



In previous editions, I have written about a training aircraft which was constructed by the RTAF and came into service after 1974. This was the Type 17 Trainer (or Chantra aircraft) which as previously known as the RTAF Type 4. The Chantra was developed and built using research and analysis of aeronautical scientific information and construction based on the Chipmunk training aircraft (Type 9 Chipmunk). From this principle they derived the way ahead used in 2003 for the construction of the Engineering Department Type 2 aircraft which relied on reverse engineering from the Marchetti SF.260 MT. The Marchetti was a trainer aircraft which used a conventional engine and had already left RTAF service. The results of the Engineering Department Type 2 aircraft program were in preparation for a more advanced aircraft. This was the RTAF Type 6 aircraft which uses a turbo-prop engine. Anyway, the story that I will tell is not of the RTAF Type 6 aircraft, but rather the Type 15 Trainer aircraft which came into service in 1973 and left RTAF service a number of years ago.

The story of this trainer aircraft is one part of making RTAF combat pilots for over 30 years. It begins in 1972 with the need to procure a new trainer aircraft to replace the Type 8 Trainer (T-6) or "T-Six" in RTAF slang. The Type 8 Trainer had been in service with RTAF flying schools since 1950. After 1967, it was only used as a graduating aircraft in Advanced Flying Training schools. This had commenced in 1957 and even by this time they were not new aircraft, having previously been used by the US military forces since the time of the Second World War. They were refurbished in 1951 before being supplied to the RTAF under Defense Military Assistance Program (MAP). Before long there were constant problems arising from their use and maintenance support especially in 1972 when they had the highest accident rate in the RTAF with six incidents. This led to examination of a new trainer aircraft to replace the Type 8 Trainer. A selection and test committee was established and several aircraft types were examined against RTAF criteria. Eventually, the SF.260 MT manufactured by SIAI Marchetti of Italy was selected. At the time it was the pre-eminent military trainer in the world. Approval was given for the procurement of 12 aircraft at a cost of 1,660,180 Thai Baht per aircraft. Four officials travelled to Italy for training in flying and maintaining the aircraft. The only pilot in that group Squadron Leader Pricha Niyomthai, who was at that time posted as Operations Officer at the Kampaeng Saeng Flying School, undertook flying training in June 1973. After the training in Italy, he returned as a Flying Instructor and Test Pilot for the first SF.260 MT aircraft in the RTAF.

The name of the aircraft is derived from an abbreviation of the manufacturer SIAI Marchetti and the Type F comes from the name of the aeronautical designer Stelio Frati. The numeral 260 comes from the company model number while MT stands for Military Thailand. (This designation changed based on the client nation – Belgium used the SF.260 MB while Singapore used the SF.260 MS etc). There was no name allocated to the aircraft like other types of aircraft so when it entered service with the RTAF it was known as the ‘Marchetti’ from the sound of the Italian manufacturer’s name.

In August 1973, the first SF.260 MT arrived in Thailand and was inspected at the Aviation Engineering Department maintenance facility at Don Muang. While there it received the designation Type 15 Training aircraft or Type F15. While in the process of delivery and acceptance of the SF.260 MT from SIAI Marchetti to the RTAF there was no confirmation of any RTAF documentation; however, there seem to be indications that the company pilot carried out a test flight which was accepted by the RTAF. The acceptance occurred on 24 July 1973 but the evidence of the Aeronautical Engineering Department indicates that the first delivery occurred on 18 August 1973. The strength of evidence would suggest that the 24 July date is correct as the date on which the flight from Italy commenced and the aircraft stopped in a number of countries before arriving in Thailand on 18 August 1973. This is supported by evidence from SIAI Marchetti which states that delivery occurred from 24 July until the twelfth aircraft was sent on 2 May 1974. This would space delivery at one aircraft per month. It is also stated that the sixth aircraft (company number 146/1406 and registered as I-THAF) was sent on 29 November 1973. However it was written off on 1 December in an accident during its delivery flight. This aircraft was also identified as T.15-6/16 and this RTAF aircraft number was transferred to the seventh aircraft. Therefore, from an order of 12 aircraft Marchetti only delivered 11 (serial numbers T.15-1/16 to T.15-11/17).

