

LPLA – Lajes Fields Flight manual

Welcome to Lajes Fields! This base was an emergency base for Shuttle Trans-Atlantic Landing abort mode, next to Istres, Zaragoza, Moròn and Easter Island.

1. Before playing

You don't need anything to play with it; but if you decide to launch a scenario, you need its requirements, and they are listed in the "Lajes Field" Scenario folder.

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2. The base

2.1 History

The origin of the Lajes Field dates back to 1928, when Portuguese Army Lieutenant colonel Eduardo Gomes da Silva wrote a report on the possible construction of an airfield in the plain land of Lajes, for that branch's aviation service (Portuguese: Aeronáutica Militar). However, the location of Achada on the island of São Miguel was chosen instead at the time for the construction of the field. In 1934, the Achada airfield was condemned due to its inadequate dimensions and adverse weather conditions, resulting in the construction of a landing strip of packed earth and a small group of support facilities by the Portuguese military at Lajes.

During World War II, the designation of the airfield was changed to Air Base No.4 and the Portuguese government expanded the runway, sending troops and equipment to Terceira, including Gloster Gladiator fighters. The military activities in the Azores grew in 1942, as the Gladiators began to be used to support allied convoys, in reconnaissance missions and on meteorological flights. In addition, the first Portuguese Junkers Ju 52 arrived in July 1942 to fly cargo missions.

By 1943, the British and American armed forces were allowed basing rights in Portugal, and the Royal Air Force took over Lajes Field as RAF Station Lajes. The Azores permitted British and American airplanes to protect Allied shipping in the mid-Atlantic.

On 1 December 1943, British and U.S. military representatives at RAF Lages Field signed a joint agreement outlining the roles and responsibilities for the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) and United States Navy (USN) at Lajes Field. The agreement established guidelines and limitations for the ferrying of aircraft and the transport aircraft to Europe via Lajes Field. In return, the US agreed to assist the British in improving and extending existing facilities at Lajes. Air Transport Command transport planes began landing at Lajes Field immediately after the agreement was signed. By the end of June 1944, more than 1,900 American airplanes had passed through this Azorean base. Using Lajes Field, the flying time relative to the usual transatlantic route between Brazil and West Africa was nearly cut in half from 70 to 40 hours.

Lajes Field was one of the two stopover and refueling bases for the first transatlantic crossing of non-rigid airships (blimps) in 1944. The USN sent six Goodyear-built K-ships from Naval Air Station South Weymouth in Massachusetts to their first stopover base at Naval Station Argentia, Newfoundland and then on to Lajes Field in the Azores before flying to their final destination at Port Lyautey (Kenitra), French Morocco. From their base with Fleet Air Wing 15 at Port Lyautey, the blimps of USN Blimp Squadron 14 (ZP-14 or Blimpron 14) conducted night-time anti-submarine warfare (ASW) to search for German U-boats around the Strait of Gibraltar using magnetic anomaly detection (MAD). In 1945, two ZP-14 replacement blimps were sent from Weeksville, North Carolina to the Bermudas and Lajes before going on to Craw Field (Kenitra Air Base) at Port Lyautey.

The United States and the United Kingdom transferred control of Lajes to Portugal in 1946. The Portuguese redesignated Lajes as Air Base No. 4 and assigned it to the air branch of the Portuguese Army. However, talks between the U.S. and Portugal began about extending the American stay in the Azores. A temporary agreement was reached between the U.S. and Portuguese governments giving the U.S. military rights to Lajes Field for an additional 18 months: the relationship between the Portuguese and American governments continues to this day, where the U.S. military resides under a tenancy status. Lajes Field remains Portuguese Air Base 4 under the direction of Headquarters Azores Air Zone commanded by Portuguese Air Force brigadeiro (equal to a U.S. two-star general).

In 1947, the Portuguese Esquadra 41 started to operate from Lajes, equipped with Boeing SB-17, Grumman HU-16 Albatross, Douglas C-54 Skymaster and, later Sikorsky H-19. This unit was responsible for the search and rescue (SAR) operations in the Atlantic between Europe and North America.

In 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military alliance was established. Portugal, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and various (other) western European countries were charter members of NATO. By reason of the NATO alliance, Lajes was available for use by those countries, and the use of Lajes was one of Portugal's primary contributions to the alliance.

