



## TIGERMEET 2009, MAJOR EVENT IN BALANCED EUROPEAN AIR WARFARE

### TIGERMEET 'KEE BEE' BELGIUM

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#### TIGER MEET 2009, AMBITIOUS AS EVER

This year 31 Smaldeel of the Belgian Air Component hosted the family of tiger squadrons for a two weeks period with exercises of NATO tiger meet 2009 (NTM 09). The tiger meet is a large scale combined air operations exercise, in fact the biggest exercise of this kind in Western Europe for 2009. The special thing where the tiger meet distinguishes itself from other exercises is the tiger spirit, which is expressed by the participants in every way. .

#### TIGER CULTURE

The tiger squadrons are units from several European countries associated in the NATO Tiger Association (NTA) which conducts an exercise every year from the home base of one of the full members. Using a rotation concept, the full members are accompanied by probationary members and even observer countries. All these participants are part of a full scale Dissimilar Air Combat Training (DACT). Of course the exercise has the same professional character like other exercises in NATO and earns if you look at the number of participants and movements the term 'Flag Exercise' but the tiger meet is so much more and part of a tradition which became a culture among the pilots. The family of Tigers changed in composition during the years since 1961 when the first tiger meet exercise was conducted from USAFE Woodbridge. Some squadrons were disbanded since that time, others, like Canadian squadrons were withdrawn from Europe and are now disbanded members. On the other hand new probationary members became full members and fill up the strength of NTA today. The 31 Smaldeel was there in the beginning with the organisation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> tiger meet, followed by another six times. To mark this historical aspect an ex- Royal Belgian Air Force F-104G Starfighter with the serial FX-52 in special tiger looks was for the time of the exercise weeks transported from Weeze in Germany where it is on exhibition normally.

The tiger look is something special and does not only express the feeling of the tigers but also inspires the painters to create beautiful peaces of art. This concept attracts the press with even this year top photographer Katsuhiko Tokunaga among them, the VIP's of the organizing countries, the families of the participants on the family day and aircraft enthusiasts who were granted with a 'spotters day'. Some 6000 of them were offered a continuous look at the starts and landings of jets and helicopters in a bright sunny day, party time for everybody. Once more it was proven that the simultaneous organisation of a large scale military exercise and a major public relations event is feasible as long as you keep the military exercise and the PR-events physically well separated. Tiger meet 2009 was participated by some 65 aircraft, 250 aircrew and 19 nations and called by the new base commander of Kleine Brogel ( Kee Bee for insiders) as an unqualified success when looking at the operational part considering the fact that almost every operational goal was reached.

#### FULL SCALE

The span of exercises is within the full spectrum of air combat what can be encountered in air combat nowadays. The commanding officer of one of the squadrons is current chairman of the NTA and declares that everything is based on the principle 'train as you fight and fight as you

train'. This implicates you must simulate the circumstances just as they are in real combat. This asks a wide variety of assets including land units making the exercise a joint exercise and indeed is a challenge to organize. In this context it is very important to keep in mind that air warfare changed a lot through the years and new threats are to be recognized and countered successfully. It is good to realize that the opponent can be a high tech Sukhoi Su-35 but also terrorists using human shields who are difficult to fight. Actually several of the participants are active in and above Afghanistan bringing their experience with them.

It is highly valuable to have an instrument to share this experience with each other resulting in mutual improvement of knowledge and skills. The exercise is prepared in conferences in previous months and a realistic schedule is set up in the pre phase. Operational baselines were set out by 31 Squadron. Within the main objectives is better cooperation between de NATO air forces, a better understanding of procedures and developing unit interoperability. Objectives which were first lay down by General Lee in 1962 and the Tigers still live with that. Practically the exercise is conducted in daytime because of restrictions, but actually what can be done in daytime can also be done in night time and this is vital while air warfare shifted to nightly hours.

The participants are split in blue and red forces and briefing separately. During the morning the aircraft were flying 2v2 and 4v4 engagements and other small scale operations in so called 'shadow waves' while the full Composite Air Operations (COMAO) were scheduled for the afternoon. The COMAO wave includes Close Air Support (CAS) aircraft, Suppression of Enemy Air Defences (SEAD) aircraft and airborne radar (AWACS) and usually consists of 50-60 aircraft. NTM 09 was not limited by fighters only. Helicopters of different countries joined in the CSAR part and performed such operation on the spotting day, simulating KB as a spot behind enemy lines.

Red Forces develop their own strategy in the theatre including counter insurgency with halo jumpers from transport aircraft. The scenarios are fully adaptive and changed by mission results of the day. A major Special Forces (SOF) exercise called Pegasus 2009 was hosted by the Belgian Air Component at Florennes Air base and offered participation which was most helpful for NTM 09. The advantage of more

players in the field is to set up a very realistic scenario close to Afghanistan-like actions. The polygon field with German and French SAM batteries was involved and also in the field French units were deployed in the Ardennes with Crotale missiles while Smokey SAMs simulated missile launches elsewhere. The operational theatre was pointed to the south of Belgium, Northern France and above the North Sea west of the Netherlands. In the latter area the use of chaff and flares and supersonic flying add more realism to the training.

## **CONTEST**

To host 800 involved people with a great diversity of nationalities it is quite a challenge to organize. Thanks to the Tiger culture it is interesting for them. There is a strong identity in the social concept. After hours of activity there are events like a Gala –evening, gift exchanges during the International evening and off course the tiger games creating a sportive issue. The Squadrons are not new for each other, there is no ice-breaking period, there is a long tradition of networking and the feeling is much can be reached within two weeks. The crews are partly experienced and partly new, so others can be attached to the concept. New countries applying for the membership must prove to be worth as a probationary member. Then after two years practicing with de rules of engagement a full membership can be achieved. The crews have an own village with containers, for every nationality one. In order to put everyone close together the choice was made for a deployable set up which is also common on bases like Kandahar. The container offers space for planning for the own units and briefings are done in the hangars. Centrally there is a mobile Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) for Command & Control

(C2) which is run by the Belgians and others. In this village you can spot all kind of tiger ware like painted cars, motorcycles and special tiger look clothes.

The participants are especially stimulated by competition. To win the Silver Tiger Trophy the participants are judged by subjective criteria like the quality of briefings, how the missions were executed and the way how they help new members to a higher operational level. Representatives for judging are from every contributing country. Other prizes are the Tiger Spirit Award, the winner of the Tiger Tail, Tiger Suits, the Tiger Spirit Award, the best Operational Squadron and Tiger Games. The tail of a Tornado of the German AKG-51 with a green Tiger-eye earned the tail contest. This year there is a trend to paint in tone down grey/black tiger looks instead of fully coloured art. The reason is simple while a grey aircraft can be operational at any time and for example the Belgian Air Component obtained this as a regulation for further operational use.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

NTM 09 was a success from operational point of view but considering the fact that new countries were present and adapted the tactics commonly used within NATO exercises easily you may say it was a step forward. The Belgian Air Component can look back with satisfactory while the major public and family days were a success too and only marked by a single sad moment when a spotter in the public suddenly died. The lessons learned are valuable. The leading C.O. mentions that all experiences are shared with future organizers and there are already meetings with 313 Squadron at Volkel. They will organize tiger meet 2010 and for 2011, 2012 and 2013 the meet is projected at Cambrai in France, Monte Real in Portugal and Araxos in Greece.

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