

RAF Tornados join NATO partners to put defences to the test

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1,100 personnel and 48 aircraft from 7 NATO nations, including the RAF's 31 Squadron "The Goldstars," have descended on Leeuwarden Air Force Base in the Netherlands for the start of the two-week-long "FRISIAN FLAG" exercise.

The local Dutch population have been treated to the spectacle of Tornados, Typhoons, Mirage and F16 aircraft taking off on the exercise, which is organised by the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAf) and runs from 27 March to 7 April 2017.



The RAF has deployed six Tornado GR4s for the exercise in which they will at times simulate the "Red Force Element, effectively playing the part of the enemy that will attempt to breach the defences of opposing forces from the USA, France, Germany, Portugal, Belgium and the Netherlands, they will also be playing "Blue" friendly forces.

EX FRISIAN FLAG aims to provide aircrew with experience of the planning, execution and debriefing of large scale composite air operations (COMAO) in realistic scenarios by allowing partner NATO nations to work alongside one another, test each other's capabilities and develop a close working relationship. Missions being flown include various air defence scenarios including protection / escort of high value aircraft and the attack of ground targets on land and sea in a high threat environment, which include opposing fighter aircraft and ground based Patriot and SA-6 missile batteries.



Wing Commander Matt Bressani, OC 31 Squadron & the Detachment Commander of the RAF contingent at FRISIAN FLAG, said: "Working with NATO countries helps us

to

better understand our own strengths and weaknesses by testing each other's defences. With the Tornado GR4 going out of service in a few years' time, this

is an ideal opportunity to train our crews for their future beyond this airframe. The time working alongside our allies means that we will expose both air

and ground crews to working closely with Typhoon deployments from our partner

nations, allowing our boys and girls to get up close to an aircraft they could

be working on themselves in the near future. The aircrew will get to see German, Dutch and Portuguese Typhoons in action and see how they work alongside

the American and French aircraft too."



The

Commander of the Royal Netherlands Air Force, Lieutenant General Luyt said:

"In

the current security situation, air superiority can no longer be taken for

granted. Our colleagues from the army and navy count on us to achieve air

superiority wherever required. Large-scale deployment as part of a NATO air

campaign can no longer be ruled out. What's more, we could be called on as

early as tomorrow. As the Royal Netherlands Air Force, we must once again be prepared to meet the challenge."

Editor – Ken Pike

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[First nine-ship for 2017 Red Arrows team](#)

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THE 2017 Red Arrows

team have flown their first "nine-ship" ahead of this year's display season.

Carrying out their

winter training at RAF Scampton, the Lincolnshire home of the Royal Air Force

Aerobatic Team, the Squadron is renowned for displaying with nine, British-

built

fast-jets and bringing the whole formation together is a key moment in the six-month winter training programme.

The Red Arrows begin

training for the forthcoming season almost as soon as the previous year has ended.



For the latest season,

full preparations got underway after the team returned from a nine-week, 20,000-mile, tour of the Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions supporting UK interests at the end of 2016.

Typically, this winter

training starts with small groups of three or four aircraft formations.

Each pilot flies three

sorties a day, five days a week, and the formations grow in aircraft number as training progresses.

The occasion saw the

team's trademark Diamond Nine formation flown, among other manoeuvres that will feature in this year's show.

Squadron Leader David

Montenegro, Red 1 and Team Leader, said: "We have flown 13 weeks of intensive

training and the result is being able to get 9 aircraft airborne today which is

testament to the perseverance and dedication of the team pilots; tireless and

enduring effort of our engineering team; brilliant work from our PR and administrative teams on the squadron and indeed, support from the Station services at RAF Scampton.

"On a personal

note, this is the third and final year that I will achieve this milestone and I

can say in all honesty that the adrenaline build-up and sense of achievement

is as strong as it was in 2015.

"In the pursuit of

professional excellence, we now transition to the next phase of training during

which we will perfect the display and ensure we maintain the RAF Red Arrows' benchmark of being a world-leading team, able to represent our Service and our

Nations' interests in all corners of the globe".