The RTAF acceptance ceremony of the Type 15 Trainer aircraft occurred on 18 May 1975 on the tarmac in front of RTAF HQ along with CT-4A Airtrainer aircraft. Air Chief Marshal Kamol Dechatungkha was the Presiding Officer at the ceremony. It is noteworthy that there were only eight Type 15 Trainer aircraft at that ceremony (aircraft 02, 04 and 09 were absent). At this time, I am still not sure why this occurred. In any case after the ceremony, all 11 Type 15 trainer aircraft were on strength of the Flying School for duty in training intermediate-level student pilots. Actually, the aircraft had been at the Flying School for a period of time since passing acceptance checks at the Aeronautical Engineering Department. If students passed the intermediate phase and were selected for jets, they moved on to the T-37B/C Tweety Bird or the ‘Twinny’ as it was known in Thai service. However, if they were selected for propeller aircraft they would stay on the Type 15 Trainer for more advanced training. They used the callsign ‘Hawk’ for the Type 15 Trainer aircraft which was synonymous with an agile and fast bird of prey. The aircraft was maneuverable and had a good rate of climb which made it good for aerobatic maneuvers like vertical loops, barrel roll, chandelle, and lazy-eight which were made quite easy in this capable aircraft. The good aeronautical design of the original aircraft made this possible.

In 1977, there was a series of accidents which involved the Type 15 Trainer while in flight training activities. This removed a number of aircraft from the RTAF register; and included a number which were sold as being ‘beyond economic repair’. This led to a problem of there being insufficient aircraft available for the flight training program. Procurement of an additional six SF.260 MT or Type 15 Trainers was examined. These were received in 1978. These were numbered T.15-13/21 to T.15 18/21 in the RTAF system. This brought the total to 18 aircraft although many people suspect that this figure was not actually attained. Personally, I suspected the same owing to the fact that there were 12 aircraft in the initial purchase. This was because aircraft number T.15-12/20 was seen in 1977, so an attrition aircraft (to replace the one lost on the delivery flight) had been received. Whether this is true or not can not be verified and now I’m just not sure if SIAI Marchetti delivered a replacement aircraft on 21

March 1977. The SIAI Marchetti handbook states that the aircraft was delivered on 21 March 1977. It is expected that this was the date it left the factory in Italy rather than the delivery date to Thailand.

When the second batch of six aircraft had been received they were to the same specification as the initial batch. However, more modern flying aids might have been fitted. Apart from being used in the Intermediate Flight Training role, from the end of 1980 till early 1981, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince undertook training in the Type 15 Trainer at the Flying School. Aircraft T.15-14/21 was used for this task and the Crown Prince flew a total of 172.2 hours in the Type 15 Trainer.

During 1982-1988 the RTAF undertook a joint-program to build a trainer aircraft with Rhein Flugzeugbau GmbH (RFB) from Germany. This was the Fantrainer FT400 (Type 18 Trainer) and the FT600 (Type 18A Trainer). The aircraft entered service at the Flying School from 1989. The purpose was to use the Type 18 and Type 18A Trainers to replace the Type 15 Trainer in flight training (along with a number of other types of training aircraft). In 1988, six Type 15 aircraft were re-assigned to 604 Squadron of Wing 6. This was to provide an aircraft for intermediate level instruction. The remaining Type 15 aircraft from the graduation level training program were used with intermediate level student training at the Flying School alongside the Type 18A Trainer. However, when the PC-9 or Type 19 Trainer was procured (1991 – 1993) to replace both the Type 15 and Type 18A trainers, the remaining Type 15 Trainers was moved from the Flying School to be Administrative aircraft in the Directorates of Wings 1, 21, 23, 41 and 71 (one aircraft per Wing).

