

# 100 YEARS OF AERONAUTIQUE NAVAL

## NAVAL GATHERING AT HYERES FRANCE

To mark the 100 years anniversary of Aeronavale's naval aviation, the French admiralty decided to organize a celebration at BAN Hyeres. (Base Aero Navale) This did not end up with only a 'bunch' of aircraft but turned out to be a well organized air fete. It was welcomed very much by those who were interested. Good luck was a main factor considering the fact that hardly 24 hours later the air base was flooded by extreme rainfall and floods.

## AIRCRAFT CARRIERS IN THE BAY

There was of course an important role for the host, showing their diversity of aircraft both from land-based squadrons and embarked units. No less than three carriers were anchored in the bay of Toulon including the own French Charles de Gaulle (R91), the Spanish Principe d'Asturias (R11) and most surprising the USS Harry S. Truman (CVN-75). Sadly the invited British HMS Ark Royal and the Italian Giuseppe Garibaldi could not make it to join the festivities. All three carriers sent aircraft to BAN Hyeres for a nice static show and air displays. The unusual combination of aircraft was colourful on the ground and several mighty aircraft impressed the public with their show.

## AERONAVALE'S PROUD

Aeronavale presented their Dassault Rafale F2 (12F) and Super Etendard Modernise (SEM) fighters (11F & 17F) and Grumman E2C Hawkeye AEW aircraft (4F) from the Charles de Gaulle. Land based units from Hyeres and nearby Nimes Garons showed their helicopters and maritime patrol aircraft such as the AS-565SA Panther (36F), the Sa-319B Alouette III (35F) and Sa-365N Dauphin (35F) helicopters from Hyeres. Other aircraft were EMB 121AN Xingu (28F/EPV) and Breguet Atlantique 2 ASW from Nimes and Falcon 50 SURMAR from 24 F in Brittany. The Lynx helicopters from 31F, normally embarked on frigates flew some rounds but their successor the NH-90 was on the static and from 2010 onwards the Lynx from 31F will gradually be replaced by this helicopter. The NH-90 on the static however is still in use by 10S/CEPA and will later on move to 31F. Even aircraft for initial training (MS-880 Rallye from 100S and CAP 10B from 50S) were in Hyeres to complete the collection. Two SEM aircraft performed a buddy-to buddy air refuelling which is seldom seen at air shows. The SEM is still an important aircraft within Aeronavale and will soldier on until 2015. Some aircraft were in special colours such as a SEM at the static with 1910-2010 prominent on the fuselage and an AS 565 Panther with a decoration of a mythic animal. The Rafale showed in the air its typical moves from a latest generation fighter aircraft. At this moment the Rafale 1 has been replaced with the Rafale 2 which is enabled for both air defence and ground attack duties. The Rafale 1 aircraft will be updated to more capable Rafale 3 aircraft before re-entering service.

## FOREIGN GUESTS

The French did everything to enlighten the show with a fly past of the Airbus A-380 and the Patrouille de France stunt team. The Italians showed an EH-101 and the Spanish Navy made a performance with their Harriers from Principe d'Asturias but of course the real treat was the U.S. Navy with no less than four F-18 Hornet aircraft together in the air. Among them

a very colourful F-18 with bright green shades in its colour scheme. Carrier-on-board-Delivery (COD) greyhound aircraft flew from carrier to base and back. It was in every aspect a success. But when an event is in progress some disturbance can occur and this time a sad circumstance happened within the group of warbirds who were at BAN Hyeres to symbolize the early years of Aeronavale.

## **WARBIRD GONE**

About 15.00 hours at June 12 heavy sounds of alarm installations indicated troubles. Early in the day the organisation had promised the spectators there would be a surprise on the end of the day. After the alarmbells rang, a sour feeling crept the visitors when they heard that the replica of a Focke Wulf crashed about 150 meters out of the coastline. Some surprise... The aircraft was rehearsing a dog-fight with a Spitfire for the airshow when the engine seized in a slow role and the aircraft ditched. It jumped over the water like a little stone and at the place where the movement stopped it eventually sank. The 63 years old pilot Marc 'Leon' Mathis was saved by people on jet-ski's who were rapidly on the spot. He was evacuated by them to the shore and given in the hands of the fire-brigade. The replica Focke Wulf 190 (registration F-AZZJ) sank 3 metres down with a fair bit of structural damage sustained after hitting the water at over 200 km/h according the pilot who put 11 crash landings on his name in his career of 1600 flying hours. As it appeared later on luckily ever after Marc was not injured. Later on the show was closed with a mighty performance of the earlier mentioned Airbus A-380 and what a way to close the event, what a surprise for all visitors. In spite of the accident the French Aero navale can look back on a well organised 100 years celebration !

---

[Kees Otten & Wim Das](#)

---

*NB: The next day there were no flying activity at Hyères, due to floods and very heavy rainfall. Afterwards the ditched Focke Wulf was hoisted up out of the water, and we presume that Marc Mathis will pick up the courage and starts repairing his plane once more...*

*We wish him strength and wisdom !*

