



Top left
The Thai Air Force Museum is home to what is reputedly the world's only surviving original Curtiss Hawk III.

Top right
A real rarity is this Vought V-93S Corsair observation/attack aircraft, which the museum says is the only remaining example.



Bangkok Wings

Jamie Hunter and Sergio Santana find fascinating exhibits at the Royal Thai Air Force Museum, and explore the air arm's history

The roots of the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF, or Kong Thab Akat Thai) can be traced back as far as 1911 when Belgian aviator Charles van den Born flew a display at Siam's Sriratchathani racecourse. Impressed by this aviation debut,

Siam's leader, King Rama IV, duly dispatched three army officers for flying lessons in France in 1912. The trio returned with their 'wings' the following year, along with four Breguet and four Nieuport aircraft. These went on to form the nucleus of the

country's air arm, the Siamese Flying Corps (SFC), based at Don Mueang, north of Bangkok, from March 1914. In July 1917 the SFC entered World War One, when the Siamese Expeditionary force was sent to fight alongside the Allies in Europe.

The SFC's name was changed to the Royal Siamese Aeronautical Service in 1919, but then a new moniker was given in 1937, when it became the Royal Siamese Air Force. This changed to the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) on April 9, 1937, after Siam became Thailand.



This Hawk 75N is one of a pair that shot down three French Morane-Saulnier MS.406 fighters on January 10, 1941, during the Franco-Thai war. The Hawks were from the Pibulsongkram Attack Squadron, led by Wg Cdr Khun Ron Napakas.



A Tachikawa Ki-36 'Ida' army co-operation/training aircraft, which is just one of two surviving airframes. Design of the type dates back to 1937.



With wings folded to denote its aircraft carrier associations, Curtiss SB2C-5 Helldiver '83410' basks in the Thai sunshine. The RTAF received six of these airframes.

The RTAF operated Fairey Firefly FR.1s from 1952. This exhibit is in good condition and sports classic Royal Navy Extra Dark Sea Grey and Sky camouflage.



being fought by three Thai pilots who took off from Watthana Nakhon airfield in their Hawk IIIs, to engage a formation of 20 Japanese fighters and fighter-bombers. Eventually a ceasefire was reached and the Thai government granted passage to the Japanese forces on their way to Malaya and Burma. This resulted in the US-led Allies beginning to bomb Thai territory - in response the RTAF managed to shoot down a B-29 Superfortress on November 27, 1944.

The RTAF museum was established in 1952 and has more than 50 aircraft/helicopter exhibits, among them one of just two Tachikawa Ki-36 trainers extant globally. More modern machinery includes the F-5A Freedom Fighter, MiG-21 Fishbed and A-37B Dragonfly.

By the time the RTAF was officially formed it consisted of five wings equipped with a mixed order of battle, including the following: 30 SPAD VIIIs/XIIIs, 20 Avro 504N trainers, eight Breguet 14 multi-role aircraft, two Heinkel HD43 fighters, two Boeing 100E fighters, 12 Vought V-93S observation/attack aircraft;

12 Curtiss Hawk IIs and 24 Curtiss Hawk IIIs; six Martin 139 WSM bombers and 12 Curtiss Hawk 75Ns.

Thai aircraft and personnel were involved in two major conflicts during the 1940s, starting with the so-called Franco-Thai War (October 1940 to May 1941), in which Thailand clashed with Vichy France regarding sections of what was then French Indochina.

The day after the raid on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941), Japan, a former ally, attacked Thai territory in two areas to further its advance on British forces in Burma and Malaya. The Thais fought back, and several acts of resistance took place, one



Known as Fighter Type 14 in RTAF service, the Griffon-powered Spitfire Mk.XIV flew with the air arm from 1948.

Royal Thai Air Force Museum

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www.rtaf.mi.th/en/Pages/Tourist_Attractions.aspx



The RTAF signed a deal for 45 North American F-86F-30/40 Sabre and 17 F-86L Sabre Dog fighters, received in 1961 and 1963 respectively. Airframe 30681 shown here, is of the latter sub-type and wears the leaping tiger motif of the 1st Fighter Wing.