

Air Policing in 2009 – Review of a busy year

As 2009 draws to a close, the opportunity is afforded to us to look back upon the Air Policing mission, to reflect on our collective experiences and to thank all the personnel who worked to make Air Policing the tremendous success that it is. It is also a time to look ahead to the future and to make plans and establish goals.

Air Policing is one of the most dynamic and challenging tasks of the Alliance. Even with that challenge, this past year was a marked success for the northern air region. This simple statement must be put in context, as a huge amount of teamwork is involved in the scrambling of fighter aircraft into the sky to guard NATO's airspace.

It is about the enormous, concerted, and effective effort that airmen at all levels put into each mission, ranging from those running the isolated sensor posts or maintaining the runways and the fighters ready at any moment, right through to those working in the CRCs as controllers or surveillance personnel and finally to the pilots in the Quick Reaction Alert sheds.

Not to forget all the men and women at CAOC level and above that have to make the right decisions at the right time. This 'collective' makes it possi-

ble to maintain the smooth running Air Policing standard throughout the entire Air-COM Ramstein Area of Functional Responsibility and allows assigned fighter aircraft to respond promptly and professionally to varying air scenarios.

Air Policing is a fluid and dynamic process and during 2009 new documents relating to the NATO Air Policing mission were introduced. In addition, NATO organised effective multinational exercises, both live and simulated, in order to maintain the skills and improve the proficiency of all the involved parties.

The Baltic Region Training Event (BRTE) serial has continued to develop. The programme is welcomed by both the Baltic countries and the participating nations. It is a good framework to exercise and train both ground- and aircrews. At the same time, this serial is a clear and visible demonstration of Alliance cohesion and solidarity in the skies above the Baltic States. This year Danish, Czech, and German fighter aircraft deployed to Šiauliai, Lithuania, in support of guarding the airspace of the Baltic region. The Czech Gripen and the Ger-

man Eurofighter jets marked the debut of fourth generation aircraft in this part of NATO's airspace.

At the northwestern end of NATO's European airspace, Iceland hosted fighter aircraft from the Danish, Norwegian, and the United States Air Forces, allowing them to train and exercise in the airspace surrounding the island as well as fulfilling the NATO Air Policing task there.

As we approach 2010, France is already preparing to take over the Air Policing mission over the Baltic States. It will be the second time that the Mirage 2000 aircraft will fly there since the North Atlantic Council approved the Baltic Air Policing mission in 2004. They will be followed by fighters from Poland and the United States. The first 2010 Air Policing detachment deployed to Iceland will be Danish. The intention is for Germany and the United States to take over the remaining open slots at Keflavik Air Base later in the year.

Air Policing remains a cornerstone of the Alliance's collective defense and solidarity. 2009 has clearly demonstrated this and NATO will continue to show the cohesion and commitment by employing its assigned Air Policing forces effectively to maintain a safe and secure airspace.

NOTAM: During the night of 24th December increased air activity is to be expected, emanating from the cold northern part of the AOR. Ho, ho, ho...



German Eurofighter taxiing at Šiauliai Air Base



German QRA during takeoff



Photos by Johann Ostholthoff, Luftwaffe

