

Bird Dog Story by FSGT1 Asi S.

Several people who are interested in Thai aircraft from a time when Thailand was engaged in a counter-insurgency war with Communists might have heard the Thai nickname “Dog’s Mouth” used in reference to this RTAF aircraft. The reason for this name is well-known to most, but for those who do not know and it is for them that we will relate the story of this aircraft in its status of being greatly involved in RTAF Communist counter-insurgency operations.

The L-19 Bird Dog was an aircraft designed and built by Cessna Aircraft Company of the USA from a US Army requirement for a replacement for the World War 2-era L-4 and L-5 light observation aircraft. The stipulation required a two-seat observation and liaison aircraft. Cessna designed and developed the aircraft from the Cessna 170 and called it the Cessna Model 305A. It was a single-engined light aircraft with a high-mounted wing and tail wheel. The second crewmember sat behind the pilot. The all-round canopy was expanded overhead the cabin to improve visibility in the observation role. The US Army was the initial organization to order and purchase the aircraft for service, which was named as the L-19A Bird Dog. It began entering service in 1950. Between 1950 and 1959, the US Department of Defense ordered additional L-19 aircraft for the other services. The final total was 3,200 aircraft; however, total production was 3,431 airframes. In 1962, the designation was changed to O-1A as a single standard was used across all US services.

As for the name ‘Bird Dog’, the person who named the aircraft was Jack A. Swayze, who was a designer at Cessna Aircraft and he had won the competition to choose the name after the design had been selected for manufacture by the US Army Committee. This was a new tactical reconnaissance aircraft with the mission of searching for and locating enemy installations and reporting their position or the results of artillery fire or ground attack by aircraft. The aircraft would fly low over the battlefield while the crew would observe and report adjustments for artillery fire continually by radio. Therefore the ‘Bird Dog’ name was appropriate as close observation and close contact was required. It was also capable of other missions such as aeromedical evacuation. It saw its first opportunity for combat experience between 1950 and 1953 in the Korean War. Later the USAF employed the O-1 in the Vietnam War where its primary role was aerial reconnaissance and forward air control (FAC). Doctrinally, this was flying and reporting the enemy position so that it could then be engaged by other ground attack aircraft. This required close coordination and radio communications between the FAC pilot and the pilots of the other aircraft who were responsible for providing close air support. The O-1 had to fly and locate the target area from map references received and when they located the enemy locations they used smoke rockets to clearly mark the targets for the other pilots so they could use their weapons. The FAC aircraft would orbit the area at an altitude higher than the attack aircraft and maintain observation on the target and give reports on the effectiveness of the fire. It was this role which contributed to the high reputation of the O-1 in the Vietnam War. The mission was very risky and the pilots had to be brave and possess a high level of airmanship; while the O-1 was very slow and the mission required low zig-zag flying to search for the enemy targets. The enemy could easily use personal weapons to engage the aircraft. This led to aircraft being hit very often. However, after 1967 the mission was taken over by the faster-flying O-2 Cessna Skymaster.

In the Thai Armed Forces, the L-19A began to enter service in the Military Assistance Program (MAP), with the Royal Thai Army receiving the first six aircraft in 1956. The aircraft was known as the Observation Type 19 and many aircraft quickly followed. However this story of the RTA use will be somewhat truncated, so that we can concentrate on the use by the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF). This is merely because the subject matter of my articles focuses on aircraft used by the RTAF, and which have now left Thai service. (However, there might be some articles written by me which concern aircraft which are currently still in RTAF service.) The RTAF received the first eight O-1A in October 1967 as part of the US

Government MAP. This aircraft was designated Observation Type 2 or Bor Tor 2. These aircraft were numbered Tor 2 – 1/10 to Tor 8/10. All these aircraft were assigned to 71 Squadron of Wing 7 in Sattahip. This unit used the callsign 'Mosquito' since before 1961. From 1969 to 1973, their aircraft were grouped into No 1 Flight with 2 and 3 Flights consisted of Administration Type 1 aircraft (U-10B Super Courier). The role was target spotting and aerial reconnaissance. 71 Squadron received an additional 34 O-1 aircraft, and with an additional 10 U-10B aircraft, at that time it had more aircraft under its command than any other squadron in the RTAF. However most of the aircraft were not located in Sattahip as the squadron deployed detachments of aircraft to airbases throughout Thailand. All these flights were composed of a mixture of O-1 and U-10B aircraft.

