

## Big Brass Staying At Thai Outpost

Nakhon Phanom, Thailand

The American military keeps five generals and an admiral living in the boon-docks, with hostile forces less than 20 miles away, at this tiny air base, better known just as "NKP."

It is the smallest and most isolated of the six major U.S. military installations in Thailand. The nearest town

is 10 miles away and Bangkok is 365 miles to the south.

The big brass in residence here, living in trailers, include the highest-ranking American officer on the Asian mainland, four-star General Timothy F. O'Keefe. He commands what remains of the once massive 7th Air Force. When headquartered on the outskirts of Saigon, it ran the Indochina air war.

The Vietnam cease-fire caused the American forces to depart and the 7th Air Force moved to this remote northeast area where Thai insurgents are active, and pro-communist troops are just across the Mekong river in Laos.

The wisdom of reestablishing operations at NKP is still being debated—at least by the 4,800 servicemen who are stuck here for a year's duty without their families.

The location was picked by General O'Keefe because NKP had \$5 million worth of idle computers that a modern Air Force headquarters needs. Also, the NKP flightline was half empty, he explained.

"It had the facilities available that we wanted." But he conceded that, because of its isolation, "NKP is not a place people volunteer to come to."

During much of the Indochina war, the base here was takeoff point for clandestine air operations over Laos and North Vietnam. And its fancy computers, located in air-conditioned bunkers, received the "input" of thousands of sensors dropped along North Vietnam infiltration routes through Laos.