

ALPHA-JET LOOKS BACK ON SUCCESSFUL CAREER

More and more Alpha-Jets are losing their operational life in the military since the type has been phased out like recently was the case in the Portuguese airforce on 13th of January. Others are nominated for this in near future which will be the fate for the examples flying in the Belgian and French Air force. However this fact does not necessarily mean the end of its flying career since the type is quite popular. Many find or will find the way to a civil destination similar to the Aero L-39's. Such career has already been established in Canada where Alpha-Jets are incorporated in the 'Top Aces' group (Discovery Air Defence Services) and Red Bull in Europe.

MULTI NATIONAL DESIGN AND MORE THAN ONE TASK

The Dassault-Breguet Dornier Alpha-Jet served for many years with the E-version (Ecole) as jet trainer in the Belgian and French airforce. The tactical A-version (Appui Tactique) saw service first in the German Air Force (175 aircraft). Germany in particular was not interested in the trainer version while attached to a training course in the United States but saw advantage in a light attack aircraft. After some years however they changed their mind and Alpha-Jets were withdrawn from use and sold to other countries like Thailand and Portugal. The latter receiving 50 examples in 1993. Portugal operated the type successfully as replacement of the T-38 Talon in the 103 squadron mainly in the training role as a pre-phase for F16AM/BM. Until recently only six examples were left in service. The Portuguese Airforce used the type in dissimilar air combat (DACT) against the F-16 with remarkable success for the Alpha-Jet.

The type turned out to be a good airplane in combat actions which was not really a surprise while the designers ment the type to be for both attack and training role. It was quite easy to transform one version into the other. Although the Alpha-Jet was considered a better attack aircraft as the designers could have imagined the needs in Europe determined the aircraft on this continent mainly in the training role. One of the European users was the Royal Airforce with seven operational aircraft and five spare examples with the British Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, also called QinetiQ while it took too long to acquire Bae Hawks for the Job. They were tasked with a variety of jobs and testing and lost operational duties on 31th january 2018.

FRENCH AND BELGIAN COLLABORATION IN TRAINING

Both countries replaced the Fouga Magister with the Alpha-Jet. France took 99 airplanes in service and Belgium 33. Dassault and Dornier produced the aircraft but Sabca in Belgium delivered some parts for assemblage. French examples were operating from Cazaux and Tours, and the national aerobatic team Patrouille de France based on Salon the Provence acquired the type for their stunt operations and became very successful. Belgian aircraft were based on Bevekom (Beauvechain) and called Alpha-Jet 1B while some effort was made with a few modifications fitted by SABCA. During 2004 France and Belgium met each other in an agreement to combine their training activities and most Belgian Alpha-Jets moved to Cazaux in France. The type served both air forces in a satisfactory way for many years.

FRANCE MOVES CHARACTER OF FLYING

The French however despite the Alpha-Jet was 'soldiering on' in a good effort were already considering a replacement for some time and found a candidate in 2017. Quite striking they

made their choice for a turboprop engined type to replace the jet. Their choice was made for the Swiss Pilatus PC-21 which would be perfect to do the job with outstanding flying characteristics and performances and the cockpit lay-out suits to prepare candidates in a preliminary trajectory to Mirage 2000 or Rafale. Even some systems will replicate those of the Rafales. The British provider of defense services Babcock was selected. Babcock Mission Critical Services France (BMCSF) will buy 17 PC-21 turboprop trainers and form a joint company with Dassault to provide future fast jet pilot and navigator training aircraft for the French Airforce in a service contract lasting for 11 years.

Simulation specialist CAE joins the project as subcontractor for ground training, this project is called FOMEDEC which stands for modernized and differentiated training of fighter aircraft crews. The PC-21 will be stationed at Cognac and replaces those Alpha-Jets operating in the elementary jet training at Cazaux and fast jet training at Tours. In addition to that the PC-21 also will replace other types of aircraft at that base. A few Alpha-Jets will remain flying from Cognac for weapon-training and will be supported by Dassault. Also the Patrouille de France will stick to the type in near future. Other Alpha-Jets in French military will be phased out.

PHASING OUT OF THE BELGIAN ALPHA-JET FLEET

Finally also Belgium will close down their Alpha-Jet era as General-major Frédéric Vansina, the highest officer in Belgian Airforce claims, when they will leave the Advanced Jet Training School at Cazaux by the end of 2018. Belgium plans to join the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training (ENJJPT) on Sheppard Texas, for a temporary period and so far the Belgian Alpha-Jets will cease their activities. Outside Europe small deliveries were made in Morocco, Egypt, Nigeria and Togo in both training tasks as tactical options. Recently the stored Nigerian examples were put back in to service to counter the terror organization Boko Haram. Military seen the role of the type is actually almost played out in considerable time, which will not be the case with civilian examples. The latter group will surely increase when ex Belgian and French examples will find their way to the civil market.

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