

TLP AND THE PROFESSION OF WARFARE

TLP and the profession of Air Warfare

Air warfare is a complex item which seems continuously under development adapting new and advanced techniques. Those who are working with the concept are influenced by trends and respond on lessons learned from conflicts anywhere in the world. In respect of air warfare as a profession it requires equally to other self respecting professions mechanisms to develop to a higher level. Such mechanisms concerning the latest ideas and views in the world and consist of international education programs, seminars and conferences on a regular base and an academic course. The aim is a commonly shared air warfare doctrine at advanced level to be educated to participants. In the tactical field of air warfare this course exists in the Western military world as the Tactical Leader Program (TLP) still on location at Florennes Air Base in Belgium. During 2008 we saw again, as was the case in many years, an interesting mix of participants joining the flying course in Belgium where the TLP will be exit in near future. In this article a report about the TLP and its objectives.

Multinational

The concept was born in the need to offer NATO pilots a theatre where they could find out at what level they perform. In this theatre tactics are exercised in Combined Air Operations (COMAO). During the years of existence of the course the complexity was growing, featuring new developed scenarios as outcome of most recent inspirations. The TLP exercise originally started in Germany (Furstenfeldbruck and Jever), moved to Florennes in 1989 and after a long period of very sufficient tactical air warfare training the choice was made to change the operating theatre to Spain where the TLP will reactivate at Los Llanos Airfield, Albacete as scheduled in 2009-2010. In the past decennia many NATO crews were lead through the course, achieving tactical leadership skills and in this way adding glue to the idea of the multinational concept in military operations. The aim to bring each other to an equally high level of tactical knowledge, awareness and performance will also create coherence. During al those years TLP was facing increasing numbers of participants, marking the popularity or the course. An important feature of the TLP programme is the concept of three branches mutually supporting and interacting for the benefit of the whole. This branches comprises the Flying Branch, the Academic Branch and the Concepts & Doctrine Branch (C&D)

Structure

However TLP is a dynamic process, some principles are standard. Friendly forces are indicated blue and opposing forces are indicated red. In a briefing during the pre-phase the units are tasked. Most preparation phases ask for several days and a seminar to plan the exercise effectively and to instruct everyone with his task. Tactical forces are lead by fighter sweeps providing force protection in Offensive Counter Air operations (OCA) with the aim to achieve air superiority for at least the surroundings of the tactical component which is tasked to strike at ground based

targets. A main aspect is Suppression of Enemy Air Defence (SEAD) to reduce the harm in the corridor to the target. The defenders however will put their effort in Defensive Counter Air Operations (DCA) giving struggle to the attacking force. Classically OCA consists of SEAD, Sweep, Force Protection and OCA attack elements and DCA with active elements of aircraft and Ground Based Air Defence Units (GBAD). Exercises are mostly Combined Air Operations (COMAO) and sometimes joint exercises involving naval elements for example. In the past decades fighter aircraft were developed with most advanced communication abilities. Adding AEW aircraft and involving more and more data-link communication capable aircraft in combination with improved ECM capability in the exercise makes the TLP more challenging. It is not only a match of skills but also of aircraft capabilities. Tactics are following the latest capabilities enabled by the most modern avionics with features of a high level of threat recognition. Improved awareness with the use of superior avionics can lead to different choices and different tactical management. Each course provides a wide selection of all tactical aircraft available in the NATO inventory today. Talking about aircraft capabilities is one but still the pilot is in charge and needs to be educated. They will be challenged to use their imagination on new scenarios

Participants

A major objective of the course is to provide an atmosphere where crews of several countries with different background can work together in a culture of shared operations. With the introduction of more NATO members this is a most important aspect. Originally the TLP was started with Belgium, Canada (withdrawn in 1997) Germany, The Netherlands, the U.K. and the USA who are still joining in a major percentage. Later a memorandum of understanding was signed by Denmark and Spain. After the withdrawal of Canada space came free for guest slots for Italia, Turkey, Greece, France, Norway and Portugal and later the Czech Republic while Poland will probably join in Spain. France receives some free slots in return for the use of its low-flying areas for the TLP courses. The missions, some extended by means of air refuelling are conducted over Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, U.K. and already mentioned France. Different national tactical employment concepts are examined by experts of the C&D branch including C3 and EW experts drawn from national and NATO headquarters, Combined Air Operation Centres (CAOC's) and the TLP itself. Recommendations are given on operational doctrines how to deploy air assets in the most tactical way. In this way integrated operations could achieve a most effective level. The NATO by means of TLP tries to improve the tactical techniques and procedures of the NATO air forces and multi-national tactical air operations with realistic training but also tests new concepts and doctrines during TLP flying missions. Next to this the tactical interoperability has to be improved through exposure to other air forces tactics and capabilities.

