

**Vegetation Control and other uses
of Herbicides and Toxic Chemicals at
Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base
1967 to 1972**

Information Compiled by:

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Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base 1967 - 1972
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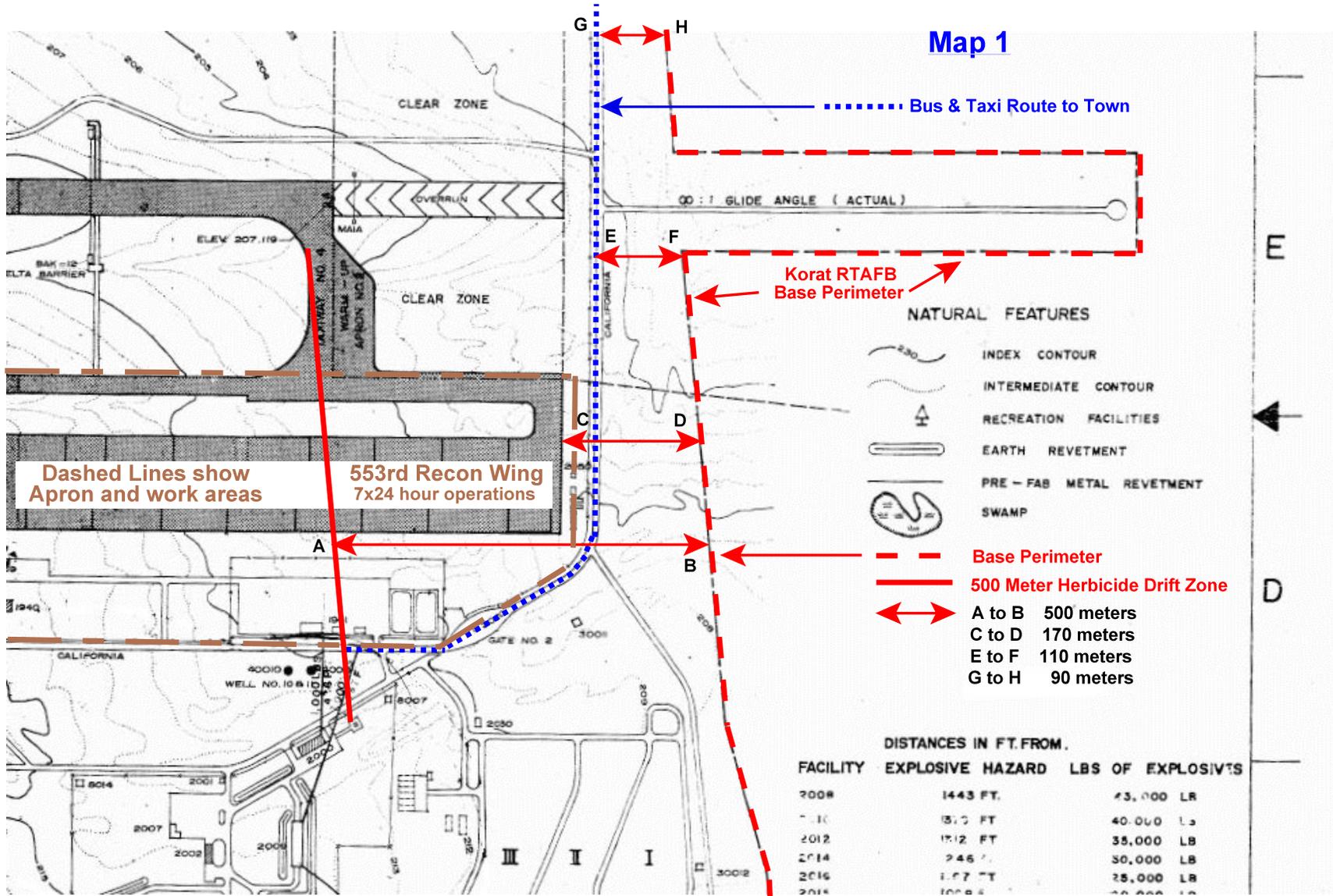
Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base (Korat RTAFB) perimeter location in relation to work, living, physical exercise and recreational areas in the 1967 to 1972 time period. Solid red lines on Maps 1 & 2 show the U.S. Army defined herbicide spray drift areas.

Map from the Department of the Air Force, Master Plan, Base Plan, Korat Air Base, Master Planning Directive 65-11, dated 1 Jan 73.

