



NATO Tiger Association

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Story and pictures

Uli Metternich, LTC ret. GAF

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„Tiger Flag“



NATO Tiger Meet 2009 can claim to be the biggest European air exercise of the year and sets new standards with a two week exercise period.

Swiss F/A-18 “Hornets” during formation takeoff.

[*Source: Metternich/Luftwaffe*]

“ Tiger Flight is cleared for Takeoff ”

Mid September at Kleine Brogel/ Belgium. Good weather conditions are still prevailing and the afternoon sun illuminates the runway in warm colours. The first formation of jets has been cleared for takeoff by an air traffic controller. More than 40 fighters from different countries are already waiting on the taxiway for their release from the control tower. The noise of the running engines increases slowly to a tremendous level that attracts the attention of many visitors and spectators. In minute intervals afterburners become lit and aircraft are taking off for their missions during the Exercise “ NATO Tiger Meet 2009 ”. Lieutenant Colonel Paul “ Polle ” Desair from the Belgian Air Component (Belgian Air Force) is watching the takeoff phase from the control tower at Kleine



Brogel Air Base. He is an experienced F-16 pilot and commander of the Flying Group of 10th Wing at Kleine Brogel. LtCol Desair is the so called “ Air Boss ” of the exercise and supervises the flying operations.

He is responsible for flight safety and safe execution of the missions: “ Normally I have not a lot to do, if everything works as planned. Only in emergency cases or difficult weather situations I have to react. Flight safety is the main point in all operations. ”

Small Air Space

“ The airspace over Belgium is very limited. It is not easy to guide out a package of more than 50 aircraft to their designated exercise areas and bring them back home again safely. It is important to have the general overlook and it requires perfect coordination with air traffic control ”, adds LtCol Desair. For this reason the exercise planning staff had already booked a large number of exercise areas in northern France, the Netherlands, Germany and over the North Sea during the preparation phase of over 18 months. The exercise scenarios for the Composite Air Operations (COMAOs) were adapted to the



training areas and in addition the army exercise “ Pegasus ” was integrated into the scenarios.

The “ Air Boss ” in the control tower.

[*Source: Metternich/Luftwaffe*]

Fast Roping of Special Forces.

[Source: Cosimino / ITAF]

Special Forces Exercise Pegasus

Parallel to the NATO Tiger Meet the army exercise had over 300 soldiers of Special Forces from different nations deployed in the Ardennes in southern Belgium. Exercise operations took place together with the forces of the NATO Tiger Meet. A number of tasks and activities such as FAC (Forward Air Controlling), CSAR (Combat Search and Rescue), PR (Personal Recovery) were carried out. The troops were supported by a Belgian C-130 Hercules transport aircraft from 15 Wing / Mels-



broek, two Czech Mi-24 Hind attack helicopters from 221 Squadron / Namest, two Belgian Agusta A 109 Light Recce Attack Helicopters from Wing Heli at Liege-Bierset and one Italian Bell Agusta AB-212 from 21° Gruppo at Grazzanise. They guaranteed air transport for the Special Forces.

Ultimate Tiger Meet

With 64 aircraft involved, more than 850 exercise participants from 11 nations, plus official observers from 5 additional forces, it was not only the



Ramp with parked Jets.

[Source: Metternich/Luftwaffe]

largest air exercise of the year within Europe, but also the biggest NATO Tiger Meet in the almost fifty years of the NATO Tiger Association (NTA). A total of 785 missions ended up in 1253 flight hours with high value tactical training for the participants. 15 Tiger squadrons, 6 other flying squadrons and one UAV-squadron (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) shared this multinational experience. In addition the Tiger squadrons from Greece and Turkey (335 SQN HAF / 192 Filo TuAF) sent 2 observers each, since flying participation was not possible for them this year. For the week-end two more squadrons showed up with their jets. Esquadra 301 from Monte Real / Portugal flew in with a double-seat F-16B and 321 Squadron from Lechfeld /Germany landed 3 Tornados at Kleine Brogel. But the NATO Tiger Meet had two more guests visiting. For the first time two Serbian pilots of 241 Squadron “Tigrovi” from Kraljevo-Ladjevci Air Base were

invited to visit the NATO Tiger Meet. Within the process of integration of new European countries and the programme “Partnership for Peace” (PfP), they had a chance to see what “Tiger Spirit” is all about.