Concept

Every year the Flying Branch organises six flying courses to improve the tactical leadership skills and flying capabilities of section leaders. Up to 24 aircraft and crews can participate in each course. Each unit normally deploys two aircraft to TLP with crews and engineering detachments of up to 30 personnel. Next to the flight activities

of those aircraft, the base will see arrivals of transport aircraft from the participating air forces as well. Aircrew attending to one of the flying courses have to be well experienced and already capable to lead a four-ship formation or at least a pair of aircraft. The course provides in further development of aircrew leadership capabilities. In total the aircrew will go through approximately 15 carefully planned missions with increasing complexity and increasing number of aircraft. Each day a different crew leads the others through all phases of the missions. In the seminar phase aircrew join a number of academic lessons as well. The four weeks flying program with a wide range of mission profiles will see the climax in the last two weeks when extra aircraft are assigned to act as red forces. Intense debriefing takes place in order to learn the most out of the mission. Each course one participant is responsible for bringing a two seat aircraft enabling a TLP instructor to take part into flying sessions. Two missions are planned for air-to-air refuelling operations. ECM tasked aircraft are scheduled for operations in week 3-4 and AWACS aircraft are acting from the home base Geilenkirchen. Sometimes participants of neighbouring countries are operating from their home base too when situated in or near the operation area. Once a year the TLP flying course is organised out of the region (OOR) giving participants the chance to operate over unfamiliar terrain and other weather conditions. In this Deployed Flying Course (DFC) is the only possibility to conduct night operations due to restrictions around the own operation area around Florennes. For them, as we are talking about the base personnel of Florennes, it is a pity the course will come to an end in this region. What could have been the objective to choose for another location in future? This could be many. One must understand that a new area and new conditions could possibly push the TLP to a new level. The organisation is that much international minded that change of location will not a big issue while the benefits of other conditions could cause even more eagerness to join.

Staff

The Staff of TLP is also a multinational approach. The Flying Branch is headed by a Lieutenant Colonel drawn in rotation from Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom or the United States. Some 14 officers from 7 nations make up the two sections of the Flying Branch; Air-to-ground and Air-to-Air. All officers have recently completed front line flying tours and all return to their home units when not active for TLP to maintain flying currency. Many of them have recent experience in Middle East or Balkan theatres and were ever a TLP student themselves. The Staff has the responsibility to coordinate the missions in the whole concept including briefing and debriefing the participants, assessing the results and reflecting the lessons learned. Equally the C & D Branch is lead by a Lieutenant Colonel who has four other members in his staff with two of them have sub-specialisation Command, Control and Communication (C3) and Electronic Warfare (EW). Staff members make visits to national centres for interaction at national level. The Academic branch comprises two shops: Academic and Intelligence with specific tasks to promote awareness in COMAO concepts and providing essential intelligence support to the other branches and is also headed by a lieutenant Colonel. The one year capacity for the Academic Branch to educate in stand alone seminars and combined with Flying Courses is 500 representatives of Nato air forces. Florennes is hosting the TLP now for years and provides all the necessary facilities. All countries are satisfied about the good work Belgium applies as the host for so far and feel a warm relationship with Belgium in appreciation.

Future

The Flying Branch is only one out of three and so the two others have their own importance while all three branches collaborate. In the academic courses the crews will learn the ins and outs of threat doctrine, weapons and weapons effect, aircraft performances, SAM and AAA - capabilities, battle staff management and theory of OCA and DCA. The Academic Branch has set up a similar course for tactical helicopter operations such as CSAR which operates on other dates. All three branches give a wide variety on conferences held at Florennes such as TLP/Partnership for Peace (PfP) Air Operations Seminars which countries will on their turn give briefings on the structure and training of their air forces. C & D however has to focus on mobility and new threats and their tactical ideas can be evaluated and developed on TLP flying courses while the results of C&D work are incorporated into Academic and Flying Branch programmes. The need is recognized to put things in a wider prospect and while multinational operations have seen increasing frequency, in the same way the importance of combined and joint exercises have grown simultaneously. Future scenarios are likely to demand closer coordination between navy, land and air forces. In the coming years the TLP will see enough of this concept and will face a transformation to NATO's south region. For pilots of the Northern areas this will be an attractive idea.

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