- 1 Primary unit at Korat RTAFB was the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing (388th TFW). Those assigned to the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing received orders to report to the 388th Combat Support Group. Upon arrival at Korat RTAFB the individual was then assigned to the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing.
- 2 Per the official 388th TFW histories, it is the 388th TFW, as the primary unit, who received, and acted upon directives from the USAF to perform vegetation control. Vegetation control was necessary to prevent insurgents from infiltrating and possibly killing USAF personnel, and/or from damaging USAF assets.
- 3 Attacks did occur at Ubon, Udorn and U-Tapao Air Bases in Thailand in this period. See the "Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report Base Defense in Thailand," dated 18 February 1973, now declassified. The threat was real.
- 4 The 553rd Reconnaissance Wing performed its mission 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, from October 1967 to December 1970. After the 553rd Reconnaissance wing inactivated, those assigned to the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing were reassigned to the 388th TFW, while continuing work in the same physical areas as they did while the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing was active.
- 5 Headquarters, Department of the Army, U.S. Army manual FM 3-3, titled "Tactical Employment of Herbicides," dated December 1971, page 5-5, paragraph d, lower right corner of the page, indicates herbicide spray used on the ground can drift for 500 meters from the intended spray area.
- 6 The Veterans Administration homepage, URL <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/thailand.asp> States the herbicides were used at USAF Air Base facilities in Thailand, including Korat RTAFB.
- 7 The operations area used by the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing was the north east section of Korat RTAFB. Approximately 40% of the ramp lies within the 500 meter spray drift area from the perimeter. When the USAF first arrived at Korat RTAFB the middle section of the base was used for the fighter apron. Later when the Connie's were sent to Korat, an additional operational apron was built in the part of the remaining open space of Korat RTAFB near the north east perimeter of the base. See Map 1.

- 8 553rd Recon Wing personnel were in that apron area at all times of the day, 365 days a year. Maintenance personnel, 553rd Electronic Maintenance Squadron - EMS, (later Avionics Maintenance - AMS), Field Maintenance Squadron - FMS and Organizational Maintenance Squadron - OMS, worked these areas 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. See Map 1 and Photo Image 7.
- 9 Flight crews spent 3 to 4 hours on the apron prior to each mission. It was too hot inside the airplane (camouflage paint soaks up the heat), so air crews always stood or sat on the ramp. Missions take off times occurred around the clock. Air crews arrived at the airplane the 3 to 4 hours before take off time in case an airborne aircraft aborted. See Map 1 and Photo Image 7.
- 10 Other units also used the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing apron and work areas; specifically the College Eye Task Force EC-121D and EC-121T Warning Stars, the 193rd Tactical Warfare Squadron Pennsylvania Air National Guard EC-121S Super Constellation. Some services used by the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing were provided by the 388th TFW. Other tenant units sometimes used the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing apron and work areas. The aircraft, the ground and air crews, may have worked on any part of the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing apron.
- 11 Living quarters were very close to the perimeter, some as near as 11 meters, or 35 feet. See Map 2. NOTE these "hootch" type living quarters were not barracks. The hootches did NOT have glass windows, were NOT air conditioned, with the window openings covered only with screens. Screens will not stop spray from entering the hootch. See photo pages, image 2.
- 12 The area used for physical training was very close to the perimeter, about 35 meters, or 90 feet from the perimeter. See Map 2.
- 13 The softball field used for recreation by all assigned to Korat RTAFB was about 125 feet from the perimeter. Map 2.
- 14 Those who went into the town of Korat (Nakorn Ratchasima), or other Thai cities, traveled by perimeter road both going to town and returning to base. See Map 1.
- 15 From time to time ground and air crew members of the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing were verbally assigned the responsibility to guard the perimeter area. Written orders were not created for this assignment. See photo pages, image 1.
- 16 Photos indicate some type of toxic chemical(s) were in use near the 553rd EMS squadron shops. Note the ditch and drums of photo 2. That ditch was always full of brownish black liquid which really smelled bad. No vegetation existed near these drums. See photo page, image 2, lower right corner. Other drums of unknown substance were stored near the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing Apron. See photo pages, images 3 & 4. If the drums in either area contained toxic chemicals, then the entire 553rd Reconnaissance Wing area was subject to toxic chemicals.

