

# VAYU

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## Aerospace & Defence Review



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# Swamp Foxes in Poland

157FS/169FW, South Carolina Air National Guard at Łask Air Base



During the first weeks of June 2015, eight Lockheed F-16Cs (Block 52) of the South Carolina Air National Guard (SC-ANG, 169 Fighter Wing, 157th Fighter Squadron ‘Swamp Foxes’) deployed to the Polish 32nd Air Base (32. Baza Lotnicza) at Łask.

The aircraft had started their journey from their home base, McEntire Joint National Guard Base in South Carolina, on 28 May 2015. Supported by Boeing KC-135s and McDonnell Douglas KC-10s tankers for an incredible 10 aerial refueling sessions, the aircraft flew directly to Łask.

Since 2012, the USAF has held large bilateral exercises with the Polish Air Force every year, and a local USAF office, the 52nd Operations Group, Detachment 1 (the detachment’s motto is ‘*Razem Silniejsi*,’ which translates as ‘Stronger Together’ in Polish), supports these exercises at the Łask

Air Base. Throughout the year, F-16s from Spangdahlem Air Base (Germany) and Aviano Air Base (Italy) deploy to Łask on a regular basis, and at least once per year a large deployment from the continental USA will visit Łask.

This SC-ANG deployment is supporting the larger United States Air Force exercise ‘*Atlantic Resolve*’ in 2015, which has already seen two USAF F-15 deployments and one USAF A-10 deployment to Europe. During their stay in Poland, the eight SC-ANG F-16s were joined by six F-16s from Spangdahlem, and all these USAF aircraft flew missions together with the local Polish F-16s of 10th Tactical Squadron (‘*Dragons*’). During the exercises, the F-16s flew various missions: air-air, air-ground, ground suppression, air-defence suppression, and close air support. The sorties also involved other US aircraft such



Polish F-16 with conformal fuel tanks fitted (photo: Joris van Boven)



as F-15s and A-10s. The main goal of the month-long deployment was to train the Polish and American F-16s together for better integration of the two Air Forces. Several exercises were planned for the all the Łask F-16s to execute, these being *Eagle Talon*, *Sabre Strike*, *Ramstein Guard*.

The deployment saw four different paint schemes on the participating F-16s : the Spangdahlem F-16s were a grey/silver colour, the Łask-based Polish F-16s had a two-tone 'grey-on-grey' scheme, three of the SC-ANG F-16s had the standard two-tone grey, and the remaining five SC-ANG F-16s had the special radar-absorbing 'Have Glass' paint that is intended to decrease the radar signature of the aircraft. This paint, borrowed from the F-35 programme, will be applied to all US F-16s in the Suppression of Enemy Air Defence (SEAD) role, and can be identified by a distinct darker and more metallic appearance.

### Łask Air Base

Base Commander Lt Col 'Palm' (only callsigns are cleared for publication) briefed the media about Łask Air Base and the roles and functions of the local based F-16s. Łask Air Base is one of two Polish F-16 bases, the other being the 31st Air Base (*31. Baza Lotnicza*) at Krzesiny. Both bases were rebuilt and upgraded to NATO standards before receiving their F-16s. Łask Air Base also employs some 1,400 people, which makes it a huge economic factor in the middle of Poland.



*SC-ANG F-16 in distinctive 'Have Glass' paint (photo: Patrick Harbers)*



A runway modification is foreseen in the near future, in order to lengthen the runway at Łask to make it capable of operating all NATO aircraft. Currently the 2,500 metre (8,200 feet) runway cannot accommodate all aircraft types in wet, snowy or icy weather



*SC-ANG F-16 in 'Have Glass' paint and fitted with pods, tanks and training missiles (photo: Patrick Harbers)*



*Tails of all participating F-16s – from front to back: Poland, SC-ANG, and 480th Squadron, Spangdahlem (photo: Joris van Boven)*

conditions, if they are not equipped with a braking-parachute. A longer runway will eliminate this problem. Owing to runway repairs at Krzesiny, all F-16s from the 31st Air Base are temporarily based at Łask, prior to deployment to Greece for a separate exercise.

### **Pilots interviewed**

The six F-16s from Spangdahlem came from the 480th Tactical Fighter Squadron of the 52nd Operations Group. Captain 'Jarred' a pilot with some 1000 flying hours, stated that six F-16s and 12 pilots would be based at Łask for 3 weeks, with two missions to be flown each day, allowing each pilot to conduct one mission per day. The missions consisted of air-ground (close air support, air defence suppression) and air-air (offensive and defensive roles), and

the F-16s participated in the *Sabre Strike* exercise along with the Polish and SC-ANG F-16s. The squadron brought its own 'weather-man' Technical Sergeant 'Michael' for accurate weather predictions.

