

“Eurofighter Typhoon – the German Air Force’s system of the future”

The Eurofighter is entering its next procurement phase, Tranche 2. In the German Air Force, two wings are already accumulating operational experience, testing the aircraft’s reliability, strengths and challenges, and the role it plays in the Air Force’s combat readiness. We interviewed Lieutenant General Klaus-Peter Stieglitz. The Chief of Staff of the German Air Force is a pilot himself and regularly flies Europe’s most advanced and capable fighter aircraft.



General, now that the Eurofighter has been flown a while by the Air Force, what is your experience with this aircraft?

The Eurofighter has been flying with the Air Force for nearly four years. It has appreciably enhanced the Air Force’s capabilities. Its major advances are the exceptionally high thrust-to-weight ratio it provides, its unique agility, and the range and precision of its weapons, to name just a few.

We’ve also learned, however, that its many computers, especially when operated in flight, have added to the aircraft’s complexity compared with the Tornado weapon system. This is a formidable challenge. The young officers piloting this combat aircraft not only need to fly well, they moreover need to know a great deal about the management of complex systems.

How is the EJ200 engine doing in the field?

The engine you people designed and built proves to be one of the Eurofighter’s outstanding components. The aircraft’s deployment characteristics, such as the agility and climb it needs to survive and win out in all scenarios, in a sense make this engine the centerpiece of the combat aircraft.

In the fighter’s deployment, will there be other or additional roles the Eurofighter will have to fill down the road?

For the Air Force, the Eurofighter will no longer be solely the fighter in the classical sense of the term but moreover will additionally provide offensive operations capability. In other words, in battle the Eurofighter will be able not only to maintain or gain air superiority but also fend off enemy attacks on the ground and precisely engage targets day and night, in any weather and at any distance while avoiding collateral damage.

Do you believe the Eurofighter is adequately equipped for future missions, or is there an apparent need for an update here and there?

The Eurofighter provides the Air Force with a fourth-generation combat aircraft which in terms of operational versatility, capability and technological enhancement potential is presently unrivaled, at least in Europe.

But still, any type of military technology needs continuous upgrading and improving.



A Eurofighter of fighter squadron 73 “Steinhoff” in Laage in flight with the afterburner on.

The Eurofighter, for one, has been conceived exactly along that line, considering that the development, production and deployment phases overlap. Insights gained in deployment, for instance, can be fed back directly into the continuous improvement of the aircraft.

What significance does the Air Force attach to the procurement of the Tranche 3 Eurofighter?

The Eurofighter is the Air Force’s eminent system of the future. It is not until Tranche 3 is deployed that the makeover of the service’s airborne weapon systems will be complete. As this combat aircraft is being phased in, the inventory of older combat aircraft that are much more expensive to maintain is substantially reduced. Sometime around 2017, the Air Force will have a total of 180 Eurofighters and 85 Tornados at its disposal to fulfill its mandate.

It is only if and when we introduce the Eurofighter in the scope envisioned that we are able to reduce the inventory of older combat aircraft while further improving our capabilities. For the Air Force, procurement of Tranche 3 is a must.

Generally, how in the next decades do you envisage the role of the manned combat aircraft versus the unmanned aerial vehicle?

Unmanned aerial vehicles will not be able to completely replace manned aircraft. Rather, they will to a certain extent appropriately complement them in the aggregation of weapon systems used in aerial warfare. Manned aircraft will be available only in limited numbers, having to concurrently cover ever more potential multi-role deployment options. This is where unmanned systems provide relief and unlock a new dimension in capability value. UAVs deployed to that effect will become an indispensable tool in the projection of air power.

What is your personal experience piloting the Eurofighter?

It’s a totally electrifying experience to fly it. I envy the young pilots beginning their Air Force careers on this aircraft.

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