

The Ushtar Eagle Has Landed

The UK's NATO ally Albania hosted over 200 RAF Reserves and Regulars in numerous locations around the country as they trained together developing operational teamwork and friendships on Exercise Ushtar Eagle 17.

Exercise Director and Officer Commanding 8 Force Protection group, Wing Commander Phil Hateley said:

"The UK is committed to NATO, and despite the fact we have are leaving the European Union we are still committed to European security, and our deployment of troops in Albania is a clear demonstration of that. Coming to Albania has given us many opportunities that we could never replicate in the UK. The freedom to be able to go and conduct military training in and amongst local villages is the hallmark."



Drawn from 18 individual RAF stations across the UK, Reserves from specialisms including the RAF Regiment, RAF Police, logistics, medical, intelligence and Media Operations worked alongside their Albanian counterparts to hone their war-fighting, peacekeeping and humanitarian skills.

The Balkan country provided a stunning backdrop for a series of gruelling drills and training scenarios that UK and Albanian troops could carry out on operations together in the future. Gunners and soldiers bonded together over tactical training, physical exercise and some social time in the evenings.



Interest in Ushtar Eagle reached presidential levels in the first week with a visit from the Albanian President, Ilir Meta, who watched a combined tactical demonstration by the RAF Regiment Reserves and soldiers from the Third Battalion of the Albanian Army. He was joined by the British Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Stuart Peach, who was in Albania's capital Tirana for a NATO conference.

An Albanian naval establishment close to Durrës was the setting for members of 2503 and 603 Squadrons and the Third Battalion of the Albanian Army to storm a building suspected of being a "terrorist safe house". Under the cover of smoke the combined assault team entered the building, making an "arrest" and extracting the "suspect" with the

help of RAF and Albanian police.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach said:

“I would like to thank the Albanian people for the warmth of their welcome and the exceptional training facilities they provide. We have come a long way together through our shared military history and shared experience in NATO. I am confident as the UK Chief of Defence that our future is much more secure as a result of our alliance.”



The Albanian Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, Brigadier General Bardhyl Kollçaku, who also attended the demonstration, said:

“This is a demonstration of the excellent cooperation we have between the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Albania, and the assurance that this cooperation will extend and will continue even more in the future in the interests of peace and security, not only between our countries but also in the region and beyond.”

Moving from the coast to more rural areas in the mountains for the second week the exercise featured section attacks, patrolling through Albanian villages, ambushes and defensive tactics. Enduring temperatures over 35 degrees the RAF and their Albanian counterparts trained from dawn till midnight, pushing themselves physically and mentally. The gunners received a warm but curious welcome from the local population as they went about their daily business.



LAC Alex Hand, from 609 Squadron, and the youngest Reservist on the exercise, said:

“Opportunities like this to train abroad are one of the reasons why I joined the Reserves. I have been pushed out of my comfort zone but loved every minute of it. Working with the Albanians has been very interesting and meeting other Reservists from around the country has made me realise the scale of the organisation I belong to.”

This is the first time the RAF Reserves have worked and trained so closely with the UK's NATO ally Albania. The two countries are developing a close working relationship after the Royal Navy and British Army previously completed exercises and training.

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Third anniversary of operations against Da'esh

The Royal Air Force has marked the third anniversary of the first UK airstrikes against Da'esh by continuing operations against the false caliphate.

Daesh fighters are being pinned down by the RAF in their former stronghold of Raqqa as the UK marks three years of operations against the barbaric cult in Iraq and Syria.



Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, said:

“British forces have crippled Daesh since 2014, forcing this miserable cult from the gates of Baghdad to the brink of defeat in Raqqa. By air, land and sea UK personnel have played a tireless role in striking targets and training allies, demonstrating that our values will not be compromised at any price.”

Since 2014 RAF Typhoon, Tornado and Reaper aircraft have struck Da'esh 1340 times in Iraq and 262 times in Syria. In that time the group has lost territory, finances, leaders and fighters as the 73-member coalition has liberated cities in both countries. As the second largest contributor to the Global Coalition's military campaign, the UK has flown more than 8,000 sorties providing strikes, surveillance and reconnaissance, air-air refuelling and transport.



The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier said:

“This has been an immense effort by RAF airmen and airwomen over the last three years of continued operations, countering Da'esh in Iraq and Syria. However, the tempo continues with RAF aircraft destroying 17 targets in Syria in a single day last week.”

Three years ago Daesh was barely an hour from the gates of Baghdad, but today it has lost more than 73 per cent of the territory it occupied in Iraq and 65 per cent of its former territory in Syria. The RAF has played an essential role to allies, helping Syrian Democratic Forces engaged in ground close combat and the Iraqi Security Forces who continue their advance having liberated Mosul and Ninewah province. More than 5.5 million people have been

freed from Da'esh's rule and over two million displaced Iraqi civilians have returned to their homes. In Mosul alone, it is estimated that over 265,000 people have returned.