Two Polish pilots from the 10th Tactical Squadron 'Dragons' were also interviewed. 1st Lt 'Lenny' and 1st Lt 'Slim' (callsigns) talked about the Polish F-16s and their twice-daily missions in various roles, including recce with the DB-101 recce pod (main role of the 10th Squadron F-16s), Suppression of Enemy Air Defence (SEAD), focused mainly on destroying the radar installations, Destruction of Enemy Air Defense (DEAD), focused on the destruction of all enemy air systems, Offensive and Defensive Counter Air (OCA/DCA) and Close Air Support (CAS). In order to participate in these exercises, all



*SC-ANG F-16 in flight (photo: Joris van Boven)*

Polish pilots need to be qualified ‘Combat Mission Ready.’ The two pilots interviewed flew various missions in June, taking part in exercises *Eagle Talon* and *Sabre Strike* alongside American F-16s. The aim, they said, being to achieve better bilateral cooperation.

The South Carolina Air National Guard detachment commander in Poland was Lt Col ‘Abu’ (callsign), with over 4,000 flying hours, nearly all on the F-16. After 11 years as an active duty USAF officer, he switched to the SC-ANG 14 years ago. The detachment participated in all three June exercises, *Eagle Talon*, *Sabre Strike*, *Ramstein Guard*, and brought 16 pilots and 125 personnel to Poland for the month-long deployment. Some pilots were already very experienced, while the other half were at least ‘Combat Ready.’ The aim of the ‘*Swamp Foxes*’ was to learn to integrate with the Polish F-16s and to work with them as a team. Lt Col ‘Abu’ enjoyed learning from his Polish colleagues and working in European/Polish airspace and regulations. Despite the fact that South Carolina is in the warmer southern part of the USA, they have very similar weather to that in Poland ! Lt Col ‘Abu’ also became keenly aware in Poland that the communication with non-US pilots and non-US ground stations needed good attention. The aviation procedures and language may be standardised within NATO, but care had to be taken to speak clearly and to listen carefully for seamless communications.



*F-16s on the flightline at Łask (photo: Joris van Boven)*



*SC-ANG F-16 taxiing out for a mission (photo: Joris van Boven)*

***Text and photos: Joris van Boven and Patrick Harbers, Sentry Aviation News***

# Défilé Aérien over Paris



Alpha Jets of La Patrouille de France over the Champs-Élysées (photo: S Lafargue/ECPAD)

Every year on 14 July, France's National Military Parade (*défilé*) is held in Paris, to commemorate the beginning of the French Revolution. On 14 July 1789, the Bastille prison was raided by the people of Paris, an event that is regarded as commencement of the French Revolution. Since 1880, a military parade has been held in Paris every year to commemorate that occasion. Troops, tanks and heavy vehicles march down the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, while aircraft and helicopters conduct a flypast overhead in the air parade (*défilé aérien*).

In 2015, theme of the flypast was the liberation of France 70 years ago and the national aerobatic team *La Patrouille de France* opened the show with a formation shaped like the 'Lorraine Cross' (*Croix de Lorraine*), to honour the French Resistance during the Second World War. On this occasion the nine Alpha Jets from the display team were joined by three additional Alpha Jets to form the cross.

Thereafter the 'Free French Air Force' (*Forces Aériennes Françaises Libres*) of WWII was specially honoured by a C-135 tanker trailed by 4 Rafales and 4 Mirage 2000s. Later, a mix of French Air Force (*Armée de l'Air*) and Navy (*Marine Nationale*) aircraft completed the fixed-wing parade. Foreign participants included a Belgian Alpha Jet, a Spanish C-130 and a Spanish CN295. For the first time, an Airbus A340 flew in the parade.

The finale had a number of helicopters from the Army (*Armée de Terre*), Air Force, Navy and the Police (*Gendarmerie Nationale*).

The parade also highlighted ongoing French military operations, namely *Operation Sangaris*, the support operation for the government of the Central African Republic, *Operation Barkhane*, the anti-terror and stabilisation operation in Mali (Africa), and *Operation Chammal*, the operation in Iraq against the Islamic State.

## Base Aérienne 105 Évreux

Various aircraft flew from various airbases, some from their home bases (C-130, A400M, E-3F, C-135F, Navy fighters), some from airbases close to Paris (Évreux



*Mirage 2000C taking off from Evreux (photo: Alex van Noye)*



*Twelve Alpha Jets in 'Lorraine Cross' formation over Paris (photo: SIRPA Air)*



*An EC725 Caracal over Paris (photo: SIRPA Air)*



*A Rafale B departing for Paris (photo: Alex van Noye)*



*Rafale C taxiing out past rows of Mirage 2000s getting ready for flight (photo: Joris van Boven)*

for fighters and transport, Villacoublay for Air Force helicopters, Creil for Army and Navy helicopters).

On morning of the 14th there was a photo-opportunity at Base Aérienne 105 Évreux to witness the flight preparations and launches of most of the fighters that would be taking part in the parade. Participating Rafales, Mirage 2000s and Alpha Jets took off from runway 22 to fly over Paris, while the standby aircraft conducted their flight-preparations but only left BA Evreux once the parade was over. All fighters returned directly to their home bases after the défile aërica.

*Text and photos: Joris van Boven/Sentry Aviation*

*Photos: Alex van Noye/Runway28 unless noted otherwise*



*Mirage 2000Ns prepare for flight as a pair of Rafales take off in full afterburner (photo: Joris van Boven)*