

= Station Group Banak =

Station Group Banak (Norwegian : Stasjonsgruppe Banak) , formerly Banak Air Station (Banak flystasjon) , is a military airbase located at Banak , just north of Lakselv in Porsanger , Norway . Operated by the Royal Norwegian Air Force (RNoAF) , it serves a detachment of the 330 Squadron , which operates two Westland Sea King helicopters used for search and rescue operations in Finnmark , Svalbard and surrounding Arctic sea areas (the northern Norwegian Sea , the Barents Sea and the Arctic Sea) . Of the station 's two helicopters , one is on standby at any given time . The station group is co @-@ located with the civilian Lakselv Airport , Banak and is administratively under the 132nd Air Wing and Bodø Main Air Station . Banak is RNoAF 's most northerly base and has fifty employees .

The airfield was first built with triangular runways in 1938 . It was taken over by the Luftwaffe in 1940 , who expanded it and laid down two wooden runways . Banak was taken over by the RNoAF in 1945 , but abandoned in 1952 . Plans for re @-@ opening emerged in 1955 , but uncertainty regarding its value in a war caused a prolonged debate about financing . The air station was largely funded by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and was opened on 4 May 1963 , along with a civilian terminal . During the Cold War , Norway did not allow allies peacetime use of the airfield . The runway was extended in 1968 and the 330 Squadron was established in 1973 .

= = History = =

= = = First airfield = = =

The first proposals for an airport in Lakselv stemmed from military considerations . Despite a Norwegian policy of neutrality , there was a fear that Norway could be occupied by foreign powers to take advantage of the country 's strategic position . The Norwegian military therefore wanted airfields constructed throughout the country to increase the air force 's mobility . Finnmark was regarded as a key location , given the increased Soviet militarization on the Kola Peninsula . Increased military funding was granted from 1937 , which allowed triangular runway to be built Banak the following year . It was used by a detachment of the Royal Norwegian Navy Air Service .

Banak was taken over by the Luftwaffe during the German occupation of Norway during World War II . The Wehrmacht was planning an attack on the Soviet Union from Finnmark and designated Banak as their primary air base in Northern Norway . By September 1940 , the main runway was extended to 1 @,@ 000 by 200 meters (3 @,@ 280 by 660 ft) , constructed in wood . Three hangars were built , allowing the air base to house bombers . The air station 's prime function during the war was to facilitate attacks on the Arctic convoys . Expansion continued , and by 1943 there were two parallel runways , both 1 @,@ 800 meters (5 @,@ 900 ft) long . The air station was blasted in October 1944 during Operation Nordlicht , the German retreat from Finnmark .

In 1945 the Norwegian Air Force took control over the airfield and commenced reconstruction . That year , the air force operated a service from Bardufoss Air Station via Banak to Kirkenes Airport , Høybuktnøen , with correspondence to Oslo at Bardufoss . The service lasted only the one season . Later the runway was used to serve air ambulances . During the late 1940s , part of the wooden runway was removed and used for other construction projects .

Interest in Banak rose with the Czechoslovak coup d'état of 1948 and fears of Soviet intervention in Norway . Finnmark , located on the Norway ? Soviet Union border , became of particular interest for the military . Although specific plans were articulated , no construction of an airbase was carried out . However , Norway 's entry into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 had a dramatic effect on the military strategy and Banak . Finnmark was regarded as a tripwire and was to be sacrificed in case of a Soviet invasion . The airfield was closed in 1952 , but the runway remained , consisting of a short section of unmaintained wooden runway and the rest a grass strip . It was occasionally used by small aircraft .

== Plans for reestablishment ==

Interest from military leaders for an airport at Banak returned in 1955 . The Air Force was mainly concerned that they could not reach the easternmost parts of Norway from Bodø Main Air Station . This allowed for several Soviet infringements of Norwegian air space . Alternative locations were considered , such as Kautokeino , where a radar had been built . NATO supported a reconstruction of Banak , partially raised by increased focus towards NATO 's northern flank , and also to serve as part of the nuclear program . NATO was ready to provide funding in 1957 , but by then Norwegian authorities were wanting to delay its construction . They cited lack of personnel to man the station as well as a lack of usability in times of war . The government decided in 1957 to disallow nuclear warheads to be stored in Norway during peacetime , thus eliminating NATO 's strategic need for Banak . The air station was therefore removed from the investment program .