4th Generation Jets

Latest generation aircraft such as Rafale and Gripen enriched the exercise with their presence. After two Czech JAS-39C/D Gripen from 211 SQN at Caslav already had participated in flying operations during last years NATO Tiger Meet at Landivisiau, this time the Hungarian Air Force showed up with three Gripen of 59/1 Squadron from Kecskemét Air Base. During the first exercise week their Air Base Commander, Brigadier-General Nandor Kilian, took the opportunity to have a close look at exercise operations. Having applied for membership in the NATO Tiger Association (NTA), 59/1 “Puma” Squadron was nominated for probationary status in the NTA. Already since 2006 the French Rafales of Escadron de Chasse et



d’Expérimentation 05/330 „Cote d’Argent“ from Mont de Marsan are regular participants with two or three Rafales besides their Mirage 2000. Lieutenant Colonel Patrice „Bob“ Morand, the squadron commander of EC 05/330 notes: “It is my first Tiger Meet. Besides an excellent infrastructure especially the operational and realistic planning is impressive. The operations are fully comparable to “Flag-Exercises” and offer high value training for all aircrews and Groundcrews.”



TOP:
Serbian Pilot from
241 SQN
„Tigrovi“ as
Guest.

LEFT:
Mixed Tiger
Formation over
Belgium.

[Source: Metternich/
Luftwaffe]

Flying Operations

During eight full exercise days AM and PM missions were flown. The “shadow wave” in the morning consisted of individual training flights and formations of smaller sizes. The afternoon was dedicated to the big COMAOs (Composite Air Operations), in which different air assets were employed in diverse roles and tasks, including swing role operations for some jets, being fighter protection as well as fighter bomber attack assets. The main objective was to train and practice interoperability between different units.

The preparation phase for these complex missions including more than 50 aircraft was always started in the afternoon of the day prior.

Planning Cycle

After receiving the task, the overall leader of a COMAO, the so called “Package Lead”, initially studies the ATO (air task order) and the exercise scenario before he develops his plan and “package flow” together with the leaders of the different parts of the package. For example fighters have to fly in front of the main package as a fighter sweep or as direct escort for fighter bombers in the middle of the package. SEAD aircraft have to hold down hostile radars of surface to air missile systems enroute or in the target area. Besides these examples, Tactical Air Reconnaissance is an important factor for the mission success. This includes pre and post strike (attack) reconnaissance. After the big plan has been discussed,

The following tasks were carried out during NATO Tiger Meet 2009:

OCA - Offensive Counter Air

AI - Air Interdiction

TST - Time Sensitive Targeting

DCA - Defensive Counter Air

CAS - Close Air Support

FAC - Forward air controlling

TAR - Tactical Air Reconnaissance

SEAD - Suppression of Enemy Air Defences

AEW - Airborne Early Warning

IADS - Integrated Air Defense System

CSAR - Combat Search and Rescue

PR - Personnel Recovery Ops

TA/D - Tactical Airlift / Drop

AAR - Air to Air Refuelling



Multinational Team preparing a mission.

[Source: Metternich/Luftwaffe]

specific responsibilities are handed over to the individual sections and aircrews of the mass formation. Weather, navigation, flight restrictions, timings, fuel calculation, air-to-air refuelling, communications plan and target planning are only some of the tasks that have to be prepared and closely coordinated. The main planning phase for the afternoon COMAO then starts after the operations

and weather briefing in the morning. Every aircrew has its jobs to fulfill until the “Mass Briefing” takes place and mission flow and timings are reviewed. Everybody has to have a clear idea of the whole mission, because in the air every second counts.

