

# VAYU

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## *Aerospace & Defence Review*



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# Frisian Flag and EART 2017



*A German Eurofighter and Dutch F-16 readying to depart Leeuwarden*

At Leeuwarden air base in the Netherlands, the annual *Frisian Flag* exercise was held from 27 March to 7 April 2017. The two weeks saw a mix of air-to-air and air-to-ground air warfare scenarios executed by the participants, which included ten Eurofighters from the German Luftwaffe's 31 TLG at Nörvenich, eight USAF F-15Cs from the 122th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron (with aircraft from the Florida and Louisiana Air National Guard), twelve Dutch F-16s from 312, 313, and 322 Squadrons at Volkel and Leeuwarden, Belgian F-16s from 349 Squadron at Kleine-Brogel, RAF Tornado

*A Louisiana ANG F-15 about to touch down at Leeuwarden*



*Mirage 2000D coming in to land*



GR4s from 31 Squadron at Marham, Portuguese F-16s from the Monte-Real air base, French Mirage 2000Ds from Nancy-Ochey, a single Dutch C-130 acting as a 'slow-mover' to be escorted by the fighters, and a civilian COBHAM Dassault Falcon 20 for electronic warfare training.

Realistic international cooperation is one of the key aims of *Frisian Flag*, as lessons learned from recent Afghanistan and Libya operations have shown. Many international



*A Portuguese F-16 gets airborne for a Frisian Flag mission*

operations are conducted by multinational taskforces, with different aircraft types, with different tactics, doctrines and training-levels, with different command-chains and different air-refueling procedures and certification. Exercises like *Frisian Flag* supply a low-cost opportunity to train for multinational operations.

Each day had two missions, flown by the same aircraft but with different pilots. The missions grew more and more complicated through the course of the exercise, and all participating countries had opportunities to play the role of 'mission commander' for various missions, bringing in their specific national tactics, doctrines and experiences from previous exercises and conflicts.

Preparations for the morning missions commenced the day before and ended with a mass-briefing early in the morning, while the afternoon missions commenced planning early in the morning and ended with a mass-briefing just before take-off. Missions flow included offensive and defensive air-to-air missions and offensive and defensive air-to-ground missions twice a day with some 40-50 aircraft airborne each mission.

The Dutch 322 TACTESS (Tactical Training Evaluation and Standardisation Squadron) has organised the *Frisian Flag* exercise and its predecessors for over 20 years. The main task of 322 TACTESS is to standardise Dutch operational F-16 tactics and doctrines.



*RAF Tornados line up before a mission*

### Tanker training

In parallel with *Frisian Flag* 2017, the multinational refueling training exercise EART 2017 was held at Eindhoven air base in the southern part of the Netherlands. These tankers participated as refuelers for *Frisian Flag* aircraft, giving the participating European forces the ability to train with a variety of a tanker and receiver aircraft. The 2017 edition

saw boom-equipped Dutch KDC-10s, hose-equipped German A310 MRTTs, French KC-135 with boom and hoses, and Italy's modern KC-767, also with boom and hoses, available for the *Frisian Flag* fighters, enhancing future interoperability and broadening expertise for both the fast jet and tanker crews.

*Text and photos:  
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*Tankers at Eindhoven during EART 2017: an Italian KC-767 climbs out as a Dutch KDC-10 taxis on the ground*