By 1959 the United States was concerned that the militarization of the Kola Peninsula would become the prime source of a Soviet attack on North America . A new discussion about location arose , with Alta and Kautokeino as the main alternatives . Banak was estimated to cost NOK 4 @. 9 million , NOK 2 @. 8 million less than Alta , had better instrument landing and weather conditions and allowed a longer runway . The main advantage of Alta was that it would be better suited for civilian traffic . The government and Parliament approved construction of Banak in 1959 on condition that it receive NATO funding .

By then new concerns had been raised by NATO regarding the defense of Banak , caused by its proximity to the Soviet Union , lack of military forces in Finnmark and lack of natural obstacles . The initial response from the Norwegian Air Force was that the airfield could easily be used by the Soviet Union in its current shape and that a means of destruction could make it useless following a Norwegian retreat . Later costs estimates rose to NOK 8 @. 9 million , which would include a 2 @. 000 @- meter (6 @. 600 ft) runway , a 400 @- meter (1 @. 300 ft) taxiway and a 1 @. 000 square meters (11 @. 000 sq ft) apron . Lack of funding meant the airport would not meet all of NATO 's air base standards . This would be permitted because the airfield , from NATO 's point of view , would only be used for emergency landings .

NATO 's proposal for an investment program was approved by the Norwegian Government on 7 December 1959 and by the North Atlantic Council on 1 June 1960 . Parliament passed the plans on 5 August . Construction was carried out simultaneously at Banak , Alta Airport and Kirkenes Airport , Høybuktmoen , which would combined give Finnmark three primary airports . All three airports opened on 4 May 1963 .

== Cold War ==

The dwindling credibility of the massive retaliation strategy caused NATO to shift to the flexible response strategy . This increased the importance of Banak , as it would be used to fly in reinforcements in a war situation . In 1962 , both RNoAF and NATO proposed that Banak be expanded to full NATO standards . RNoAF planned that Banak should host a detachment of up to six fighters or fighter @- bombers and act as a stopover for fighters , transports and helicopters . The airfield was to stockpile supplies , including fuel and ammunition , for one month of war efforts . NATO saw need , in case of a Soviet attack on Finnmark , to deploy two brigades consisting of 10 @. 000 men in the course of a week and simultaneously host a squadron of tactical aircraft .

The expansion was estimated to cost NOK 17 @. 8 million , of which NATO would fund 15 @. 6 million , and approved by Parliament on 7 May 1965 . NATO adjusted the plans later that year , reducing the apron area by 9 @. 000 square meters (97 @. 000 sq ft) while increasing from one to two hangars . Construction lasted from 1967 to 1968 . It consisted of extending the runway with 600 meters (2 @. 000 ft) , constructing two hangars , a communications building and a network of internal roads and taxiways . The upgrades were followed up by pressure from the armed forces to establish an squadron of fighters at Banak . Following the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August ? September 1968 , the ministry decided to upgrade the Garrison of Porsanger from 400 to 1000 men . This was followed up with an extension of the runway and better

air defense at Banak .

Throughout the Cold War , Norway enforced a policy to disallow allied aircraft to operate further north than Bardufoss and Andøya , in an effort to minimize tension with the Soviet Union . Specifically , allied aircraft were not permitted to operate east of the 24th meridian east , which was just west of Banak , thus hindering use of the airfield . This was motivated in part to not unnecessarily provoke the Soviet Union , with which Norway shared a land border , and in part because increased allied military presence could decrease the popular support for NATO membership . The restrictions were strengthened following the 1960 U @-@ 2 incident , in which a US spy aircraft en route to Bodø was shot down over Soviet territory . During the mid @-@ 1960s , NATO unsuccessfully attempted to convince Norwegian authorities to move the allied operational border from the 24th to the 27th meridian east .

Norway prohibited nuclear warheads to be stored on its soil , preventing Banak from serving in a role as a base for US nuclear @-@ armed bombers . NATO 's military interest for Banak peaked during the late 1960s . Increased range of Soviet aircraft during the 1970s diminished the need for troops in Finnmark ; combined with Norwegian tension and nuclear policies , this caused the United States to favor Vestfjorden and Troms over Banak as the primary areas of defense .

Since 1970 , the 332 Squadron and later the 334 Squadron and 336 Squadron have operated regular training missions out of Banak with fighter aircraft . In 1969 Parliament decided to establish a search and rescue squadron . Ten Sea King helicopters were bought by the Ministry of Justice in December 1970 and the 330 Squadron was re @-@ enacted on 25 May 1973 . Banak was one of four original stations for the helicopters , the others being Bodø , Ørland and Sola . The first major mission was on 7 April 1974 , when thirteen fishermen were rescued when the trawler Longvabakk sank in the Oksefjorden at Cape Nordkinn .

