

The Samurai Phantoms



Over the years, the F-4EJ Kai has built up a great reputation in Japan, this Phantom fleet majorly updated over the years to the 'Kai' standard. The type is currently in the last days of its operational career with the Japan Air Self Defense Force (JASDF) and will soon be replaced by new gen Lockheed-Martin F-35A Lightning II. The most colourful Phantoms in Japan are the photo reconnaissance aircraft of the 501 Hikotai. After more than 45 years in service of the JASDF, the aircraft are to be phased out by end 2020, the tasks of this version of the legendary Phantom taken over by the F-15J Eagle using SAR pods. The Phantoms have served with the Japanese Air Force for over 45 years and have equipped eight squadrons during their service.

The legendary McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II continues in frontline operational service with the Japan Air Self Defense Force (JASDF). In the near future, this will change, as in the course of 2020, the Phantoms will be phased out and replaced by the next gen Lockheed-Martin F-35A Lightning II. After 45 years of service with the Japanese Air Force, the Phantom is now obsolescent and due for replacement, having been in decline with the JASDF for several years. Of the original seven squadrons and a test unit, only two squadrons and a test unit are now active with different versions of the F-4 Phantom. The other squadrons have since been re-equipped with the Mitsubishi F-15J Eagle. After a long evaluation on a successor to the F-4 Phantom II, by the Japanese Government decided in December 2011 to purchase the Lockheed-Martin F-35A Lightning II. Japan had initially chosen

the Lockheed-Martin F-22A Raptor but this move was rejected because the aircraft would be far too expensive and beyond the Japanese defence budget.

The F-35A Lightning II is going to be Japan's first fifth generation fighter plane and will therefore, play a most important role with the JASDF. The very first Japanese F-35A arrived at Luke Air Force Base in the United States on 29 November 2016 and

since then, the JASDF has been training the first batch of its fighter pilots on this new fifth generation fighter aircraft. Japan is part of an international training unit that trains pilots on the F-35A Lightning II at Luke Air Force Base. At the beginning of 2019, the first F-35s were relocated to Japan itself to form the first operational unit there.

The first Japanese operational squadron re-equipping from the F-4 Phantom to the



One of the first JASDF F-35As