

## **EXERCISE F-16 FOR AFGHANISTAN AT HILL AFB USA**

From march till the beginning of june 2008 some eleven F-16's from the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAF) participated in various exercises in the United States and Canada. For these exercises the F-16's were flown specially from their homebase 'Volkel' to the North of America.

The pilots have the opportunity to train very realistic in the USA and Canada concerning the terrain circumstances for example. Desert and mountains. This way they can prepare optimal on missions that they actually have to fly in Afghanistan.

From march 3<sup>rd</sup> up till april 16<sup>th</sup> the exercises Hill-1 and Hill-2 took place from Hill AFB in Utah. During these exercises many so called 'Close Air Support' (CAS) missions are practiced in the dark. These are missions where from out of the air direct support is given to groundforces. The pilots use night vision goggles and next to that the planes are equipped with special targeting pods. Some similar exercise in international connection was held from 21<sup>st</sup> of april up till mai 3<sup>rd</sup> from Cold Lake AFB in Canada.

From 2<sup>nd</sup> of mai up till 3<sup>rd</sup> of june will be participated from the Canadian airforce base Cold Lake in two sessions on the big international exercise Maple Flag. The purpose of this exercise is training in international connection of missions with a large number of different types of aircraft in cooperation with groundforces.

Spread over the whole period about 500 men Dutch personell are involved in these exercises. The eleven F-16's have been flown accompanied by a KDC-10 tanker plane of the RNLAF to the United States, taking two days for this trip. Last year was the first time that RNLAF participated in the Hill exercises. The high value of these training missions compared to the limited opportunities in The Netherlands is the reason to participate this year again. Also these exercises abroad reduce the noisepollution in the neighbourhood of the Dutch bases and over the densily populated aerea's in Holland.

**Kees Otten en Wim Das**

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