Three of the Red Arrows' nine pilots are new to the team for 2017.

Flight Lieutenant Dan Lowes, who is Red 3 and a former Typhoon pilot, said: "That was a truly memorable experience. It was an honour and a privilege to have flown in my first Red Arrows 9 ship.

"The training has been tough, and there's still a long way to go, but it's great to have achieved our first 9.

"I'm now looking forward to deploying on our spring training camp and working towards PDA."

These flights involve a thorough brief, debrief and discussion to ensure safety is paramount and the formations are precise.



Winter training in the UK lasts until mid-spring, when the team usually moves overseas to a location with more predictable, settled weather to maximise flying hours and perfect the display. This is known as Exercise Springhawk.

Flight Lieutenant Si Taylor, Red 7, who also previously flew operationally in the Tornado and Typhoon and joins Red 6 to form the 2017 Synchro pair, said: "This feels like it's happened so fast since we got back from the tour in December.

"It's a great feeling to have achieved a significant milestone through some hard graft and dedication throughout the winter months. Hopefully now we can kick on and make the show look incredible for all the crowds in the 2017 Season. I'm really looking forward to it".

The first nine-ship is an important occasion for the whole Squadron – including the ground team, who number more than 100 and comprise technicians, suppliers, drivers, photographers, administrators, operations staff and a public relations department.

Each has a crucial part to play in ensuring the Red Arrows can fly and perform precision displays

around the world.

Among those people with a role in today's nine-ship were the technicians on the flightline – responsible for checking the aircraft are safe for flight, assisting the crewing-in of the pilots into the cockpits and marshalling the jets from their parking stands.



Flight Lieutenant Alicia Mason, the team's Junior Engineering Officer responsible for day-to-day engineering issues on the Squadron, and who is also new to the Red Arrows this season, said: "Today has been a superb achievement for all concerned. It's another milestone in our calendar that the groundcrew have been preparing for behind the scenes for the past few weeks.

"Luck was not on our side this week though and we've had a tricky few days with the jets not behaving themselves but I'm proud to say that the team have put in a tremendous performance over the past 2 days working together day and night to ensure that we had 9 serviceable aircraft for the programme this morning. It was great to see the fruits of our labour when all 9 took off and landed safely and the aircrew were able to practice some of their 9-ship manoeuvres. Even some of the groundcrew were able to take a break for a few minutes this morning to come outside and watch part of the first 9-ship practice to show their support and enjoy this moment as a team.

"We can't rest on our laurels though, there is still much to be done ahead of our deployment to Greece for Exercise SPRINGHAWK. The groundcrew will be busy over the next 4 weeks ensuring that we have 11 serviceable aircraft and equipment prepared and ready to take with us for the duration of the Exercise".



During Springhawk the team is assessed by senior Royal Air Force officers, with the aim of gaining Public Display Authority.

If this is awarded, the Squadron's pilots change from green coveralls into their famous red flying suits and the ground crew are allowed to wear their royal blue display coveralls.

The season then officially begins and public performances by the Red Arrows are permitted.

It is hoped the first display to the public in the UK will be on 3 June this year, for the Torbay Airshow, Torbay.

More information about the 2017 season will be release on the Red Arrows website shortly.

For more information about the team, follow @rafredarrows on Twitter, like RAF Red Arrows on Facebook or visit www.raf.mod.uk/reds

Editor – RAFAT PR Manager

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[RAF Lossiemouth's XV \(Reserve\) squadron disbands](#)

RAF LOSSIEMOUTH'S XV(RESERVE) SQUADRON DISBANDS

XV(Reserve) Squadron, the final Royal Air Force Tornado squadron based in Scotland, disbanded on Friday 31 March 2017 with a private military ceremony at RAF Lossiemouth. The disbandment of XV(Reserve) Squadron marks the end of the Tornado era at RAF Lossiemouth. The Squadron completed their final sortie on Friday 17 March.