The Observation Type 2 aircraft was used for target spotting and aerial reconnaissance. It could be fitted with weapons to conduct ground attack or to provide self-defence. The aircraft was fitted with four under-wing hard points. Each hard point could hold a twin launching tube for two 2.75 inch air-to-ground rockets. This gave each aircraft a total capacity of eight rockets. In the target spotting or FAC roles, smoke rockets were carried so as to mark enemy positions for ground attack aircraft to subsequently engage. This was similar to the US doctrine used in the Vietnam War which we have already discussed. For the aerial reconnaissance mission, there is a difference as weapons were carried to enable armed reconnaissance flights to occur. Rather than smoke rockets, the warheads contained high explosives. If the reconnaissance flight encountered a mobile enemy, it could immediately attack before the targeted enemy could organize and generate effective defensive fire and/or escape. It also allowed immediate effective fire to be placed in support of friendly troops who were being attacked by the enemy without requiring additional ground attack aircraft to react. For aerial reconnaissance tasks, a photographer could sit in the rear seat and use a K-10 aerial camera to record specific imagery of the target. On landing, this film had to be rushed to be processed, printed and analysed in order to become a product within the target file for future use by the intelligence section. It was for this reason that the term 'Dogs Breath' came into use in the everyday speech within regional force units. Now I don't know the truth of this but it seems it was because the RTA itself had L-19 and O-1 aircraft in supporting COIN operations just like the RTAF, however for some reason the RTA aircraft were always known as 'Dog' – from 'Bird Dog' and calling it 'Dog's Breath' might have come from ...and there are many people and airmen who think that 'Dog's Breath' refers to AU-23A Peacemaker aircraft from the mouth that is painted under on the nose and under there is that we know the nickname of the O-1 and L-19.)

In 1975, 71 Squadron received the last group of 14 additional Liaison Type 2 aircraft which brought RTAF strength to 56 aircraft. (Many people say that) Within this group there were many aircraft which had seen service in the South Vietnamese Air Force however when the South fell to the forces of North Vietnam the RVAF pilots flew their aircraft out to Thailand. In 1977 there was a major re-organisation of the RTAF units. In this restructure Wing 7 became Wing 71, and 71 Squadron became 711 Squadron. This was in accordance with the stipulation for each Squadron of the RTAF to have three digit designation. However the base location remained Sattahip. During the period 1977 -1980, the RTAF had various aircraft weapon systems research and development programs in order to better conduct COIN operations. One of these was an aircraft mounted rocket called "Haew Faa". This was test fitted and test fired using the Type 2 as the test aircraft.

Later when an RTAF base was completed in Surat Thani province in 1982, Wing 71 was moved from Sattahip to Surat Thani. 711 Squadron, which was a direct-command unit of the Wing, was required to relocate at the same time. However the aircraft which were allocated to 711 Squadron were reallocated to 531 Squadron of Wing 53 in Prachuap province. Meanwhile the Attack Type 5 (OV-10C Bronco) aircraft of 531 Squadron were re-allocated to 711 Squadron. Like the aircraft, the 'Mosquito' callsign of 711 Squadron was

exchanged for the “Shark” callsign of 531 Squadron This has continued through to the current time with 711 Squadron using the callsign “Shark”.

The relocation of the aircraft types was seen as necessary to have appropriate aircraft types in each location. Factors included aircraft role, required mission and overall RTAF asset disposition at that time.