In 1994, the aircraft allocated to 604 Squadron were reallocated to 402 Squadron of Wing 4 in Takhli along with Type 18/18A Fantrainer FT400/FT600 which had come from the Flying School in 1992. On 18 January 1994, five Type 15 Trainers were delivered to 402 Squadron, for use in training Qualified Flying Instructors (QFI) for employment in the Flying School, and to provide currency flying for pilots posted to non-flying units. Later on, when Type 18A Trainers allocated to 402 Squadron experienced accidents in 1994 and were ordered out-of-service from 1995, 402 Squadron was left with few aircraft and were not able to carry out their assigned mission. Therefore an order was made that the Type 15 trainers assigned to the Wings be returned to 402 Squadron. 402 Squadron was able to resume its assigned mission. It also received an additional subsidiary mission of administrative flying. This continued till 1999 when an order was received to cease flying operations as a result of a new restructure of RTAF flying assets. The Type 6 Observation/Transport (Merlin IVA), Type 7 Observation/Transport (Arava), and Type 12 Observation/Transport (Learjet 35) from 605 Squadron were reassigned to 402 Squadron. 402 Squadron operations were modified from providing training to aerial reconnaissance and electronic warfare. The Type 15 Trainer were sent for preservation and storage at Wing 4, Takhli. In spite of the fact that they were going out of service, a foreign company proposed to modify the aircraft with changes to the engine structures and equipment systems. However on examination, the RTAF decided not to go ahead with these modifications as there was no value or additional use to be gained by them.

Later, in 2006, three of the aircraft in storage were serviced and returned to flying status with the RTAF Flying Association. These aircraft were given civilian registrations HS-AFD, HS-AFE, and HS-AFF. Prior to this they were registered as T15-9/17, T15-5/16, and T15-4/16 respectively. Apart from the Type 15 trainers, the RTAF Flying Association also used three Type 1 Commercial (?) aircraft (Cessna 150). The Association used land at 604 Squadron of Wing 6, including tarmac space and hangars. However, the Type 15 trainers were not used for flying duties and were left parked at 604 Squadron. When the great flood of 2011 occurred, some of you may have seen photos of HS-AFD and HS-AFF with the water up to the cockpit sill. For those of us who love historical Thai aircraft it was a truly sorrowful sight.

Currently, the RTAF Type 6 aircraft, with its structure based on the Type 15 trainer or 'Marchetti' is still under development with the Aeronautical Engineering Department so in the near future we should see this type of aircraft on the RTAF production line and in future use as a training aircraft. The program is running several years behind schedule.



Photo : RTAF
via : ASI S.

พิธีรับมอบ บ.ฝ.15 ชุดแรกเข้าประจำการเมื่อวันที่ 18 พ.ค.2518

Acceptance ceremony for the first batch of Type 15 Trainers on 18 May 1975.



photo : RTAF
via : ASI S.

บ.ฝ.15 ของฝูง.604 ที่ย้ายมาจาก รร.การบิน จะเปลี่ยนมาใช้สีและสัญลักษณ์ของกองบิน 6
แต่ว่าก็ยังมียังมีบางเครื่องที่ยังใช้สีตามแบบเดิมอยู่

Type 15 trainers of 604 Squadron which had been transferred from the Flying School changed colour schemes and styles to those of Wing 6. However some used their older schemes for a while.



photo : RTAF
via : ASI S.

มาเก็ตตี้ ที่เคยส่งไปเป็น บ.ธุรการยังกองบินต่างๆ ได้ถูกนำกลับมาบรรจุในฝูง.402 เมื่อปี 2538

Marchetti aircraft which had been administrative aircraft of various Wings were returned to 402 Squadron in 1995.



photo : ASI S.

มาเก็ตตี้ของสมาคมการบินกองทัพอากาศ (RTAF Flying Association)
สำหรับ บ.เครื่องบินจดทะเบียนพลเรือนเป็น HS - AFE

A Marchetti of the RTAF Flying Association. This aircraft carried the civil registration HS-AFE.

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