The last parade of the Squadron's standard before it is laid up marks the end of the 102 year old Squadron's history. 750 invited guests attended the event that saw members of the Squadron, led by their Commanding Officer, Wing Commander Paul Froome, carry out the emotional but precise military ceremony.

Led by the Band of the Royal Air Force College, the personnel marched in two flights into the hangar and

formed up in front of their proud families and friends. The parade personnel were flanked in the hangar by two Tornados, one being MacRobert's Reply.

Parade Commander was Officer Commanding XV(Reserve) Squadron, Wing Commander Paul Froome. No. 1 Flight Commander was Squadron Leader Mark Swinton, whilst No. 2 Flight Commander was Squadron Leader Matt Smith (the Squadron's Senior Engineering Officer).



The Standard Bearer was Flight Lieutenant Sam Williams, the Standard Escort was Warrant Officer Tam McEwan. Chief Technician Si Guillou and Chief Technician Grant Hamilton were the armed escorts.

The parade Reviewing Officer was Chief of Defence Intelligence, Air Marshal Phil Osborn himself a Tornado navigator and a former Tornado squadron commanding officer.

With the precision expected of the UK Armed Forces, Wing Commander Froome and his Flight Commanders led their troops through 131 orders to carry out the parade. Finally the Standard Party left the hangar to the haunting tune 'Sands of the Kuwait' played on the bagpipes by Chief Technician Al Sharp. The tune was written to commemorate the Gulf War, which fittingly was XV(Reserve) Squadron's final battle honour.



Following the parade Wing Commander Froome gave an emotional tribute to the members of his Squadron, he said:

"I am incredibly proud today – members of XV(Reserve) Squadron have provided a stirring finale to the Squadron's history. And to be able to share today with many past and present members of the Squadron, as well as our families, has been wonderful.

"The hours of dedicated work the Squadron engineers have provided to the Tornado Force over recent years has been replicated in their efforts today in this arena. It was an absolute honour to lead them through today's parade, and I will be sad to leave them and RAF Lossiemouth."

Following the event there was a flypast of the Station in the early afternoon by Tornados from RAF Marham.

The final Tornado aircraft will leave RAF Lossiemouth over the coming months for RAF Marham where the RAF Tornado fleet is now based. RAF Lossiemouth will see growth in the near future as a fourth Typhoon squadron is formed here and 9 P8 Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft are based here. Currently the three Typhoon squadrons based at RAF Lossiemouth provide Quick Reaction Alert (Interceptor) North, or QRA as it is commonly called, protecting UK skies.



The final ab initio Tornado GR4 student left XV(Reserve) Sqn in mid-February. Flight Lieutenant Nathan Shawyer completed his training as 'combat ready' and was posted to 31 Squadron, RAF Marham.

The future of the squadron number plate hasn't been decided at this time, therefore the Squadron's standard will be laid up in the rotunda at RAF College Cranwell, Lincolnshire in April.

Group Captain Paul Godfrey, Station Commander of RAF Lossiemouth, paid tribute to the hard work of the Squadron's personnel both in recent years and in creating a fitting end to the Squadron's history. He said:

"I'm extremely honoured to have been the Station Commander of RAF Lossiemouth in the last 18 months of XV(Reserve) Squadron's time as a Tornado Operational Conversion Unit and it is a sad day to see the Squadron officially disband, ending over 23 years of Tornado presence in Moray.

"The Squadron's output in terms of quality training that has provided the RAF with such skilled air crew has been second to none and has been fundamental to the success of the Tornado on operations. All of the Squadron's members on parade today have made a huge contribution to past and current operations worldwide and are highly regarded for their professionalism and skill. That same high standard of output and effort has been shown again today in an excellent parade, which was a fitting end to the Squadron's time here at RAF Lossiemouth.

"I am extremely pleased that many of the Squadron personnel will transfer to our Typhoon squadrons here at RAF Lossiemouth to support the future growth of the

Station,

and I wish all members of the Squadron the very best of luck in their future endeavours; every single one of them can have with a real sense of pride in what they have achieved and it is obvious that they have maintained the very highest of standards right to the very end.”