= = = Later history = = =

The responsibility for Banak 's Sea Kings originally included Svalbard . After a 1992 sinking , the government decided to instead lease a Super Puma helicopter for Svalbard , removing the archipelago from Banak 's portfolio . Banak 's runway was extended in 1992 and 1993 , including widening to 45 meters (148 ft) and receiving new runway lighting . The range of the Sea Kings is in part determined by their radio range . Until 1998 , some long @-@ range missions with Sea Kings were flown with assistance of P @-@ 3 Orion aircraft to serve as radio relays , at one point allowing for a record 3 @,@ 148 kilometers (1 @,@ 956 mi) mission . The air station was in 1998 converted to a station group under Bodø Main Air Station .

In 2001 , the Ministry of Justice considered reorganizing the search and rescue services , and looked into moving the 330 Squadron from Banak to Hammerfest Airport . The rationale was the proximity to Hammerfest Hospital and a typical 40 @-@ minute shorter flight time to the coast . However , such a location would give longer travel time to the inner parts of Finnmark . The plans were hindered by opposition from the Air Force , as they would have to establish a military station at Hammerfest . The Norwegian Armed Forces announced in 2007 that they would carry out a major restructuring and decrease of activity in Finnmark , with the long @-@ term plan to close the Garrison of Porsanger .

= = Facilities = =

Station Group Banak is located on the Banak peninsula , which sticks into Porsangerfjorden , just north of Lakselv . It is the northern @-@ most station of the RNoAF . The military facilities are located on the western side of the runway , while the civilian facilities are on the eastern side . The runway is 2 @,@ 788 by 45 meters (9 @,@ 147 by 148 ft) and aligned 17 ? 35 (roughly north ? south) . It is mostly asphalt , although parts are concrete . There is instrument landing system category I in both directions . The airfield saw 10 @,@ 953 aircraft movements in 2011 , including civilian .

= = Operations = =

The 330 Squadron has a detachment with two Westland Sea King Mk 43B helicopters at Banak . They are part of the Norwegian Air Ambulance service , organized by the four regional health authorities . Medical personnel is provided by Finnmark Hospital Trust , while the remaining personnel are military . The detachment flew 271 missions and 854 hours in 2009 . The Sea Kings ' primary role is for search and rescue (SAR) mission , with a portfolio of northern Troms , Finnmark and the Barents Sea . In SAR missions , the squadron operates under the management of the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre of Northern Norway located in Bodø . The detachment 's secondary responsibility is as an air ambulance , under management of Hammerfest Hospital .

During winter the helicopters must often follow a coastal flight route of Porsangerfjorden before heading east to Kirkenes or west to Tromsø , to avoid icing . The Sea Kings have an operational radius of 740 kilometers (460 mi) ; in combination with refueling possibilities at Bjørnøya and Hopen , this allows all parts of the Norwegian exclusive economic zone to be covered . Because of issues with icing , the helicopters cannot fly higher than 200 meters (660 ft) altitude .

The General Dynamics F @-@ 16 Fighting Falcons based at Bodø regularly use Banak both for monitoring and training . Fighter aircraft can reach the Norway ? Russia border in about ten minutes , while helicopters can reach the border in thirty minutes . The primary use for fighters is training is Halkkavarre Shooting Range .

= = Civilian sector = =

Lakselv Airport , Banak is the main airport serving central Finnmark , with its catchment areas including the municipalities of Porsanger , Karasjok and Lebesby . Widerøe is the primary airline operating at the airport , with daily flights to Alta and Tromsø using Bombardier Dash 8 aircraft . In 2011 , the airport had 63 @,@ 537 passengers . It is classified as an international airport .

= = Accidents and incidents = =

On 12 June 1985 , an F @-@ 16B with two people on board experienced control problems north of Banak . The pilot ejected and survived while an officer was killed .

On 23 March 1992 , an F @-@ 16A lost power at 5 @,@ 500 meters altitude (18 @,@ 000 ft) . The pilot survived after aiming the aircraft at an unpopulated area and ejecting at an altitude of 1 @,@ 400 meters (4 @,@ 600 feet) .

On 29 June 2005 , an ICP Savannah micro aircraft crashed only a few minutes after its departure from Banak , with two flight instructors on board . Both instructors were killed in the accident .