Lessons learned

To evaluate the mission success after the COMAOs forces have landed, mass debriefings and individual flight debriefings were always scheduled for late afternoon. With flight profile recorders (FPR) that can be carried from most of the aircraft as external stores, it was possible to reconstruct tactical situations even without fixed ground stations that carry out real-time monitoring of the exercise area, like at Nellis AFB for the “Red Flag” exercise. It was remarkable to see how the training process developed during the exercise. Every squadron had to provide package leads or section



leads for the “Shadow Wave” in the mornings and the COMAOs in the afternoon. Therefore every squadron could take advantage of high value training up to the maximum extent. Tactical lessons were learned and relearned every day and shared among the participating squadrons.

Eyes of the Tigers

The Recce-Tornados of TRW 51 “Immelmann” were the flying eyes of the NATO Tigers. Pre- and post strike recce flights in the target areas and en-



Recce Tornado from AG 51“Immelmann“ during Take-off. [Source: Metternich/Luftwaffe]



Commander TRW 51
 “Immelmann” (left) during
 Mission Planning.

[Source: Metternich/Luftwaffe]

route provided valuable information for the “Tiger Forces”. Even in the times of satellite- and drone reconnaissance the manned tactical air reconnaissance is indispensable in modern air warfare. To see how his troops were doing, Colonel Karsten Stoye, commander of TRW 51 “Immelmann” visited the exercise and even flew one mission. As an old Tiger from Oldenburg and 511 Squadron at Schleswig he can look back on a few Tiger Meets and notes: “ Compared to my first NATO Tiger Meet some 15 years ago, the present form of the exercise is a big step ahead in tactical training. Besides realistic scenarios and tasking, all provided facilities like big planning and briefing rooms, technical equipment and the internal communications and computer network left a very professional impression with me. For the future it will be important to keep the high standards reached and combine the NATO Tiger Meet with other high value exercises. ”

Tiger Meet in the past and today

Major Jeroen „Poeske“ Poesen
 in the cockpit of his F-16.

[Source: Metternich/Luftwaffe]

Since the first NATO Tiger Meet in 1961 and today the exercise has passed an evolution from meets with only a few days of duration and little flying to a complex flying exercise that is as good as “ Flag- Exercises ” like “ Red Flag ” or “ Maple Flag ”. Major Jeroen Poesen, F-16 pilot and commander of 31 Squadron at Kleine Brogel describes the objectives of the NATO Tiger Meet with his own words: “ Main aim for us was to provide good training and practice interoperability between different squadrons on operational level as well as maintenance level. I think we have reached this goal in spite of a rather small budget. On top all the participating units had the chance to expand their common knowledge on the socio-cultural level and make friends with other nations. ” To the question of what impressed him most during NATO Tiger Meet 2009, he answers:





Tigers over Belgium. *[Source: Metternich/Luftwaffe]*

“ After having started with the preparation of the exercise already early 2008, it was a tremendous experience to see all the pieces of the big puzzle come together to a well working picture. For this effort I would like to thank everybody who has contributed in preparation and conduct of this exercise. ” With respect to the big number of participating squadrons he is also very satisfied, since this shows despite considerable budget cuts the awareness of the different Air Forces about the excellent training value of the exercise.

High Value Training

For the first time a NATO Tiger Meet lasted for two weeks. A new chapter has been opened with it looking at previous Tiger Meets. Compared to earlier exercises the number of flying days was doubled with just a small increase in cost. Extending the length of the exercise not only contributes to cost effectiveness, but also increases the continuity of the high value training. Looking at budget cuts, it becomes more and more essential to optimize operational aircrew training. 313 Squadron of the Royal Netherlands Air Force already plans the next NATO Tiger Meet. Hopefully many Tiger Squadrons will be reunited at Volkel Air Base in the Netherlands during the first two weeks of October 2010 with their everlasting motto “ Once a “Tiger always a Tiger. ”

Ulrich Metternich

LtCol ret. GAF

NTA