

NATO Tiger Meet/Exercise ARCTIC TIGER 2007

Over Fifty aircraft from the NATO Tiger community deployed to Orland Main Air Base near Trondheim in Central Norway between 23 September – 1 October to participate in the Annual NATO Tiger Meet and its official air exercise, ARCTIC TIGER 2007. This was the first time that a full Tiger Meet had been hosted in Norway and in spite of ongoing operational commitments in the Middle East and Asia for some participants and budgetary restrictions for others the widespread membership of the NATO Tiger Association managed to provide a full range of capabilities at Orland. Our hosts had also planned and prepared a comprehensive air exercise designed to maximise the training value for all participants. National support was impressive and by the time Exercise ARCTIC TIGER 07 started on 23 September, more than 1,000 personnel assigned to 21 flying squadrons and supporting units from 12 different nations were operating from Orland.



The planning process for Exercise ARCTIC TIGER 07 started in October 2006 with Major Marianne 'Mary' Knutsen, Norway's first female F-16 fighter pilot and previously a member of 338 Squadron and now on the Wing HQ Staff, as the nominated Project Officer for NTM 07. Invitations explaining the aims and objectives of the exercise, tailored to the geographical environment and the Norwegian weather conditions, were despatched to all NTA members. The need for respective nations to confirm their individual air exercise plans resulted in some early responses with ARCTIC TIGER 07 rapidly shaping up to become the second largest combined air exercise in Europe this year. To take advantage of the availability of in-place assets and economies of scale, it had already been decided that the exercise would immediately follow Exercise BOLD AVENGER 2007, the NATO Air Meet which was also staged at Orland in the earlier part of September. Fortunately, Orland is practically purpose built for hosting large air exercises, with a full range of technical and domestic facilities available on base, to house accommodate large numbers of aircraft and personnel. Add to this a comprehensive air operations planning facility, virtually unrestricted airspace and close proximity to exercise areas and it soon becomes apparent why this northern base is so important to the NATO air planning staffs.

Exercise ARCTIC TIGER 2007 Scenario

The exercise scenario was based upon a familiar humanitarian theme with participants facing a deteriorating situation between the fictitious democratic State of Valhall, bordered by Loke in the North and Fenris in the South, two countries that possessed unstable governments and regimes. A long period of uneasy peace was broken at the turn of the New Century and since 2001 there has been an increase in ethnic tensions and border disputes. A United Nations brokered security arrangement for Valhall had been established previously, but a UN Security Resolution had subsequently been issued in February 2007 and, more recently, NATO forces had been called in to reinforce the Host Nations meagre Armed Forces.



NATO agreed to deploy a wide variety of air capabilities to Orland, enabling them to conduct a comprehensive range of air tasks. There was an independent, daily, scenario within the overall exercise scenario allowing for the

full integration of all air elements, regardless of role, and a co-ordination of joint training. In this respect elements of both National and NATO land and maritime forces were directly involved in ARCTIC TIGER 2007, making it a truly Combined and Joint Multinational Exercise.

The first day of air operations was devoted to the rescue of United Nations hostages with a Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) taking place. Ground forces, including a sizeable Special Forces element, were both air-dropped from C-130s and flown in by helicopter to conduct the rescue, while air assets carried out close air support. The second day's activities were dominated by the large medical evacuation operation of both military and civilian casualties, an event which generated a considerable amount of media attention and local interest, given the particular role played by the National airline, Scandinavian Airlines System, in providing a specially equipped Boeing 737 for part of the operation. Some atrocious weather on the day added to the challenges faced by the joint civil/military team during the coordination and conduct of this complex mission. Day Three was largely devoted to a large scale Combat Search and Rescue mission aimed at successfully retrieving downed aircrew, which allowed all of the rotary wing crews to hone their skills. The final day was dedicated to the launch of full scale tactical operations, using all available assets, and designed to impose the peacekeeping mandate.



A Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) was fully embedded at Orland, charged with the production of a daily Air Tasking Order (ATO) based on the Joint Commanders overall mission. This daily ATO set out in broad terms, the air tasks to be fulfilled by the Units in order to fulfil the overall mission. Having 'translated' the ATO, the mission planners then developed a full COMBined Air Operation (COMAO), identifying each squadron's specific role in support of the Joint Commanders campaign plan. Each of the twice daily flying programmes were planned and

organised by a different squadron, thereby maximising the training benefits particularly for the execution of the complex (COMAO). Each day began with a mass briefing for all participants, explaining the full plan for both the morning and afternoon sorties. The briefing contained the full scope of each sortie, expected weather conditions, and alternate airfields, before each Flight or Section convened to hold their own individual briefs. The enlargement of NATO in recent years underlines the importance of such exercises which bring together many different nationalities, operating an equally diverse range of equipment. Therefore the need to train together regularly is the most effective method to ensure the members operate cohesively. Further, some nations

are relative newcomers to NATO or, like Switzerland, are Partnership for Peace members, and unfamiliar with many of the planning processes, so the mass and individual briefings proved to be a steep learning curve for some of the participants.