The commander of UK air operations in Iraq and Syria, Air Commodore Johnny Stringer said:

"This has been an exceptional operational performance and contribution by the Royal Air Force over three years. The professionalism and judgement of our aircrew has been matched by the unstinting dedication of our engineers, suppliers, and intelligence staff across the Op Shader theatre and the wider support from stations across the UK.

"The evil brutality of Daesh is near its end and we will continue to provide this vital UK airpower until our mission is finished. I am immensely proud of, and humbled by, the magnificent efforts of all in 83 Expeditionary Air Group who have made such a difference in this fight."



Recognising the valuable contributions made by many serving military personnel, the Defence Secretary announced an Iraq and Syria Operational Service Medal during his recent visit to Iraq.

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RAF Valley's future secure for next 25 years as restoration work is completed

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon unveiled a newly restored runway at RAF Valley on a trip to Anglesey, Wales today.

The station is primarily used for advanced fast jet training for pilots and, whilst the previous infrastructure was strong enough for the Hawk aircraft, it has been restored to support pilots training in the likes of Tornados and Typhoons.

The existing runway was ageing and so a £20 million contract was awarded to

refurbish it as well as the link taxiways in addition to providing a new section airside perimeter road, new visual aids, aeronautical lighting and signage. It will extend the life of the runway by a further 25 years, demonstrating the UK's commitment to Defence in Wales.



Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

“This famous runway has been an integral part of the careers of generations of fast-jet pilots who have seen action across the world and are currently leading RAF strikes against Daesh. I'm delighted that this investment will see the runway play that vital role for at least another 25 years, training new pilots in the skills they need to help keep us safe when flying the next generation of aircraft.”



The graduating fighter pilots go on to fly Typhoon and F35 Lightning II aircraft which secure the skies of the UK and overseas. The station is also home to helicopter flying training where aircrew learn the skills required for mountains and maritime flying ahead of employment on the RAF and Royal Navy front lines, whilst the Mountain Rescue Service is based at RAF Valley saving lives across the UK.

All new UK fighter pilots pass through RAF Valley before they reach their frontline Squadron, and in the last 3 months, 4 graduates have gone on to fly the world's most sophisticated fighter, the F-35 Lightning II, out in the United States.

The UK already has 11 F-35B jets being flown in the US, and 120 UK personnel being trained there. By the end of the year the UK will have 14 of the jets, with initial flight trials from the brand new Queen Elizabeth Aircraft Carrier's deck planned for next year.

As the US' only Tier 1 partner, UK industry will provide around 15% of every F-35 jet which is built, and later today, the Defence Secretary will also visit the Defence Electronics & Components Agency (DECA), based at MOD Sealand, in North East Wales.



The facility was chosen as the global repair hub providing maintenance, repair, overhaul and upgrade services for F-35 avionic and aircraft components. Over the lifetime of the programme, components for hundreds of European-based F-35 aircraft will be serviced and maintained at the site.

The work will generate hundreds of millions of pounds of revenue for the UK defence industry, with the potential to unlock more than £2bn of future F-35 support revenue over the lifetime of the programme, sustaining thousands of high tech jobs and skills.

A newly-refurbished hangar at RAF Valley will also house three brand-new

Jupiter helicopters which will be used to train pilots from all three Services, delivered as part of the UK Military Flying Training System (UKMFTS).

These state-of-the-art Airbus helicopters, which closely recreate the cockpits and controls of front-line aircraft, are due to begin flying from RAF Valley later this year. The refurbishment of the hangar is part of an infrastructure improvement programme being delivered through the UKMFTS at both RAF Valley and RAF Shawbury worth a total of around £80 million.



Station Commander Royal Air Force Valley, Group Captain Nick Tucker-Lowe, said:

“The visit of the Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon today has highlighted RAF Valley’s vital contribution to UK defence as the home of fighter pilot training.”

“Our team of military personnel, Civil Servants and industry partners take great pride in their role of training the next generation of fighter pilots for the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy. With our refurbished main runway, we are well prepared for the future.”



UK Government Minister for Wales Guto Bebb said:

“This £20 million investment in the runway is a huge boost to RAF Valley. It further demonstrates the UK Government’s commitment to defence in Wales and the North Wales economy. It is great to see Wales playing such an important role in the advancement of our defence services and with an extra 25 years now on the lifespan of this site, the future of RAF Valley and the local economy remains strong.”

