

# ON EXERCISE

Exercise action from around the world



Specially-marked Polish AF Su-22M-4K 8919 from 8.olt returns to its parking spot at Lechfeld AB after an ELITE 2006 sortie. (Erich Riester)



## ELITE FORCE

**WHAT:** ELITE (Electronic Warfare Live Training Exercise)

**WHERE:** Heuberg training area, Baden-Württemberg, southern Germany

**WHEN:** May 4-18, 2006

**REPORTER:** Andreas Zeitler

Organized by the German Luftwaffe, this two-and-a-half-week exercise aims to develop and test new tactical electronic warfare (EW) procedures in scenarios that come as close to reality as possible.

These are composed of the different weapon systems that all the participants contribute — in contrast to other exercises, the respective nations are invited and are then free to decide on which hardware they are going to add to the scenario. It is then up to the planning staff to combine the participants in the best possible way to achieve the main objectives of ELITE.

Ground-based air defense units from 10 different nations were based on the Heuberg range south of Stuttgart this time. The main part of the flying participation was concentrated at Lechfeld AB, home of the Luftwaffe's JBG-32 wing of Tornado ECRs that specializes in EW. With more than two dozen participating jets from six different nations, the airfield was packed with action, especially during the take-off slots for the daily attacks departing to the Heuberg range.

Besides the ECRs, the Luftwaffe also pro-

top inset: The single-seat Polish 'Fitter' in its element, at low level over the Heuberg range, during the air arm's first visit to ELITE. (Andreas Zeitler)

left: The participation of the two Polish AF Su-22s at ELITE was in preparation for future involvement with F-16s. What the Vipers will add in capability, they will lack in charisma. (Erich Riester)



right: **Luftwaffe C-160D Transall 50+51 fires decoy flares as it attempts to penetrate the defenses of the Heuberg range.** (Andreas Zeitler)

below: **A pair of Royal Netherlands AF CH-47Ds makes a run over Heuberg, which offers valuable ECM training for helicopter crews.** (Andreas Zeitler)

below right: **The main Luftwaffe air defense assets involved in ELITE were once again the venerable F-4F Phantom IIs.** (Andreas Zeitler)

bottom: **A close-up view of Turkish AF F-4E 73-1039 taxiing in at Lechfeld.** (Greg L. Davis)



vided recce Tornados from AG-51, while the Hellenic AF and Turkish AF brought HARM-capable F-16s. The Turks also sent F-4E 2020 Phantoms to Lechfeld for the air superiority role. Royal Air Force Tornado GR4s of No IX(B) Squadron were used to carry ALARM missiles in the SEAD role, while the Spanish AF EF-18A+ Hornets likewise took part with their HARMs. It was the first ELITE appearance for the Spaniards with their Hornets, and 2006 was also the debut of the Polish AF, which deployed with Su-22M-4 and two-seat Su-22UM-3K 'Fitters' in preparation for future participation with its recently-acquired F-16Cs.

Whereas most of the 150 daily sorties were flown out of Lechfeld, Manching AB, located further to the north-east, was the home base of Swiss and Finnish AF F/A-18 Hornets, ECM jamming Learjets of Phoenix Air and FR Aviation Falcon 20s. Helicopters

were based closer to the range at the Heeresflieger airfield at Laupheim, while the transport aircraft were located at Penzing.

After the familiarization phase, the mission briefings amongst the dislocated participants were held using video conferences. After this, the respective time slots of 20-40 minutes in the target area were allocated depending on the complexity of the desired scenario. This could be just a small number of helicopters against mobile SAM missiles, ECR Tornados against SA-6, SA-8 or Patriot radar systems, or a complex COMAO (combined air operation) involving jets, helicopters and transport aircraft.

In an exclusive interview with *Combat Aircraft*, ELITE project officer Lt Col Wolters pointed out recent improvements. This year, a data link between the participants was established and online monitoring of the missions facilitated fast and effective debriefings. Another advantage is the fact that the actual aerial situation around the area is clear to every participant on the ground at any time. With respect to the ground and airspace restrictions at and around the Heuberg range, Lt Col Wolters pointed out another new feature tested in 2006 during ELITE. VIRTEL (Virtual ELITE) enables the integration of virtual enemies into the real exercise. Using this, real approaching aircraft can for example be attacked by a virtual frigate that is placed at a position in the exercise area where only a small lake is located in reality.

According to Wolters, ELITE in its current form is fully-grown and VIRTEL will help in providing even more complex training scenarios for the participants. Thus, ground and airspace must be continuously optimized in order to ensure the exercise's success in the long term, enabling the crews to oppose ever more complex electronic threats in the future.



above: **Turkish AF F-4E 73-1023 from 1 AJÜ gets airborne for one of the air superiority missions that formed part of ELITE's scenarios.** (Greg L. Davis)

below: **Not just a home nation participant at ELITE 2006, but also home-based — Tornado ECR 46+31 of JBG-32 taxis from its HAS at Lechfeld, the main fast jet operating base for the exercise.**

(Greg L. Davis)

