

THIS TIGERMEET THING, WHAT IS IT ABOUT ?

This Tigermeet thing, what is it about ? This question we've been asking ourselves for many years already and today (June 16th 2014) we finally got an answer from a high ranked person during the press-briefing at Schleswig-Jagel in Germany hosting 2014 Nato Tigermeet (NTM). A British Colonel called 'Don' has been in the organization of the NTM since 1979 and he seriously asked to write in majority about the operations, and minor in 'This Tigermeet Thing'.

This requires investigation off course ! It's understandable that outsiders think jets warplanes being painted in tiger schemes is odd, and pilots and crews walking in tiger clothes, tiger helmets, riding tiger cars in a scene of 'tiger nonsense' as it seems at first sight.

OFF COURSE RED AND BLUE

Let's get in to it. Unlike the name, NATO Tiger Meet, the exercise is completely 'stand-alone' with participation of NATO members but with an own authorization. NTM is or 85% comparable with many other exercises, air-to-air and air-to-ground operations with tanks involved, surface-to-air threats, hostile objectives, communication jamming, electronic warfare and the 'Red forces' against the 'Blue forces'. Time brings new experiences and knowledge from different places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and so on. So similar in concept with other NATO exercises and perhaps even competing in complexity, the Tiger meet distinguish itself with a greater number of participants and also the squadrons must be part of the Tiger family of 24 Tiger squadrons full and probationary members in the NATO Tiger Association (NTA). The exercise is annually organized on different locations and one of the participant airbases plays host.

PRE-PHASE

This time it was the turn of Schleswig-Jever, with Taktische Luftwaffengeschwader 51 "Immelmann" Tiger squadron being a member of the first hour. The Germans were in charge of the organization but this was outlined in a planning conference earlier. Everybody can claim his own piece of the cake by taking part in the planning conference and sending a representative of the own Tiger Squadron. Objectives are discussed. Also joint elements are involved and these participants join the pre-phase. The assembly decided to stay with and even expand the current NTM formula of two weeks training and two waves per day. To enhance the exercise to a better level there is more focus on joint training, electronic warfare and communication improvement between fighters, helicopters and AWACS aircraft.

LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

More experienced crews take others by the hand to learn specific skills in warfare and complexity is built up during the exercise. There is continuous change of roles so everybody gets the opportunity to act in attacking or defending role. The most experienced pilots are taking the role of 'bad guys' to the end of the exercise to enforce the training level for new crews. All fighters were operating from Schleswig-Jagel and so debriefing could be very much centralized and is of main importance in the development of the exercise. Pilots do know their own system and the capability of their own weapons but here at NTM they learn from other type of aircraft and how to fight them. The variability is a great advantage and some aircraft are quite equal in performance to those aircraft which are not in the inventory of NATO allies but could be opposing aircraft in conflicts. Off course performances between types are kept secret, and also the tactics in the packages.

ABOVE SEA AND LAND

The exercise area was mainly above the North Sea between the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark where the aircraft trained their air-to-air fighting tactics. NTM is a typical fighter exercise comprising the

major part of the missions however the joint element is growing. Two German naval ships were to be attacked and defended, but also SAM-sites on coastal areas took part in air-to-surface raids to the mainland. Simulations with AMRAAM beyond visual range attacks were also in the envelope of the NTM 2014 as are attacks to the ground with the latest methods in air warfare. The search for SAM sites is sometimes intensified and SAM sites get to know if they are eliminated. On the other hand they can also tag attacking aircraft and the pilot will know when he is hit.

Electronic warfare comprises jamming of SAM-radars. Communication with data-link is improved every next issue and so enhances the awareness to a development of more capabilities. Fighters communicate with each other and the AWACS directly by Link-16 data-link. Helicopters use link-11 but do communicate with this system with the AWACS, they are in fact in contact with AWACS but by radio. There was a participation of two Royal Navy Merlin helicopters with two Czech Mi-24 and one Czech Mi-17 helicopter, while the Germans put in a Tiger attack helicopter. The helicopters were communicating with Czech and German Forward Air Controllers to guide an evacuation from people on the ground. Also defending those so-called 'slow movers' (large planes) was one task to be performed by fighters. Results are recorded by training pods helping the pilot to learn where he stands. Debriefing works directly and flights of the next day are prepared and briefed one day before. The planners are well aware of the capabilities of the aircraft and the advances in performance of the pilots and translate this in the package of the training schedules for squadrons and pilots individual as well.

NTM HAS ITS VERY OWN IDENTITY

NTM can work separate from NATO command and has its own command and control centre (C3) deployed. The USAF was invited but was too late to introduce in the planning. Results of the whole exercise is shared with the Americans later on after the exercise has ended so they also can benefit. To avoid any tension in Europe the NTM is long before it is conducted reported to Russia and it is also this way notified that this annual exercise has no relation with any political developments in Eastern Europe, a thought which is not impossible looking at the current trends and developments in Europe. Pilots of the squadrons believe to make the ties of the European countries in NATO more tight with this kind of exercises and also to know each other better there are social meetings during the meet. This includes cultural orientated evenings, the tiger gimmick, trophies to win Like the bronze tiger for the organizing country and the silver tiger for the best performance combined with the tiger art on the aircraft. Coming to the end of this episode we promised to reveal what 'this Tiger meet thing is all about. Summarizing all together' Don explained: The Tiger meet can be defined in one word: 'Indefinable'.

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