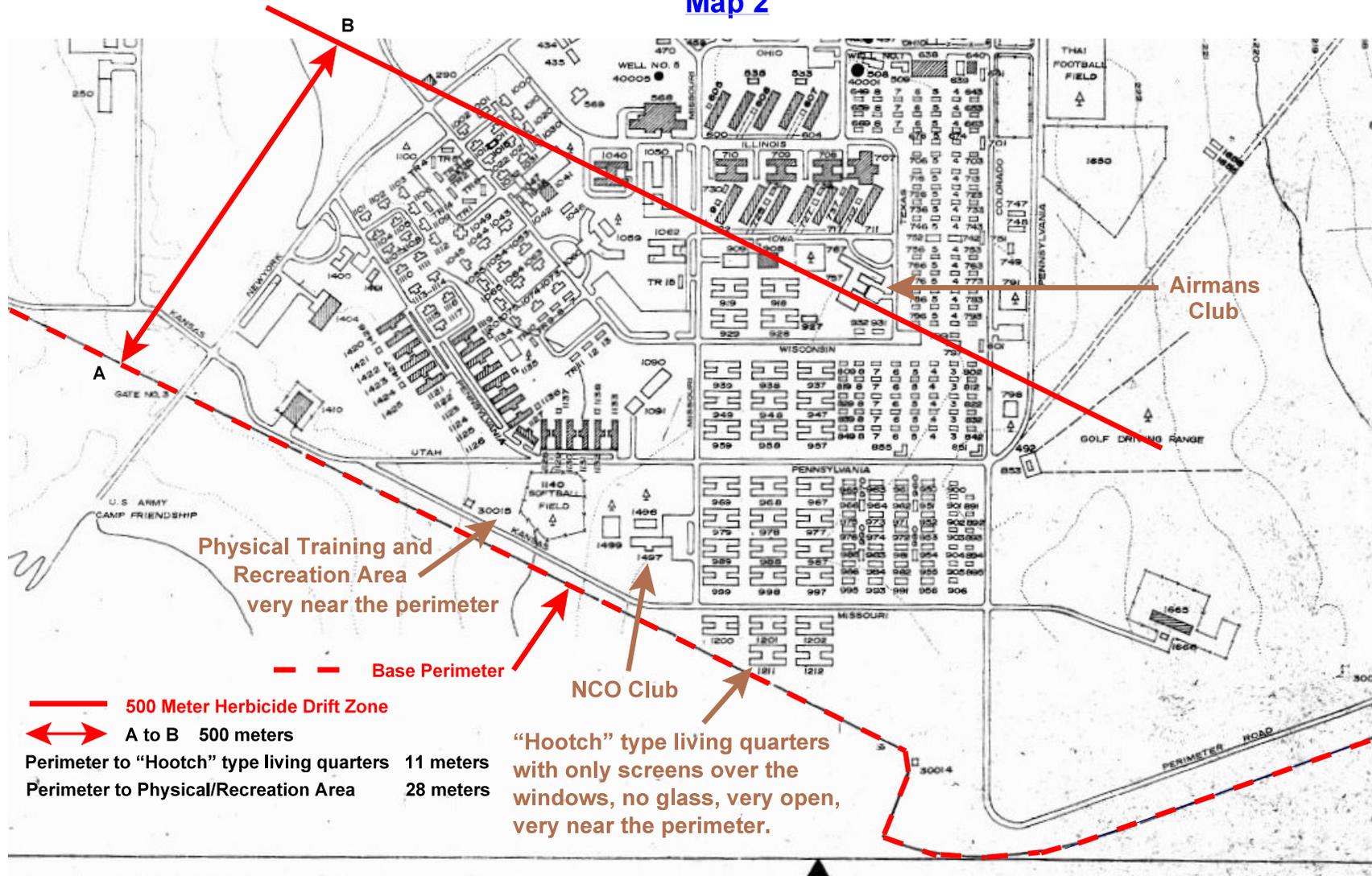
Map source - Department of the Air Force Master Base Plan Korat Air Base



Korat RTAFB Perimeter in relation to the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing Apron and Work areas

Map source - Department of the Air Force Master Base Plan Korat Air Base

Map 2



Korat RTAFB Perimeter in relation to Physical Training, Recreation and Living areas

Photo Pages - Images of Korat RTAFB 1967 - 1972



Photo Image 1 - Weapons Training

Photo Image 1 at left shows an unknown TSgt. Instructor on the left side of the photo giving Airmen Ed Hodemaker (center working the M60 machine gun) weapons instruction, while airman on right Ken Weeks observes. Airmen from the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing were given minimal training with automatic weapons, then verbally ordered on a 10 day assignment as an augmentee perimeter guard at Korat RTAFB. No written orders were provided, the orders were verbal only.

“Hootch” type living quarters as shown on Photo Image 2 to the right, were located near the perimeter. The hootches did not have glass in the windows, the windows were covered only by screens. Bathing facilities were not inside the hootch, rather a central outside area between groups of hootches had a single lavatory/bathing area.



