

## **Twenty years Belgian F-16 OCU**

### **Combined with 8th spotting event and COMAO exercise**

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The Belgian Air Force base Kleine Brogel showed a lot of activity during 16-18 July 2007. Together with the 31<sup>st</sup> squadron and 349<sup>th</sup> squadron the F-16 Operational Conversion Unit (OCU) are forming the home based units of the Belgian Air Force organised in the 10 Wing. The OCU celebrates its 20 years anniversary this year and this was a reason to put some spotlights on the unit. While Kleine Brogel, nicknamed KeeBee has a tradition to organise spotter events, and a large exercise starting from the base was planned also, why not mixing it all in one event?

#### **COMAO exercise**

The Operational Integration Exercise 07 (OIE 07) was attracting many different participants from several NATO members to join in the Combined Air Operations (COMAO). Some interesting combinations trained with each other in different settings while exploring the performances and abilities of their specific aircraft in attack missions. Next to this different aircraft practised specific DACT missions. Dissimilar Air Combat Training (DACT) is so useful to recognize where you are in the theatre and to learn your benefits and your weaknesses in Air Combat. Of course as a gesture to the celebrating OCU as many trainer aircraft as possible were present.

Some were prominent in the field like the Greece delegation with two 330 mira F-16C/D Fighting Falcons, two 338 mira F-4E AUP Phantoms and two 336 mira A-7E Corsairs which are not often seen in the northern part of Europe. According to Lt. Sinasis one of the A-7E pilots however it was his first time in exercise above the North Sea, it was pretty much the same like in Greece. Greece has with its mixed fighter force much experience in DACT/COMAO and practice this regularly. The A-7E was performing well, but Lt. Sinasis is looking forward to his next plane to operate in future; the block 52 advanced F-16 and as he said while turning away; 'with data-link' giving much importance to this instrument. Greece was not the only participant with a considerable amount of fighters but so was the Czech Air Force with three L-159 ALCA's, two JAS-39D Gripens and one JAS-39C Gripen from Caslav. They hosted six Belgian Air Force F-16's recently and now it was their turn to be invited back. Another interesting appearance amongst the contenders were British Eurofighters and French Rafales. To gain as much experience as possible with DACT and COMAO among the pilots is one objective but another one is to let the ground crews or cross-servicing teams exercise with all the many different aircraft in support of the missions. With this great amount of aircraft, they got a nice opportunity for that in preparing the launch of the sorties and awaiting the returns. An extra detail is that the public could observe their performances precisely resulting in very nice picturing.

#### **Scenario over the North Sea**

The exercise took place above the North Sea with the classical Blue Air and opposing Red Air flying forces. A fictive regime from the North with the name Scandimania occupied Northwest Germany and parts of the Netherlands. The Air Tasking Order (ATO) was to destroy forward air bases in this region in a pre-phase

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for follow-up air and land campaigns in order to achieve air superiority in the region. The Blue Air assets were flying in different packages in the attack role to attack Wittmund Air Base in the so called south flow and Nordholz Air Base in the north flow. Opposing forces should have been Dutch F-16's but they were for some reason cancelled and therefore two Belgian Air Force F-16's acted as Red Air defenders resembling Fulcrum / Flanker threat. Above the North Sea was a holding box situated and the kilo- lima corridor and American corridor were actively involved. The commander of OIE 7 was Steve Van Hecke from the 31 'Tiger' squadron from KeeBee and very experienced in this matter. A while he was assisted by the Combined Air Operation Center (CAOC) in Uedem in the Netherlands. Air traffic control was provided by Dutch Mill, KeeBee TWR and Belga Radar for safe guidance in the process of start-up, taxi, take off and transit to the corridors and the recovery.

All blue forces received a mid-air refuelling by a USAF KC-135 or RAF VC-10 tanker, while the latter showed appearance on KeeBee. The tankers have different systems. The Boom from the KC-135 is very quick to handle, especially for the F-16's but the VC-10 has a probe and drogue system with a kind of basket you have to approach.

### **The Offensive Counter Air (OCA)**

In general, the mission could be determined as a classic Offensive Counter Air mission. This implicates ground attack missions to destroy any enemy threat to the own airplanes. Several sweeps including a lead-in SEAD asset to disturb the enemy air defence forming the attack force. Selection of the right target is vital and will mostly concentrate on Command and Control (C&C) infrastructure, radar network and ground-based air defence systems (GBAD) being exactly the case in OIE 07. Sweeps are protected by a force protection of own air defence aircraft and directed by an AWACS aircraft. The strike director leads the interdiction, and aircraft in the packages can support each other by cross targeting. Any enemy interceptor will be attacked by the own force-protectors. The south lane directed on German Wittmundhafen was the theatre of a low level package comprising 12 aircraft including eight dedicated bombers being two Luftwaffe F-4F, two HAF A-7E, two AMI MB-339CD and two Belgian Air Force F-16MLU and four dedicated fighters being four AMI F-16's. A medium altitude package was using the north lane to Nordholz and Diepholz. In this package six French Rafales (2 x air force examples in the attack role and four naval examples in air-to-air role) acted next to Greek, Danisch and Belgian F-16's mostly multi-role assets, two SEAD F-16's from USAF (Spangdahlem) and four German tornado bombers and two recce Tornado's. Communications with link 16 data-link was an essential item in this exercise and was used extensively. When the missions are successful control of the air is achieved both offensively and defensively. When air supremacy is established the next phase will be combined land and air operations.

### **Helicopter action**

Other exercises conducted from KeeBee were DACT-exercises between French Rafales and Mirage 2000 and RAF Typhoons, Czech Gripen and Portugese and Belgian F-16's. Next to this a demo CSAR exercise was given to the public. A

combined action with jets and helicopters in a Combat Search And Rescue Tasked Force (CSARTF). Two F-16's searched for and located a 'downed' crew while two ALCA's provided Close Air Support (CAS) in order to destroy some enemy vehicles. The crew was recovered in a British Puma while Belgian A-109 Close escort helicopters (defending the pick-up Puma helicopter) destroyed another attacking vehicle. All public show was observed by thousands of spotting people and VIP's from a special VIP area.

### **'Luchtdoop'.**

Because there was also a festivity of the OCU, a nice formation flight was planned over the base. An Embraer ERJ-145 VIP plane of the Belgian Air Force took off with civilians giving them the 'luchtdoop'. (first time flying ever) At 6000 ft the TCAS was producing blips and while the Embraer gained hight to 12000 ft and increased speed to 480 km/u from behind

two F-16's of the Belgian Air Force took their place on the wingtip. On the left side the Belgians own pilot Van Heste named 'Kuntu' and on the right side with call sign 638 a Portuguese F/16 exchange pilot Gaiolas named 'Jackal'. The formation was reducing speed and decreasing height giving a splendid demonstration over the base and its crowd and it was repeated later with a second flight. The pilots enjoined it all including the VIP service at a special corner and for the public there was a lot of flying to picture including the VC-10 tanker, which returned after its duty. Thanks to shiny weather, it was a great event !

### **Wim Das & Kees Otten**

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