Editor: Flt Lt Ian Smith

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Royal Air Force will deploy to Romania

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Royal Air Force

Typhoon aircraft based at RAF Coningsby Lincolnshire will be deploying this summer to Romania as part of the UK's commitment to NATO.

The Typhoon

multi-role fighters and support personnel will be based at the Mihail Kogalniceanu Airbase in southeast Romania for four months working with the Romanian Air Force to conduct the NATO mission.

To support and

establish the operation, the Logistics Squadron at RAF Coningsby has already started

packing all the equipment needed to sustain the mission, from specialist vehicles,

spare parts to tool boxes.



Flight

Lieutenant Mark Taylor said: “The

Squadron has been very busy already supporting this mission. We enable the operations to go ahead by ensuring the equipment is available for the jets

to operate. We do that here at RAF Coningsby but we also deploy to anywhere in the world when needed.”

Specialist

personal from the RAF Leeming based 90 Signals Unit are also deploying to provide access to the mission critical intelligence and NATO command information the pilots will need to carry out their missions.

No 2 Mechanical

Transport Squadron from RAF Wittering has already been busy moving over 100 Tons of essential freight to Romania, and are now preparing to transport even more equipment ready for it to be loaded at the Marchwood Military Port in Hampshire over the coming weeks.



The UK is the first nation to provide jets to support the NATO mission in Romania. The RAF's lead planner for the mission Group Captain Pip Harding OBE RAF said: "With this mission, the RAF once again will be demonstrating its ability to plan, deploy and operate at the heart of the NATO Alliance. Equipped with state of the art fighters, the RAF continues to make a significant contribution to NATO, and in so doing sends a clear message to our Romanian friends that we stand alongside them in our ongoing commitment to the defence of NATO Airspace."

Editor: Jim Robinson

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[No. 2 Mechanical Transport Squadron Rolls out for Exercise Frisian Flag](#)

No. 2 Mechanical Transport Squadron Rolls out for Exercise Frisian Flag

The Netherlands is the destination for No. 2 Mechanical Transport Squadron as RAF Wittering's famous drivers set off in support of Exercise Frisian Flag on 21st March 2017.

A blustery afternoon saw seventeen trucks loaded with enough equipment to support six tornado jets and 140 personnel leave Cambridgeshire's historic air station. During Exercise Frisian Flag the RAF will operate alongside many European air forces and the United States Air National Guard.

Squadron Leader Rick Longworth is Officer Commanding No. 2 Mechanical Transport Squadron. He said: "Not everything can be moved by air; sometimes you need the economy and flexibility of surface transport, which helps us to keep our valuable transport aircraft available for tasking."



2MT, as the Squadron is known, provides the RAF with its only heavy-lift transport capability by road or sea, supporting operations and exercises across the globe. In addition to HGVs, the Squadron also boasts airfield support vehicles like aircraft towing tractors and fuel bowsers.

Squadron Leader Longworth continued: "This is not the sort of work you can just give to a haulage company. Trained airmen and airwomen are needed for this job; military drivers who understand how to work around an operational airfield and move aviation equipment."



The Squadron was formed during the Battle of Britain when spares for the Spitfires and Hurricanes, ammunition and equipment had to be urgently ferried from airfield to airfield. In Exercise Frisian Flag, the air forces of the world will practise defensive and offensive mixed-fighter operations.

In addition to the RAF Tornados, F-16s, F-15s, Mirage 2000's and the distinctive Typhoon will be operating in the Dutch skies for the duration of the exercise. When Frisian Flag ends, 2MT will be sent to recover all the UK equipment and return it in good order.

Group Captain Rich Pratley is the Station Commander at RAF Wittering and Commanding Officer of the A4 Force Elements, of which 2MT is a part. He said: "Frisian Flag is an important exercise; in deployments like these the Royal Air Force projects the UK's global influence by working in close partnership with our international allies."



Group Captain Pratley continued: "This is the second time in as many days that 2MT has been dispatched to support an exercise, this tells us that the Squadron offers Defence a very useful capability and one that the RAF is happy to showcase to our international partners."

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