guided missiles.*



*Far left, a pilot inspects the ALQ-184 ECM pod hanging beneath his F-16.*

*Airman at left is performing an inspection on an F-16's short-range AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missile.*

*The F-16 at right has just released a 2,000-pound satellite guided GBU-31 Joint Direct Attack Munition. The Air Force is counting on such precision guided weapons to counter the vast North Korean military. Global Positioning System accuracy means that JDAMs are unaffected by the frequent clouds and rain on the Korean Peninsula.*



*At left, A-10s return to Osan after a training mission. Maintaining access to quality live-fire training ranges is a challenge in Korea, much as it is in the US, but the crews pride themselves on keeping a high level of proficiency.*

*Below, Capt. Brett Rurka (l) and Capt. Chris Olsen, both of the 36th FS, head toward their F-16s parked in hardened aircraft shelters.*



*The white-clad airman above is entering the air intake of an F-16 to check for engine blade damage.*





At top left, an F-16 shows off its arsenal, including JDAMs. Top right, an F-16 releases 500-pound Paveway II laser guided bombs.

Osan is the Air Force's permanent base closest to a "front line." It is just 48 miles from the Demilitarized Zone that separates North and South Korea. As such, Osan must be able to accommodate resupply, such as from the C-5 Galaxy above.



Hardened aircraft shelters (above and left) help protect against enemy attack. With a belligerent and heavily armed adversary just to the north, the airmen with the 51st FW pride themselves on being "ready to fight tonight." ■