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French military equipment delivered to Guadeloupe on RAF C-17 Globemaster

French military equipment delivered to Guadeloupe on Royal Air Force C-17 Globemaster

Urgently required vehicles and equipment have been delivered to Pointe-à-Pitre on the French Island of Guadeloupe aboard a Royal Air Force C-17

Globemaster transport aircraft.

Following a request for assistance from French President Emmanuel Macron the heavy-lift aircraft flew to évreux-Fauville Air Base west of Paris and collected 30 tonnes of equipment and supplies including a tipper truck, digger and specialist bulldozer. The vehicles will now be taken by sea to the island of St Martin which sustained severe damaged in Hurricane Irma.



Speaking before the aircraft departed France, Colonel David Desjardins, the Base Commander of évreux-Fauville Air Base, said:

“Cooperation between the French Air Force and Royal Air Force has been in place a long time. Today we are working together to send engineers and equipment to support both the clean-up operation and the population affected by Hurricane Irma. We do often work together such as operations in Africa and the Middle East, we work well together”



The pilot of the 99 Squadron C-17 was Flight Lieutenant Mark Shepherd. He said:

“We work regularly with the French military transporting freight from France to Western Africa in support of their operations there. The level of cooperation between us and the French on this task has been excellent and this has been reflected in how smoothly the transport of this urgently required equipment has been achieved.

“As ever it has been a pleasure to work with our French colleagues and to help the people affected by Hurricane Irma.”



The flight is the latest example of the close relationship between the French and UK Armed Forces. The two nations, which have the largest defence budgets in Europe, continue to work closely on shared interests. British and French forces are deployed together in NATO, fighting against Daesh in Iraq and Syria and training together across the globe. RAF C-17s have also been used on a regular basis in recent years to transport freight from France to sub-Saharan Africa.

The RAF air transport fleet continues to directly support the UK aid effort with further C-17s, A400M Atlas, C-130J Hercules and Voyager aircraft transporting personnel, aid and equipment to the Caribbean and between the islands struck by the hurricane.

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RAF Hercules enables Royal Marines deployment to Turk & Caicos Islands following hurricanes

Royal Air Force Hercules enables Royal Marines deployment to Turk & Caicos Islands following devastating hurricanes

ON 11 SEPTEMBER

a Royal Air Force C-130J Hercules transport aircraft delivered a team of Royal

Marines and medics to the Turks & Caicos Islands, a British Overseas Territory that has been stricken by Hurricanes Irma and Jose. The C-130J was the first military aircraft to arrive in the Turks & Caicos Islands; it joins a fleet of RAF transport aircraft and nearly 700 military and specialist

civilian personnel supporting the Department for International Aid (DfID) with

the delivery of humanitarian aid and disaster relief to British Overseas Territories in the Caribbean.



Since 8

September the Royal Air Force has flown more than 20 sorties within the Caribbean, moving more than 700 passengers into and around the region and delivering more than 70 tonnes of freight to hurricane-stricken communities.

This has included:

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More

than 20 Royal Marines from C Company, 40 Commando, who have deployed to support

Her Majesty's Governor of the Turks & Caicos Islands.

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More

than 200 Royal Marines from 40 Commando and 3 Commando Brigade, who are supporting DfID's urgent humanitarian work in the British Virgin Islands.


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Sixteen


officers from the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service, who are supporting the

British Virgin Islands with policing.

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More 


than 50 officers from the UK's International Police Response Cadre, who will be 

sworn in as British Virgin Island police officers to support the territory with 

community and public order policing.


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


Water 


filtration equipment and search and rescue kits for UK NGOs Serve On and Team 

Rubicon.



Royal Air Force 

aircraft operating in the Caribbean are managed by 38 Expeditionary Air Wing 
(38 EAW), based at a logistics hub in Barbados. The EAW is supported by 
elements of the RAF's Air Mobility fleet comprising C-17 strategic lift 
aircraft, A400M Atlas and C-130J Hercules transport aircraft and Voyager 
passenger aircraft. More than 90 regular and reserve RAF personnel are
assigned 

to 38 EAW, including logisticians, RAF Police, administrative staff,
engineers 



and operations personnel, principally from RAF Brize Norton and RAF Northolt.




The Commanding 

Officer of 38 EAW, Wing Commander Gareth Burdett, said:


"The 

***arrival of the C-130J provides us with an incredibly flexible asset, able to 
deploy freight and passengers into some extremely challenging environments
to ***

***help our Overseas Territories get back on their feet. The pace of work here
in ***

***the Caribbean is relentless, but we all know that people across the region
are ***

***depending upon us. We're working closely with our colleagues in the Royal
Navy, ***

***Royal Marines, Army and DfID to make sure UK Aid makes a difference whenever 
and wherever it is needed."***

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