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## **70 YEARS CELEBRATION - FLORENNES BELGIUM**

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### **Florennes in spotlight during 70 years of Military Aviation**

The Belgian Air Force was eager to present an air show on Florennes Air Base marking the celebration of 70 years of military aviation at this air base. Florennes successfully organized the Belgian Air Force Air show of 2001 and the Defensiedagen in 2008 and was for many years the host of NATO's Tactical Leadership Program (TLP) and today the home of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Wing of the Air Component of Belgian defence force. During many years aircraft of different squadrons of many NATO's allies visited Florennes for their training programmes and so the intention to share the festivities for this base existed widely among air forces and resulted in substantial participation and representation during 22-24<sup>th</sup> June.

### **Belgian displays**

Of course a primary role was for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Wing itself. This unit flies the F-16MLU and is alternately with Kleine Brogel Air Base in charge for the F-16 Solo display. This year, as everyone could imagine, Florennes was appointed to apply a pilot and aircraft. In Belgian Air Force this is voluntary. As the squadron command asks who is interested someone can offer his qualities to meet this challenge but will be submitting to a lot of work surplus to his normal tasks and duties. He will have to maintain operational ability, flying his average training programmes and join exercises and next to this spent extra time to train his solo display manoeuvres and meets several air shows during the summer season. Nevertheless it is felt as an honour. This year Captain Renaud 'GRAT' Thys performs the F-16 solo display with more than 1800 flying hours of which 1200 on F-16 in his pocket. New this year is the A-109BA Display with special painted tail and 100.000 hrs and 20 years A-109 on the door. Also a team of four Marchetti SF-260 training aircraft presented themselves. This team adopted the name of the 'Red Devils' which name is a heritage of stunt teams operating Hunter F6 and Fouga Magister jets during the sixties and seventies. The Red Devils SF-260 team was formed during the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Royal Belgian Air Force which is nowadays called Air Component.

### **Aircraft from present and past**

To resemble a 70 years period the initiative was made to invite several war birds such as P-51 Mustang, T-28 Trojans but also T6 Harvards, the latter in Belgian Air force colours. Germany built the base during World War II and in a specific area some 300 actors on the ground were involved with this process around a Messerschmitt 108 and Fiessler Storch in Luftwaffe colours and also with the freeing of the base by US. Air Force which was participated by described aircraft above.

Also the display of the Hunter in Royal Netherlands Air Force is symbolic for the era of the red devils first appearance as Hunter team. Another spectacular sight was the display of a Supermarine Spitfire PR XIX flying in two ship formation with a Royal Belgian Air Force F-16 which is always a challenge to synchronize the air speed

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between the two aircraft. For the public are this kind of displays a real treat and they are fond of photographing this. Some 50.000 public joined the festivities during the weekend. They could witness other stunt teams such as the Patrouille the France and the Cartouche Doré, the latter with TB-30 Epsilon training aircraft. Other teams were the PC-7 team from Switzerland, the Krila Oluje or 'wings of storm' from Croatian air force with PC-9M, the familiar Royal Jordanian Falcons with extra 300's and the Baltic Bees with L-39's from Tukums in Letland.

## **Advanced jets**

Being an F-16 air base the event in Florennes was participated by up to four countries performing an air display besides the Belgian solo display. These countries were Denmark, Greece, The Netherlands and Turkey. The Netherlands participated with their well known orange-black F-16 and Turkey with their Solo-Turk team while Greece and Denmark uses a quite simple national flag figure on tail or conformal tanks. Other colourful F-16's were the Belgian FA-121 market on the tail with 95 years No.1 Squadron 'Stingers' (1917-2012) and credo Nemo Me Impune Lacessit and FA-68 with tail telling a story about the action the squadron has seen from World War II till Unified Protector Libya 2011, both on static. The Royal Norwegian Air Force sent their Tiger painted F-16's which were parked on static next to the Royal Belgian Air Force tiger F-16's. Most appreciated by the spectators were the attracted aircraft from NATO partners from Eastern Europe. Three Su-22 aircraft from Poland and two Mig-29 Aircraft from Slovak Air Force made there appearance and are truly an uncommon sight. The Mig-29 demonstrated why this aircraft is called the best dog fighter of its generation and the Su-22 made a mighty impression with a duo performance of two aircraft performing an close two ship formation in the same way like we have seen for many years with French Air Force Jaguars. Very attractive were passes with one aircraft set the wings in spread position and one in closed position for high speed. Belgium also showed their Alpha Jets, Sea King, Hercules and Falcon VIP aircraft of the Air Component. For most of all, the objective was to present the air force in current structure. For future the Royal Belgian Air Force has to make their choice for another F-16 update or to replace for a new aircraft but this is an issue like in other European countries which is pushed forwards in time until economical developments permits new acquisitions.

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