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- Exercise BLUE FLAG, Israel
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# FIGHTER WEAPONS INSTRUCTOR TRAINING

REPORT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JORIS VAN BOVEN



The third and final phase of the 'Fighter Weapons Instructor Training' (FWIT) took place from 21 to 31 October 2019 at the Dutch Leeuwarden airbase. In this concluding 'Mission Employment' (ME) phase, all the lessons learned from the previous seven months are put into practice. In spring 2019, this exercise started at Leeuwarden airbase with Dutch, Belgian and Portuguese pilots of the European Participating Air Forces (EPAF) in their F-16s, where the pilots are trained as weapons instructors. The FWIT course is organized by the Dutch 322 TACTESS squadron. The air-to-air components of the FWIT syllabus

were trained before the summer holidays. With the support of German Eurofighters, American F-15s, and American F-35s, the FWIT pilots have practiced various forms of air combat. The Eurofighters and F-15s acted as opponents and the F-35s as supporting aircraft. Even though only F-16 pilots were present in the FWIT, the participation of the F35 in the exercise played - the Royal Netherlands Air Force is transitioning to the F-35 - an important role. The FWIT provides an excellent opportunity to integrate 4th generation combat aircraft such as the F-15 and the F-16 with the latest 5th generation combat

aircraft such as the F-35. The F-35 has many sensors and cameras making this aircraft the "eyes and ears" of a mixed group of combat aircraft.

After the summer holidays, the training focused on air-to-ground warfare with various practice bombs being dropped on the nearby Vliehors range on the island of Vlieland. German Tornados were used to disable enemy air defense systems (Suppression Enemy Air Defense (SEAD)). In the final 'Mission Employment' (ME) phase, the pilots are examined on theoretical and practical knowledge. After having

successfully passed the ME phase, they can proudly wear the much wanted 'Weapons Instructor' badge.

During the ME phase, two Royal Air Force Hawks flew from Leeuwarden airbase in the aggressor role as well as German Eurofighters out of their home base Wittmund in northern Germany.

Five Dutch, three Belgian and two Portuguese pilots participated in the FWIT 2019.

Royal Netherlands Air Force F-16AM *Fighting Falcon* taking-off in rainy weather



### WEAPONS INSTRUCTOR

A 'Fighter Weapons Instructor' is the theoretical and practical knowledge-holder within a squadron. Current weapon instructors have the knowledge to optimally deploy the F-16, in cooperation with other types of fighter aircraft from NATO partners, but also with other weapon systems such as flying radar stations (E-3 AWACS), anti-aircraft systems, ships, flying electronic reconnaissance aircraft (like RC -135 RivetJoint and J-STARS) but also with transport aircraft such as the C-130 Hercules. These weapons instructors are also called the 'Masters of Integration' because they must and can integrate all types of weapon systems into an

effective combat force. Lessons from other exercises and operational deployment in the past such as operations above Libya and Iraq are combined into a large knowledge base. In the operational squadron, the weapon instructor trains young pilots and also coaches experienced pilots in their progression towards leadership and supervision roles.

The FWIT also integrates the 'Transport Weapons Instructor Course' (TWIC) for C-130 Hercules pilots. For a couple of weeks, C-130 Hercules aircraft from the Netherlands and Belgium take part in the FWIT,



flying complex missions together with the F-16s. The slow C-130s are then protected by the fast F-16s, both in the air and on the ground to, for example, deliver soldiers or pick them up again. During this combined phase, a C-130 pilot can also perform the role of mission commander for the entire group of aircraft of the TWIC/FWIT.

Four Dutch and two Belgian future weapons instructors participated in the TWIC.

- Flightline with F-16AM's from the Netherlands, Portugal, and Belgium (top left)
- Portuguese Air Force F-16s parked alongside three Hawk T1A of the Royal Air Force (bottom left)
- Pilots heading to their aircraft for the next training flight (above)
- Two C-130 Hercules used for the 'Transport Weapons Instructor Course' (below)



**EPAF FIGHTER WEAPONS SCHOOL (EPAF)**

EPAF is a collaboration between initially Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, and Denmark; the Portuguese Air Force joined in 2001. The EPAF was set up to jointly deliver F-16 weapon instructors every two years. Over the years, the focus has shifted from a technically oriented weapon instructor for the F-16, to a broadly oriented integrator of various weapon systems who can well transfer knowledge to a varied audience, but who also has the right leadership qualities to be able to make the right choices during complex air operations.



- F-16AM's from Portugal, the Netherlands, and Belgium lining-up for take-off (above)
- Three Hawk T1A's of the Royal Air Force acting as Red Force (left)



▲ Royal Netherlands Air Force F-16AM  
▼ Royal Air Force Hawk T1A



Portuguese Air Force F-16AM ▲  
Belgium Air Force F-16AM ▼