Following the conclusion of the Communist insurgency in 1983, the FAC mission of the Type 2 came to an end. However, the primary role of aerial reconnaissance remained. In 1984 a new military threat to Thailand arose. The invasion of Cambodia by Vietnamese forces in 1979 caused three Cambodian opposition factions to withdraw towards the Cambodian-Thai border which drew the battlefield with it. Vietnamese forces intentionally crossed the Thai border in hot-pursuit operations. This clear breach of Thai sovereignty could not be tolerated and a Thai military response was required. An ongoing series of clashes resulted between Thai and Vietnamese forces. During this period a number of Type 2 aircraft of 531 Squadron deployed to various airbases close to the Cambodian-Thai border region. Their role was aerial reconnaissance of the border to check on movements of the Vietnamese forces deployed close to the border. In April 1984 a Type 2 aircraft of 5312 Flight from Surin airfield was hit by Vietnamese anti-aircraft fire while engaged in photographic reconnaissance of the border. It crashed near the border in Surin province. In June 1984 another aircraft from 5312 Flight was shot down in very similar circumstances. This forced discussion and review of the missions allocated to the Type 2. As the situation was one of nearly conventional warfare rather than unconventional warfare or counter-terrorism which has existed previously, as the opposition was equipped with a comprehensive array of anti-aircraft weapons, including anti-aircraft artillery and guided missiles. In such circumstances, continued use of an aircraft with the low ceiling and speed of the Type 2 would probably not be appropriate.

At the same time, another squadron of the RTAF used the Type 2 in the same role but the mission was different from that of 531 Squadron. This was the intermediate flying training role for which 604 Squadron of Wing 6 at Don Muang was responsible. The squadron borrowed 16-20 aircraft from 531 Squadron and used them in the intermediate flying training role until 1989. The Type 2 aircraft of 531 Squadron were ordered out of squadron service in 1990. There is some information recorded that the order for the cessation of Type 2 operations was actually made in April 1989. Some may suspect this date and there has been some dispute over this date. What is certain is that in April 1990, 531 Squadron was allocated 11 Type 2 Attack/Admin aircraft from 202 Squadron to replace the Type 2 aircraft which were removed from service. However, many of the Type 2 aircraft withdrawn from service were still in a good repair and airworthy. The decision was there made to preserve and maintain these aircraft at Wing 53, Prachuap Khiri Khan province. Some aircraft were also maintained at 604 Sqn Don Muang where they had previously flown. Therefore when the Thai Aviation Preservation and Restoration Society (TANGO) was established in 1991, these aircraft were donated for preservation.

It can be seen that the Type 2 aircraft was used by the RTAF in many roles in counter-insurgency warfare, which many people are ignorant of because of the limited public information passed at the time for security reasons. However it is believed that those who worked with the Type 2 aircraft, whether aircrew or technicians in the various fields still well remember past events and will forever regard the little aircraft called “Dog Breath” with affection.

Photo : RTAF
via : ASI S.



บ.ต.2 ของ ผง.71 ทั้ง 2 เครื่องนี้เป็น บ.ที่ได้รับเป็นมอบเป็นชุดแรกของ ทอ.ไทย ในปี 2510

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Photo : RTAF
via : ASI S.



การทดสอบจรวด "เห่าฟ้า" โดยใช้ บ.ต.2 ของ ผง.711 เป็น บ.ยิงทดสอบ

Photo : RTAF
via : ASI S.



บ.ต.2 ของ ผู่ง.531 จอดอยู่ภายในลานจอด บ.ของ ผู่ง.202 ระหว่างเข้าร่วมในการแข่งขันใช้อาวุธทางอากาศ

การบรรจุจรวดขนาด 2.75 นิ้วให้กับ บ.ต.2

Photo : RTAF
via : ASI S.



Photo : RTAF
via : ASI S.



ฝูง.604 เป็นอีกฝูงบินหนึ่งที่มีการใช้ บ.ต.2 ในการปฏิบัติภารกิจ

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