



The availability of the European aircraft came close to 100 percent, which did not fail to impress the hosts of the exercises. “I’d expect a higher [sortie] cancellation rate, but they’ve done very well,” admits commander Lieutenant Colonel Ron Hanselman. “The RAF came here prepared. They’re thinking not just about the aircraft, but the tactics,” lauded the Senior U.S. Officer running the exercises.

Reporting for Green Flag West was No. 11 Squadron RAF. Wing Commander Gavin Parker had deployed seven aircraft, additionally equipped with laser target marking capability, of his squadron to Nellis Air Force Base near Las Vegas, Nevada. Complementing them were three No. 17 Squadron Eurofighter Typhoons. All in all, 20 British pilots and 150 technical and logistic staff were to demonstrate under the U.S. Air

Force and Army’s Green Flag West exercises the Typhoon’s operational multi-role capability and its ability to cover the mission spectrum assigned to it. From the fighters’ showing over the desert grounds, this much was clear: these aircraft are capable of defending or gaining a favorable air situation and moreover repulsing attacks and precisely engaging all targets day and night, in any weather and at any distance.

Mission accomplished

By Robert Wouters

The stage is set in the American Southwest, Nevada, near Las Vegas: ten times a year a desert area sprawling over several thousand square kilometers goes live with a frenzy of activity on the ground and in the air. That’s when the U.S. Air Force is conducting its aerial warfare exercises there, some of the biggest the world has ever seen. Taking part in them for the first time in June this year were modified Eurofighter Typhoons of the United Kingdom’s Royal Air Force (RAF). With notable success: the European fighter aircraft excelled in all missions they flew.

The Green Flag desert exercises prepare air and ground forces for combat missions in a realistic approximation of war scenarios. Taking part in the exercises are several thousand U.S. troops, as well as troops of varying coalition partners, plus several thousand civilians. Mock-up villages, air field complexes and surface-to-air missile sites make up the scenery in the desert.

Ever since the Iraq war, the exercises have invariably followed the same pattern, with the role of escorting convoys of coalition ground troops being added to that of attack and destruction of targets from the air. A typical scenario has two dozen friendly vehicles moving through the desert and charges pilots with the task of locating and tracking nearby hostile activities and buzzing to deter and disperse enemy combatants.

Notes Wing Commander Gavin Parker: “The complexity of the exercise is astonishing. This is the best preparation for contemporary operations that money can buy.” In the European airspace, the practicing of tactical close air support by airborne weapon systems is subject to tight constraints through noise control legislation, low-altitude flight bans and regulations governing the onboard carriage of live weapons. Not so in the American desert, where several thousand square kilometers of nothing but sand and mountain terrain around Nellis Air Force Base provide optimum conditions for complex, large-scale aerial warfare exercises.

The Green Flag operations on any one day involved as many as two dozen aircraft over a continuous nine-hour period. Simulated were multiple threats from, for instance, air defense missiles, unmanned combat air vehicles (UCAV) and enemy aircraft. Practiced also was the relief of besieged ground troops through airborne sorties. Hanselman, who ran the exercises, explains that Green Flag is “a very important exercise, because these [army] guys are going into combat.” The USAF’s 14th Fighter Squadron based at Misawa Air Base in Japan, for one, will be re-deployed to Iraq before the year is out.

The RAF Typhoons were able to make several sorties a day for durations of up to 120 minutes each. In this, they were supported by technical staff on the ground, working two shifts. The armament they carried was that intended for war emergency, that is guided short-range ASRAAM, IRIS-T or AIM-9L Side-



winder missiles for air-to-air combat, the AIM-120 AMRAAM for the intermediate range, depending on the nation, and the laser-guided Paveway II and GBU-16 for air-to-surface environments. At this loading status, the Typhoon is cleared for loads up to nine times the gravitational force of the earth in extreme flight maneuvers. And that’s about the limit to which the pilots actually pushed their combat jets over Nevada’s desert, exploiting the full power of their two high-thrust EJ200 engines.

Developed by the Eurojet consortium, the EJ200 delivers 60 kilonewtons of thrust, or 90 kilonewtons reheated. At full combat load, that takes the Typhoon to one-and-a-half time sonic speed and an altitude of 11,582 meters within less than two and a half minutes. All of which not only takes the pilots’ honed flying skills but moreover perfectly coordinated support from the maintenance crews on the ground.

The 11th Squadron’s aircraft were deployed to the U.S. along with a primary equipment pack permitting eight fighters to operate on a four-week first line spares allowance. The full hardware complement is carried on a C-130J Hercules, so it isn’t overwhelmingly voluminous. Which pleases Aloysius Rauen, Eurofighter GmbH Chief Executive Officer: “The Typhoon has been developed for cost-efficient operation at low operating costs. An appreciably reduced amount of infrastructure, engineering and not least manpower, ease of



A Royal Air Force Eurofighter Typhoon during a mission in Nevada.

maintenance and intelligent logistic concepts permit the aircraft to swiftly adapt to diverse challenges, such as the instant shift from air-to-air to air-to-surface assignments.”

That capability was much in demand also during Green Flag. “We’re getting into the era of digital close air support,” was how Wing Commander Gavin Parker summed it up at Nellis Air Force Base. The Link-16-equipped Typhoons can pool situational awareness data with other weapon systems. What’s more, Parker’s team includes four forward air controllers plus a liaison officer on

the ground to connect with the 4th Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment.

The Royal Air Force considers its Green Flag participation a full success. So it hopes to be in on the exercises in 2009 as well.



For additional information, contact
Heidrun Moll
+49 89 1489-3537



For further information on this article go to:
www.mtu.de/208GreenFlag

