

# More Wit



The Rockwell OV-10 works with the MD-520MG Defender in the close-air-support (CAS) and counter-insurgency (COIN) roles. To reduce the risk of mid-air collisions the air force applied a high visibility white finish to part of the upper side of the wings. The top side of the vertical stabilizer of the MD-520 tail and part of the wings of the SF-260TP are also painted white for the same reason.

ALL PHOTOS, ROGER WESTERHUIS/AERO IMAGE

The PhAF is always in need of more tactical troop transport capability, consequently the expansion of its UH-1 Huey helicopter fleet is one of the main priorities. Recently 20 Hueys were acquired through Singapore Technologies Aerospace (STA), with deliveries completed during the second half of 2005.

**N**OT TOO long ago the Philippine Air Force (PhAF) was one of South-East Asia's most modern air forces but today it faces a constant battle to keep its aircraft and helicopters flying. Political instability, corruption, the 1997 Asian currency crisis and continuing operations against communist and Muslim insurgents are among the reasons it has been unable to develop a force similar in size and capability to those of its neighbours. Despite its plans for modernisation and its efforts to improve efficiency, the PhAF lacks the hardware and finance to carry them out.

## Modernisation

After the fall of President Ferdinand Marcos, which followed the EDSA (Epifanio de los Santos), or People's Power Revolution of 1986, the PhAF was left with outdated equipment. Its command structure was insufficient for adequate external defence, and it became necessary to modernise the country's armed forces in order to bring external defence capabilities up to a credible level of deterrence, and to the point where they could



# h Less!

Lt Gen Jose L Reyes, Commanding General of the Philippine Air Force, talks to Rogier Westerhuis about his modernisation programme.



contribute to the peace and stability of the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) region.

A 15-year scheme to modernise the country's external defence capabilities was designed, and the PhAF Modernisation Law, also known as Public Act 7898, was approved by the Philippines Government on December 19, 1996. Lt Gen Jose L Reyes explained the reasons behind it: "Just after the mid-1980s, following the EDSA Revolution, the presence of armed insurgents of the Communist movement grew to such an extent that it became a major problem. With a very good plan we were able to reduce the problem to a level where it was no longer a major threat to national security, and where it could be classified as a police problem." Today, the PhAF's priority no longer focussed on the internal security situation.

In 1991 the US Government decided to abandon Clark Air Force Base 50 miles (80kms) north of Manila, which had been heavily damaged by the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in June that year. Around the same time, the Philippine Senate decided not to renew the 1947 US - Philippines Military Bases Agreement, which allowed the US

military the use of bases in the Philippines.

Lt Gen Reyes continued: "With the departure of the Americans in 1991, we were left to perform the territorial defence of our country with only our F-5s. Realizing that we were now on our own, the administration of the then President, Fidel Ramos, began work on a programme to increase the country's external defence capability. In 1996 a law we called the PhAF Modernisation Law was passed (otherwise known as Public Act 7898), and the modernisation programme came into being."

The military were directed to develop a modernisation plan in line with the goals set by the Public Act, and the Air Force developed the PhAF Modernisation Program, made up of five major components.

### Capability, Material and Technology Development

Most of the 15-year budget, which amounted to over 330 billion pesos (\$6 billion) was allocated to upgrading the equipment used by the armed forces. For the Air Force, this included the acquisition of a new fighter aircraft, radar systems and long-range maritime ■



Above: After a fatal crash involving an F-5A on May 2, 2002, the remaining eight F-5A/Bs were grounded and officially decommissioned on October 1, 2005. One of the F-5As was painted in this very attractive scheme and kept in excellent condition just in case it flew again.

Below: Flying training is conducted by the Air Education and Training Command (AETC) based at Fernando Air Base near Lipa city. The 101st Primary Flying Training Squadron is equipped with the Cessna T-41D and Cessna 172.



