

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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[Press release: Welsh Secretary: Aston Martin creating a lasting legacy in Wales](#)

Aston Martin's investment in St Athan will create a lasting legacy for the region, Secretary of State for Wales, Alun Cairns will say when he attends a special ceremony to mark the beginning of the redevelopment of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) site into the car brand's newest manufacturing facility.

Work has already begun on staff facilities at the site and the second phase will start in earnest when the company today (6 April) gains access to the

three Ministry of Defence “super hangars” that will house the manufacturing plant.

In February 2016, Aston Martin Lagonda announced that the DBX – a ‘crossover’ sports utility vehicle – would be made at St Athan with the creation of 750 jobs with a likely further 1,000 across the supply chain and local businesses in Wales. The first vehicle is expected to come off the production line in 2020.

Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns will be on hand at the prestigious event in the Vale of Glamorgan which marks the start of the transition of the aircraft hangars into Wales’ newest, state of the art manufacturing plant.

Secretary of State for Wales, Alun Cairns said:

Thanks to the close partnership between the UK and Welsh Governments and the prestigious Aston Martin brand, the St Athan site is springing back to life as a significant centre of employment, bringing with it valuable skills and a lasting legacy for the entire region.

As the UK exits the EU, we are determined that our country remains a great place to invest and to do business. Aston Martin’s decision to invest in Wales shows that we are creating and supporting the right conditions for industry investment. The UK Government’s comprehensive industrial strategy will build on that success, ensuring that we have the right infrastructure, skills and support in place for our world-leading industries as well as support for new emerging sectors to flourish.

The automotive sector is the UK’s largest manufacturing export sector and is spread nationally. St Athan will be the sole production facility for the new Aston Martin crossover vehicle. With growing demand for these types of vehicles in markets such as China and the United States, it is expected that over 90% of the production from St Athan will be exported outside of the United Kingdom.

[News story: UK personnel arrive in Poland and Estonia](#)

The British Army’s Light Dragoons have arrived in Poland as part the UK commitment to NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence in Eastern Europe, taking the total deployment in the region to nearly 1,000.

Supporting the US led battle group in Poland, 150 UK personnel have travelled from their base in Catterick Garrison to arrive this week in Orzysz, Poland in Jackal and Coyote light reconnaissance vehicles.

The regiment will be based in Poland for at least six months, when they will be replaced by another unit to carry on our enduring commitment to the region.

Meanwhile the arrival of the remaining UK personnel into Estonia this week, forming part of a nearly 800-strong British-led battle group, means nearly 1000 troops are providing deterrence in Eastern Europe.

Soldiers from 5 Rifles battle group, based in Bulford, Wiltshire and The Queen's Royal Hussars, based in Paderborn, Germany, have travelled to Estonia to work under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wilson.

The commitments in the Baltic region will be augmented by the deployment of RAF Typhoon aircraft to Romania later this year, to carry out a NATO Air Policing mission in the Black Sea.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

The UK is stepping up its support for NATO's collective defence through our deployments across the alliance.

British personnel are playing a leading role in NATO: delivering deterrence and defence in Estonia and Poland and air policing in Romania underlines our commitment to the security of Europe.

On Monday, Defence Minister Earl Howe, joined by His Excellency Mr Lauri Bambus, Estonian Ambassador, bade farewell to Estonia-bound personnel at RAF Brize Norton.

Defence Minister Earl Howe said:

The men and women of 5 Rifles have travelled to Estonia as a part of the biggest reinforcement of NATO's collective defence in a generation, standing by our allies and working closely with forces from across the Alliance.

The final UK vehicles also departed Marchwood, UK last week, carrying nearly 200 vehicles including Warriors and Panthers vehicles.

Last week also saw two trains carrying French vehicles arrive in Tapa, Estonia, supporting the UK-led battalion.



Credit Estonian Defence Forces

[News story: Veterans' Gateway](#)

Updated: Veteran's Gateway formally launches to the public

There is a huge network of organisations supporting the armed forces community, so finding the right one for your needs can be tricky.

Veterans' Gateway will make it quick and easy by being your first point of contact for whatever support you need, whether you are based in the UK or abroad.

Many of the team are veterans themselves so they understand the issues that people face after leaving the armed forces and they will work with people on a one-to-one basis, connecting them with the right support as soon as possible.

You can find out further information and contact the team via their website www.veteransgateway.org.uk

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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 Sawyer 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 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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