In 1953, Lynde D. McCormick, the Commander-in-Chief of United States Atlantic Command organized a subordinate unified command in the Azores called U.S. Forces Azores (USFORAZ). A small staff of United States Army, United States Air Force, and United States Marine Corps personnel composed the joint staff of USFORAZ, serving as the liaison between the U.S. and the Portuguese in the Azores. In the late 1950s, USAF air refueling/tanker aircraft were stationed at Lajes to provide in-flight refueling for U.S. aircraft transiting the Atlantic Ocean. Some of the tanker units left Lajes by 1965, but others returned later, especially the USAF KC-135 Stratotanker. This transfer, coupled with the introduction of newer long-range aircraft, resulted in a gradual decline in Lajes traffic. The Military Air Transport Service (MATS) and its successor, the Military Airlift Command (MAC), became responsible for USAF activities at the base, and for a while the 1605th Military Airlift Support Wing acted as USAF host unit.

Lajes Field also played a crucial role in Cold War politics. From 1932 to 1968, Portugal was under the dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar, yet the U.S. Government maintained friendly relations with the Estado Novo regime, especially after 1943. With rising postwar tensions between the East and the West, the United States understood the strategic importance of Lajes Field and continued its close friendship with the Salazar Government in Portugal.

In 1961, the Portuguese Air Force EICAP (heavy aircraft advanced training unit) was transferred to Lajes, operating Douglas C-47, Douglas C-54 and later CASA C-212 Aviocar.

During the Portuguese Colonial War, from 1961 to 1975, the Air Force Hospital at Lajes operated as the main centre for treatment and rehabilitation of mutilated and heavy burned soldiers of the three services of the Portuguese Armed Forces.

Another important Cold War operation at Lajes was the U.S. Navy's Naval Air Facility Lajes (NAF Lajes), a tenant activity at the air base. NAF Lajes, and its associated Tactical Support Center (TSC)/Antisubmarine Warfare Operations Center (ASWOC), supported rotational detachments of U.S. Navy P-2 Neptune and later P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft that would track Soviet attack, guided missile, and ballistic missile submarines in the region. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, and end of the Cold War, P-3 operations at Lajes declined, and the Naval Air Facility was inactivated in the late 1990s.

During the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Lajes Field also supported U.S. airlift missions to Israel, highlighting the importance of the U.S. Air Force base at Lajes.

In 1980, an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale struck Terceira Island. Damage to Lajes Field was minimal, but Portuguese communities throughout the island suffered extensive damage. Military personnel responded with food, shelter, equipment, and manpower.

In the summer of 1984, Lajes undertook a new mission known as "SILK PURSE." Boeing EC-135s began operating out of Lajes Field as an airborne command post for the U.S. Commander-in-Chief, Europe. Along with the aircraft came the U.S. European Command battle staff and flight crews from United States Air Forces in Europe. This mission was ended in late August 1991.

Lajes supported the large airlift during the Gulf War. On the first day of the deployment over 90 aircraft transited Lajes. Strategic Air Command (SAC) created a provisional tanker wing, the 802nd Air Refueling Wing (P) Provisional, at Lajes to support the airlift. At the height of the operation a peak of 33 tanker aircraft and 600 troops deployed to Lajes. Soon after the Gulf War ended, Lajes command changed from Air Mobility Command, to Air Combat Command.

The resident Portuguese Squadron 711 Albatrozes (Albatrosses) was deactivated on 30 November 2006. With this act the long-serving Aerospaciale Puma was retired from service. The Puma helicopters were replaced by the modern AgustaWestland AW101 Merlin: the Portuguese government purchased twelve units for SAR, CSAR and Fisheries enforcement. Air Base No.4 received three Merlins on permanent detachment from Esquadra 751 "Pumas" from Air Base No.6 at Montijo,