## THE PHILIPPINE AIR FORCE ORDER OF BATTLE

<b>15th Strike Wing</b>	<b>HQ, Maj Daniello S Atienza Air Base, Sangley Pt, Cavite</b>
16th Attack Squadron	OV-10A, OV-10C, OV-10M
17th Attack Squadron 'Jaegers'	SF-260TP
18th Attack Squadron	WD-520MG
20th Attack Squadron	WD-520MG
25th Attack Squadron	OV-10A, OV-10C, OV-10M
<b>5th Tactical Fighter Group</b>	<b>Basa Air Base, Pampanga</b>
7th Tactical Fighter Squadron 'Bulldogs'	F-27
<b>205th Tactical Helicopter Wing</b>	<b>HQ, Benito Ebuon Air Base, Mactan Island, Cebu</b>
206th Tactical Helicopter Squadron 'Hornets'	UH-1H
207th Tactical Helicopter Squadron 'Stingers'	UH-1H
208th Tactical Helicopter Squadron 'Diggers'	UH-1H
<b>220th Airlift Wing</b>	<b>HQ, Benito Ebuon Air Base, Mactan Island, Cebu</b>
221st Airlift Squadron	Fokker F-27
222nd Airlift Squadron	C-130B, C-130H
223rd Airlift Squadron	Nomad N-22B, Nomad N-22C
<b>Air Education and Training Command/100th TW</b>	<b>Fernando Air Base, Lipa</b>
101st Primary Flying Training Sqn 'Layangs'	Cessna T-41D, Cessna 172
102nd Basic Flying Training Sqn 'Musang'	SF-260M
<b>505th Search and Rescue Group</b>	<b>HQ, Col Jesus A Villamor Air Base, Pasay City, Metro Manila</b>
5051st Search and Rescue Squadron	Huey II, Bell 205, S-76, UH-1H
5052nd Search and Rescue Squadron	Huey II, Bell 205, S-76, UH-1H
5053rd Search and Rescue Squadron	Huey II, Bell 205, S-76, UH-1H
5056th Search and Rescue Squadron	Huey II, Bell 205, S-76, UH-1H
<b>250th Presidential Airlift Wing</b>	<b>Col Jesus A Villamor Air Base, Pasay City, Metro Manila</b>
251st Presidential Airlift Squadron	Fokker F-28
252nd Presidential Helicopter Squadron	S-76, S-70A, Bell 212, Bell 412
<b>900th Weather Support Group</b>	<b>Col Jesus A Villamor Air Base, Pasay City, Metro Manila</b>
901st Weather Squadron	Cessna T210G

patrol aircraft. However, the Asian financial crisis of 1997 stopped any investment in new equipment.

Said Lt Gen Reyes: "The Asian financial crisis had a very great effect. Before the crisis one dollar equalled 26 pesos. However, afterwards the peso had devaluated against the dollar to such an extent that what we could buy with the initial budget was reduced by almost 50%."

This was not the only negative effect on the modernisation programme: "The number of communist insurgents, which we had perceived in the early 1990s as simply a problem for the police, began to escalate," he added. "The insurgency situation worsened, forcing us to use the armed forces to counter the threat. Bringing the forces up to date had to be put on hold due to the requirements of the internal security operations, and we were forced to make some adjustments. Rather than acquiring very high budget items for the modernisation programme - such as planes and radars, ships and tanks - we had to acquire equipment which would enable us to deal with internal security."

### Force Restructuring and Organisational Development

Force Restructuring and Organisational Development basically means re-structuring the Air Force to enable it to work more efficiently and responsively. First, the units were organised according to key functions rather than traditional geographic delineations: Air Defence Command, Tactical Operations Command, Air Education and Training Command, Air Logistics Support Command and the Air Reserve Command. As the Defence Department focussed the PhAF's priority on internal security operations, it was decided to further re-structure and downgrade the primary external defence operation units. The Air Defence Command



In common with many countries, the PNAF's main transport aircraft is the C-130 Hercules. As a result of a serious lack of funding and a shortage of parts, the service is constantly struggling to keep these important aircraft flying. This heavily used C-130H is flown by the 222nd Heavy Transport Squadron, part of the 220th Airlift Wing based at Benito Ebun Air Base, Mactan Island, Cebu.

Below: After being in storage, it was decided as part of the Aircraft Recovery Programme, to restore this ADH-76 to flying condition. This particular helicopter is on its way to the Palawan area, where it will help to protect offshore gas rigs from possible terrorist attacks.



was de-activated on March 31, 2005, and downgraded to an Air Defence Wing, and the subordinate 5th Fighter Wing was downgraded to the 5th Fighter Group.

Other goals of the modernisation plan include bases and systems resources management; acquiring new equipment requires bases with the adequate support systems and facilities to house it.