All flying operations were overseen by a NATO Boeing E-3 Sentry which monitored and updated the participants with the ever changing scenario. This was normally the first aircraft to depart Orland on a daily basis in order to be 'on station' and ready



for tasking prior to the first launch of the 'fast movers'. Occasionally, this was followed by a number of other support aircraft, including the Norwegian Dassault DA20 Falcons of 717 Skv and C-130s of 335 Skv. The sizeable helicopter force, consisting of five Norwegian Bell 412s, two RAF Westland Puma HC.1s, and a Fleet Air Arm Westland Merlin HM.1 for assault airlift would collectively depart Orland shortly after this for the transit down to the pre-assigned Forward Arming and Refuelling Point (FARP) close to the Forward Line of Troops (FLOT). These assets were generally supported by the pair of Czech Mil Mi-24V Hinds.



The full scale COMBined Air Operation (COMAO), designed to provide overwhelming force and purpose against any perceived threat from the potential aggressors culminated in the 'mass launch' of upwards of 50 fast jets over a relatively short period of time taxing the full capabilities of the Base and International Support staff. Mission packages were assembled to practice conventional ground attack, including close

air support, as well as air superiority. No weapons were carried, as all engagements and aerial attacks were simulated. On average approximately two hours elapsed from the first fixed wing launch until the final recovery during the morning 'wave'.

The tempo of operations during ARCTIC TIGER 2007 also enabled Units to conduct a secondary, but no less important, task of honing their skills either as individual units or with others in order to obtain the maximum amount of training value from the air exercise. This activity was conducted each afternoon and although it was a little less intense, it continued to present its own challenges. When exercise flying culminated on Friday morning, the combined force had, rather ironically, completed 338 (a number shared with the Hosts' Squadron number !) flying sorties in support of Exercise ARCTIC Tiger 2007.

Tiger Tails and more!

Traditionally, the annual NATO Tiger Meet has garnered a reputation for presenting aviation fans with a wealth of spectacular tiger-themed colour schemes and markings and this years event was no exception. At least 18 aircraft at Orland sported special colour schemes or markings of varying complexity. The French and German Squadrons can always be counted upon to present some of the most spectacular markings but they were up against some stiff



competition in 2007. True to form, the three French Squadrons all presented aircraft with special markings. The Mirage 2000C and Rafale B from EC.01.012 and EC.05.330 respectively sported some impressive special markings but 11 Flotille of the Aeronavale stole the show with their pair of Arctic Tiger themed Super Etendards that made a late appearance for the weekend, with a very impressive overall Gloss White scheme with black stripes. 192 Filo from Balikesir in Turkey also took the arctic theme to heart with a pair of attractively decorated F-16Cs portraying 'uniformed' Tiger caricatures throwing snow balls. A German Air Force Tornado ECR from JaBoG 321, another weekend-only visitor, also sported an impressive new colour scheme with slightly less ambitious offerings from both the Spanish and Portuguese Squadrons. Other notables were the superb new tail art on the 11 Staffel F/A-18C Hornet from Switzerland and the equally impressive markings applied to one of the Host Squadron's two-seat F-16BMs; The Units specially marked F-16AM retains its special markings but was undergoing deep maintenance during NTM 2007. Several other units brought aircraft still sporting their



special markings from the 2006 event. In addition, the 25th anniversary NATO E-3 and a specially marked Norwegian C-130H added yet more colour to the meeting.

Ever eager to show off their specially marked aircraft and proud heritage, the NATO Tigers were delighted to help their Norwegian colleagues to host a small Open Day for the General Public on the Saturday after operational flying had ceased. Bearing in mind the remoteness of Orland, the Organisers had conservatively estimated that between 2,000-3,000 visitors would make the journey to the Base. Blessed with superb weather and the

considerable publicity that had been generated from almost a month's combined air activity in the Region, almost 8,000 visitors attended the Open Day. Fortunately the Base Contingency Plan worked well and everyone as treated to not only an impressive group of specially decorated aircraft in the static park but a number of role demonstrations from Belgian and Norwegian F-16s, A very impressive Czech Mil-24 Hind display and an equally impressive EF-18A show that went on for no less than 30 minutes !



Conclusion

Each NATO Tiger Meet culminates with the traditional flag lowering ceremony followed by the presentation of the Association's awards, designed to foster excellence and camaraderie among the Units of the NTA. This year, the competition was extremely close, reflecting the success of the exercise as a whole for all. The coveted Silver Tiger Trophy was awarded to 31 Smaldeel, Belgian Air Force with the Best Flying Award jointly won by 31 Smaldeel and the hosts, 338 Skv, Royal Norwegian Air Force. The award for the best special colour scheme or markings, which can only be awarded to a Unit that has fully participated in the respective Tiger Meet, was awarded to Staffel 11, Swiss Air Force for their superb F/A-18C Hornet.

Few of us doubted that ARCTIC TIGER 2007 had probably been one of the best operational flying exercises ever conducted under the auspices of the NATO Tiger Meet, offering many of the participants a flying environment quite different from that normally encountered. The vast exercise area with virtually unrestricted airspace enabled flying activities to take place almost immediately after departure from Orland. The availability of superb on-base facilities and the challenges associated with the ever-changing weather patterns also contributed to the success of this exercise.

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