near Lisbon. They saw immediate service starting 1 December 2006. However, maintenance problems developed in the next coming months which, coupled with a shortage of spare parts from the manufacturer, led to such a low serviceable rate forcing the Portuguese Air Force to pull the Merlin from service in the Azores. The last Merlin flew back to Montijo on 19 March 2009. In order not to compromise the SAR mission, the Portuguese Air Force decided to reactivate the Puma fleet: in July 2008 a formation of four Puma helicopters made the trans-Atlantic crossing from Beja to Lajes via Porto Santo Airport on Porto Santo Island and Santa Maria Airport on Santa Maria Island. The Portuguese Air Force continues to operate one SAR squadron Esq. 752 "Pumas" operating five ubiquitous and reliable Aerospatiale Pumas to fly patients among the islands, from ships during SAR missions and during other transport duties. The entire Merlin fleet is expected to return to full operational status eventually, giving way to the definitive retirement of the Puma helicopters. There is also a long standing CASA C-212 Aviocar detachment from mainland Esquadra 401 "Cientistas". In 2009 Lajes provided rescue support of shipping lanes across the Atlantic, a safe haven for medical or mechanical emergency situations in aircraft crossing the Atlantic, and support for the USAF's continuing campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Fighter, tanker and transport planes frequently stopped there, either east or westbound. The next decade expects to see a rise in the number of U.S. Department of Defense aircraft to transit Lajes supporting the newly created AFRICOM. The base also supports other NATO and non-NATO armed forces assets crossing the Atlantic for transport, VIP, exercise, relief or humanitarian duties. The civilian terminal also plays an important role in support of passenger and cargo airliners, executive, corporate and private jets flying to the island or beyond as the central location in the Azores group of islands makes it an ideal spot for refueling or stopover. In the past five years, large Antonov An-124 and An-225 aircraft have been seen frequently transporting oversized cargo for destinations in North and South America. Civilian operators may use Terceira Airport/Lajes Air Base after requesting a landing permit according to the rules inscribed in the AIP (Aeronautical Information Publication) for Portugal, issued by the Portuguese Directorate of Civilian Aviation (INAC).

2.2 Current Status

Lajes provides support to 15,000 aircraft including fighters from the US and 20 other allied nations each year. The geographic position has made this airbase strategically important to both the United States and NATO's war fighting capability. In addition, a small commercial aviation terminal handles scheduled and chartered flights from North America and Europe, especially mainland Portugal. It also supervises commercial air traffic with the other islands in the Azorean archipelago and trans-Atlantic refueling and stopovers for commercial airlines, executive and corporate jets, air cargo haulers, small private aircraft, governmental flights, humanitarian missions, and other flights.

Today, Lajes continues to support transiting aircraft. Beginning in 1997, large scale fighter aircraft movements under the new USAF operating concept known as the Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) filled the Lajes flight line. Lajes also has hosted B-52 Stratofortress and B-1 Lancer bomber aircraft on global air missions, and also supported many routine NATO exercises, such as the biennial Northern Viking exercise. Lajes Field services aircraft from various nations, including Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, India, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Qatar, Russia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Venezuela. The airfield was an alternative landing site for the NASA Space Shuttle orbiter and also now plays as the number one diversion airport for medical or mechanical emergency diversion situations for all types of aircraft. An annual average of 50 aircraft of all types divert to Lajes as a mid Atlantic safe haven.

In August 2006, Portuguese news agencies reported that both governments were in discussions for a new agreement that could allow the use of Lajes for the training of a permanent F-22 Raptor

squadron. Since 1943, the use of Lajes by the U.S. military has allowed Portugal to strengthen diplomatic relations with the U.S. as well as obtain military equipment for the Portuguese Armed Forces, including two A-7P Corsair II squadrons and the co-finance of F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft under the Peace Atlantis I program.

Recently, in August 2010, Portuguese news agencies advised for the termination of the F-22 Raptor plan to use Lajes as a platform for DACT training over the Atlantic Ocean. DoD sources were cited as the plan cancelled due to budgetary constraints. This was regarded locally as a setback for the military environment at Lajes, as well as raising doubts from regional political forces who have concerns regarding the base future as well as the safety of the Azorean employed workforce.

Despite NATO and non-NATO fighter and transport planes which continue to use Lajes on a regular basis, the US DoD movements are now at an all time low. With more and more airplanes making use of air to air refueling, Lajes has been for some periods of time, ranging from weeks to months, almost deserted except for the occasional C-130 or KC-135.

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