### The Aircraft Recovery Programme

It is now almost a decade since the modernisation programme was introduced, but its goals are far from accomplished and things are unlikely to improve very soon. However, the matter of insurgents and the terrorist activities meant that the PNAF was determined to find a solution to the shortage of finance, one which would at least improve its limited airborne assets. The then Commanding General of the PNAF, Lt Gen Nestor R Santillan, introduced a programme prioritising the recovery of aircraft mothballed due to a lack of spares. Known as the Aircraft Recovery Programme (ARP), this proved extremely effective, and by the end of his term, 32 aircraft and helicopters had been recovered without the need for additional funding.

When Lt Gen Reyes took command on July 7, 2004, the ARP continued and the total number of aircraft and helicopters now stands at more than 40. He explained the background to this highly successful programme: "In 2002, the ARP began to address the requirement of the PNAF, especially that for the UH-1H. We have lots of UH-1Hs which have been grounded for years due to a [lack of] spares and there was a time when the Air Force was down to fewer than 20 flyable helicopters.

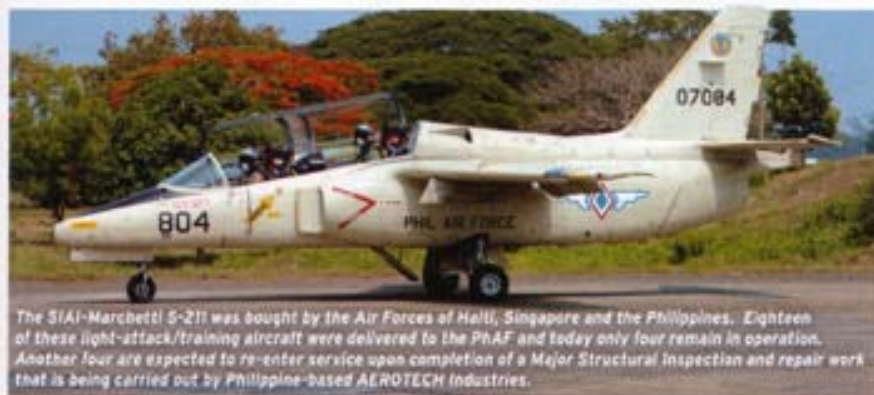
"Considering the increasing need for our internal security operations we had to have more of these aircraft. The ARP started with that. We developed the capability of our 410th Maintenance Wing at Clark [Air Base], which is the Air Force's depot level maintenance facility, and developed the capability of our personnel. Over 30% of our maintenance budget is devoted to this programme."

Although initiated to recover mothballed UH-1Hs and MD-520MGs, the programme has been such a success and so cost-effective that other types of aircraft and helicopters have been added. At present over 40 aircraft have joined the fleet through the ARP, including SIAI-Marchetti SF-260M/TPs and S-21s, Sikorsky S-76s, GAF Nomads and Cessna T-41Ds.

### Huey II

Wherever possible, the Air Force aims to get more out of the ARP than simply bringing mothballed

When the Royal Thai Air Force decommissioned its OV-10Cs, the Thai Government decided to donate eight examples to the Philippines. The first four arrived in September 2003 followed by the final four in May 2004. Except for a few minor changes, the aircraft still fly in their Thai paint schemes.



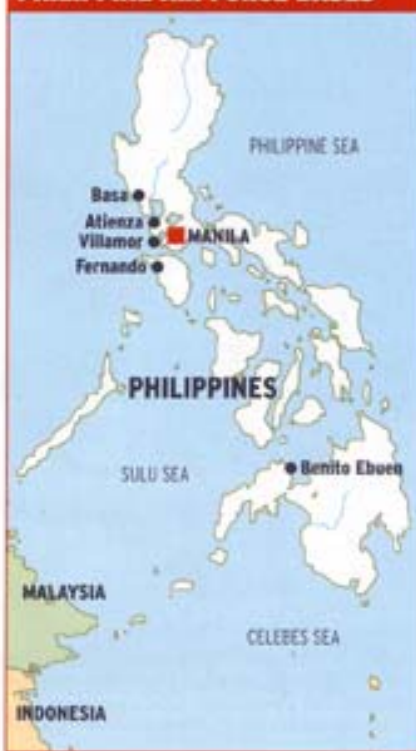
The SIAI-Marchetti S-211 was bought by the Air Forces of Haiti, Singapore and the Philippines. Eighteen of these light-attack/training aircraft were delivered to the PHAF and today only four remain in operation. Another four are expected to re-enter service upon completion of a Major Structural Inspection and repair work that is being carried out by Philippine-based AEROTECH Industries.