Photo Image 2 - Open air hootches with central latrine

Photo Image 3 at the right shows the area near the Electronic Maintenance Squadron work shops. Note the barrels on the right side of the image, then look carefully at the ground under the barrels. No vegetation grew near those drums (barrels), with the ditch containing brownish black liquid which really smelled bad.



Photo Image 3 - Toxic Chemical drums (barrels) near EMS Shops

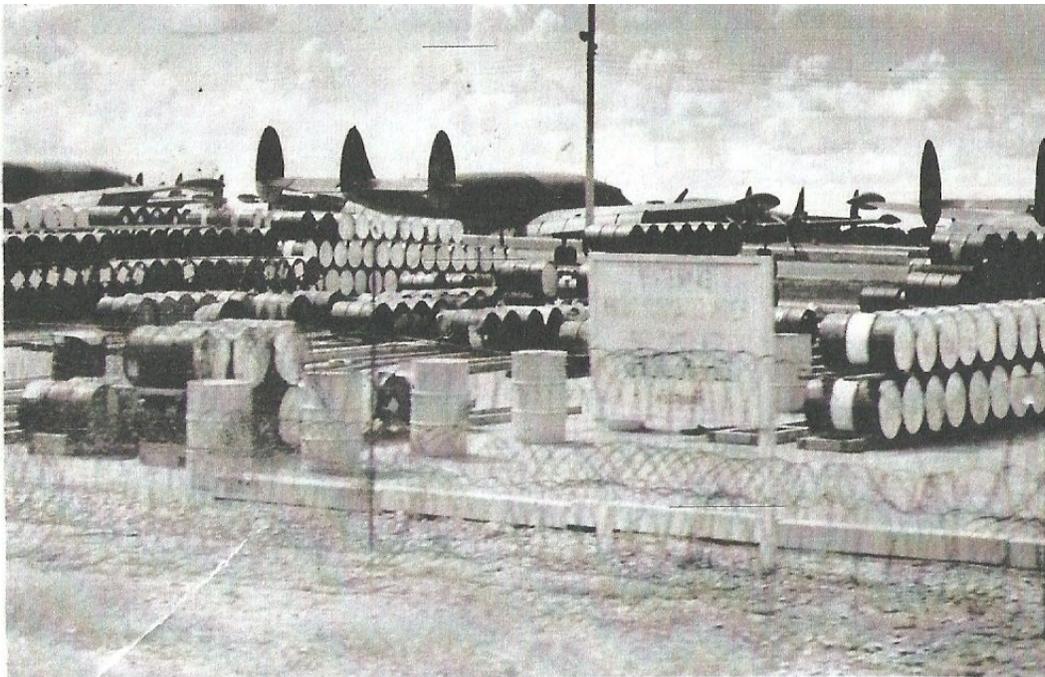


Photo Image 4 at left shows stock piles of drums (barrels) immediately behind the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing EC-121 operational apron.

Photo Image 4 - Barrel Storage next to the 553rd operational apron



Photo Image 5 at left is Korat RTAFB late 1967 showing the proximity of living quarters hootches on the left, to the base perimeter fence on the right. Hootches were open in that there was no glass in the windows, only a screen.

Photo Image 5 - Proximity of hootch on left to perimeter fence on right

Photo Image 6 at right is another view of the Korat RTAFB perimeter fence on the left of the image, with the living quarters open hootches on the right of the image. Sand bag revetments between the perimeter and the hootches built to provide protection in case of enemy attack.



Photo Image 6 - Perimeter fence left, Hootches on right



Photo Image 7 - EC-121R showing perimeter road in back

Photo Image 7 above shows a Lockheed EC-121R on the ramp with the perimeter road behind. On the left side of the center vertical stabilizer on the horizontal stabilizer is an airmen from the 553rd Avionics Maintenance Squadron. On the right side of the center vertical stabilizer is Clyde Jelinek an airmen flight crew member.

Maintenance technicians from the AMS, EMS, FMS and OMS squadrons worked on the EC-121R aircraft parked on the apron ramp as shown here, often for an entire work day (8 to 10 hours each day). Most of the time service occurred from the apron ramp, below, or in the airplane. Regardless if the work occurred below, in or on top of the airplane, the technicians worked very near the perimeter for long hours each day.

It is difficult to visualize the proximity of the aircraft to the perimeter from a ground based apron ramp photographic view. This photographic view from the top of one of the airplanes clearly shows the proximity of the airplane to the perimeter.

Air crews were required to stand by the airplane on the apron ramp a minimum of 3 to 4 hours for each mission flown, plus another hour after returning from a mission to secure the airplane and classified equipment and weapons.