### Upcoming deliveries

The PhAF is in constant need of more tactical troop transport capability so expanding the UH-1 fleet is seen as highly desirable. Recently, 20 Hueys were acquired through Singapore Technologies Aerospace (STA) with deliveries completed in the second half of 2005. These were overhauled and modified before delivery to include night-fighting capability. Now that most of the UH-1s have been equipped for night-time operations, the Air Force expects to install this equipment in the remaining helicopters. Tests have also been carried out to equip the MD-520MG with special forces systems. Training in night vision flying was undertaken in conjunction with the USAF's 6th Special Operations Squadron based at Hurlbert Field, Florida.

As well as the Hueys from STA, the Air Force has taken delivery of two Cessna 172s for training, these having been bought on the civilian market, and further equipment is due to be added soon. Said Lt Gen Reyes: "We expect to receive 20 refurbished helicopters under the Excess Defence Article Program later this year. We also hope to acquire enough additional attack helicopters for one new squadron. We are looking into an attack helicopter that is more powerful and more capable - in particular, night-capable. The [AH-1] Cobra is one of the candidates - it might be an 'old' helicopter but there are many countries still using it. In mutual exercises with United States forces, the Cobras have flown in tandem with the MD-520Gs."

### PHILIPPINE AIR FORCE BASES



The Air Force is also awaiting delivery of more C-130s and is seeking a small aircraft capable of flying up to seven passengers from Manila to any part of the country. A desperate need for long-range maritime patrol aircraft has forced the Philippines Government to prioritise and it finally seems to be in a position to acquire around three of these aircraft, possibly through the EDA programme.

### F-5 Replacement

In 1965 the PhAF received its first supersonic aircraft with the arrival of the Northrop F-5. The type remained in service until the remaining fleet of eight F-5A and F-5Bs was grounded following a fatal crash of an F-5A on May 2, 2002, and they have not flown since. In the autumn of 2004, a 'Task Force Freedom Fighter' made a comprehensive non-destructive inspection of them to determine the feasibility of re-introduction into service. Although the results were satisfactory, on October 1, 2005, the F-5 was officially decommissioned (see Philippine Air Force Formally Retires Last F-5s, December 2005, p23).

Lt Gen Reyes explained: "The priority for our armed forces now is to address the internal security problem. With a limited budget, we are forced to maintain what we have. Since we mothballed our F-5s, we have been continuously refurbishing our S-211s so that they can be used to maintain the flying proficiency and 'fighter spirit' of our fighter pilots. We are trying to equip the S-211 with [improved] weapons systems so that when needed, we can also utilize it for Close Air Support. When we reach a point where the PhAF is able to shift its attention to external defence operations, that will be the time we can allow ourselves to acquire fighter aircraft."

### The future

Despite the limitations the PhAF faces, and its struggle to meet all its requirements while still fighting an internal conflict, the Philippine Government has a mixed approach towards dealing with the problem - education and an improvement in the country's economy are at the top of its priorities. The thinking behind this is that if the level of general education increases and poverty decreases, the insurgents will lose the public's goodwill and with it a great part of their support. This approach means that rapid development of the country's armed forces is slowed down even further due to the government budget being spent elsewhere.

However, the Air Force is optimistic about its medium and long-term future. The final words must go to Lt Gen Reyes: "First we need to end this internal security problem, hopefully within the next five years. Then, we will slowly extend our external defence capability. In 10 to 15 years I see an Air Force better equipped for external operations. I see an Air Force that will have fighter capability and adequate 'eyes in the sky' - at any time of the day - and one completely equipped with radars. I see an Air Force capable of moving troops and other people from one side of the country to the other in a short time. My ambition is to see an Air Force which can attain its mandate of protecting the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity - an Air Force which can truly live up to the expectations of our people!"

Although the PhAF may currently be struggling to meet these objectives, it is clear that Lt Gen Reyes' enthusiasm for the job should overcome future difficulties, even if these results do not become reality during his command.