

Blue Wings 2020

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During their stay at Nörvenich, the Israeli Air Force F-16s used the boxes that can be clearly seen from outside the fence. Seen here are two F-16Cs and two F-16Ds adjacent to the recognizable emblem of Taktisches Luftwaffen Geschwader 31 (TLG31) "Boelcke" based at Nörvenich. Bram Marijnissen was there on 27 August 2020 to take this picture before the F-16s took part in another mission.

Participants

From 17 to 28 August exercise Blue Wings 2020 took place at Nörvenich Air Base in the west of Germany. Nörvenich is home of the Taktisches Luftwaffengeschwader 31 "Boelcke" (TLG31) with their EF2000 Typhoons. Next to these Typhoons the Israeli Air Force participated with three F-16C-40-CF Barak from 101 "The First Fighter" squadron and three F-16D-40-CF Barak from 105 "The Scorpion" Squadron which are based at Hatzor. Also one special-missions Gulfstream 550 Nachshon Aitam from 122 squadron based at Nevatim participated. In the second week also two KC-707s Re'em from 120 squadron based at Nevatim flew missions from Nörvenich. Many flights for personnel and equipment were conducted by KC-130Hs Kamaf from 131 squadron and C-130J-30s Shimshon from 103 squadron which both are based at Nevatim. Next to these aircraft the Israeli brought 180 airmen.

History

The exercise was officially launched on 18 August with a mixed formation flyby over two places of historic significance in the German-Israeli relationship: the former concentration camp Dachau and former airbase Fürstfeldbruck. In the years 1933 until 1945 around 206.000 people from 30 different countries were detained in concentration camp Dachau. At least 41.500 people were killed and among them were many Jews. Fürstfeldbruck is known from the more recent history: On the early morning of 5 September during the 1972 Summer Olympics at Munich a group of Palestinian terrorists stormed the Olympic Village apartment of the Israeli athletes, killing two and taking nine others hostage. The terrorists were part of a group known as Black September. In return for the release of the hostages they demanded that Israel released over 230 Arab prisoners (being held in Israeli jails) and two German terrorists. In an ensuing shoot out at Fürstfeldbruck the nine Israeli hostages were killed along with five terrorists and one West German policeman. This event is known as the Munich Massacre.

Commemorative fly by and ceremony

The formation consisted of two German Typhoons, two Israeli F-16s and one Israeli Gulfstream 550. On board the Gulfstream were the Commanding Officers of the German and Israeli Air Forces. The Israeli crews also took symbolic items on board

like poetry books from a Dachau survivor who is the grandfather of the deputy commander of 109 Squadron, a ring from a holocaust survivor who was the commander of 105 Squadron, but was killed in battle and flags of the state of Israel, the Israeli Air Force and the Olympics committee. General Major Norkin of the Israeli Air Force received those flags from the relatives of the killed athletes prior to his visit to Germany. After this overflight there was a special ceremony at Dachau joined by the German Minister of Defence, Israeli ambassador to Germany and both commanding officers of the German and Israeli Air Force. General Major Norkin of the Israeli Air Force said: "Standing here I raise my hand and look towards the future. This future encompassed Germany. We are training and learning, friend from friend, force from force and military from military. Even amid a global pandemic we chose to carry out this joint training exercise. This cooperation is powerful and meaningful, especially during these challenging days."



Exercise

Due to the global pandemic this was the only exercise for the Israeli Air Force outside Israel during 2020. The first week of the exercise was used for training and familiarisation flights. The second week was for the German led exercise Multinational Air Group Days (MAGDays). During the MAGDays missions were flown above the North Sea and also an Israeli Boeing 707 took part in these missions. At Schleswig-Jägel there were four Hungarian Air Force Grippens which also participated in the exercise. Next to these there were other European countries taking part but they flew from their homebases.

Preparations

On 5 August a message appeared on the Scramble message board quoting that the Israeli Air Force is participating in an exercise in Germany but it was unknown which types participated and which base was to host this exercise. A day later two Israeli C-130J-30s were underway for bringing the first equipment and personnel to Nörvenich and also the news came out that the exercise involved F-16s, Boeing 707s and a Gulfstream. The two Hercs departed the same day and it was quiet for almost a week when an "old" KC-130H arrived on the 12th and departed a day later when a C-130J-30 arrived. Unfortunately this was one of the two that arrived on the 6th.

Warm welcome

Monday the 17th was the day of the arrival of the F-16s, Boeing 707s and Gulfstreams. German Air Force Typhoons flew to the German border to welcome and escort the Israeli Air Force planes towards Nörvenich. Commanding Officer of the German Air Force Lt. General Gerhartz was flying a Typhoon and welcomed the Israeli delegation, and especially Commanding Officer of the Israeli Air Force General Major Amikam Norkin, in German Airspace as he flew side by side to the Gulfstream V "Nachshon Shavit" and spoke these historic words over the radio: "On behalf of the German Air Force it is an honour to welcome the Israeli Air Force entering German airspace for the first time in history! My Israeli friends, Amikam, now we are flying side by side".

Arrivals and departures

At that time there was a flight of two German Air Force Typhoons with three Israeli Air Force F-16s and a flight of two German Air Force Typhoons with the Israeli Air Force Gulfstream V overhead the base. That afternoon six F-16s, two Boeing 707s, one Gulfstream 550 and the Gulfstream V

landed. The F-16s used callsigns Atomi 1-6 while the Boeing 707s were flying with Giant 1-3. Giant 2 refuelled the F-16s in the beginning and returned home while Giant 1 and 3 flew all the way to Nörvenich. The Israeli Air Force F-16s did not have permission to overfly Austria or Switzerland so they had to fly via France. Both Boeing 707s departed home the same day. The Gulfstream V departed home on the 19th, a day after the flypast, while the Gulfstream 550 stayed the whole exercise and departed on the 28th.

On Sunday 23 August another C-130J-30 flight came in but unfortunately this particular aircraft was also there on the 6th. On Monday the 24th two Boeing 707s came in including one other than the two that arrived on the 17th. The Gulfstream V came back one more time on the 25th and departed home a day later. On the 27th another two C-130s arrived, one KC-130H and one C-130J-30, both had not visited Nörvenich earlier. While all Israeli aircraft had departed on Friday the 28th, the support flights arrived on the last day of August. These three transports, two KC-130s and one C-130J-30 departed on the 1st of September. The same three C-130s had visited Nörvenich earlier this exercise. In total seventeen different Israeli Air Force aircraft could be seen. Below is an overview of which aircraft visited Nörvenich on which days.

Serial overview

427	KC-130H	(27+28)
522	KC-130H	(17+31-01)
545	KC-130H	(12-13+31-01)
662	C-130J-30	(6+13)
663	C-130J-30	(6+23+31)
667	C-130J-30	(27)
260	KC-707	(17)
272	KC-707	(24-28)
275	KC-707	(17+24-28)
569	G550	(17-28)
679	G-V	(17-19) + (25+26)
531	F-16C	(17-28)
534	F-16C	(17-28)
536	F-16C	(17-28)
628	F-16D	(17-28)
676	F-16D	(17-28)
682	F-16D	(17-28)

This exercise was quite unique because it was the first time that the German and Israeli Air Force worked together in an exercise on German soil. Earlier, the German Air Force had been to Israel twice to take part in exercise Blue Flag. Hopefully these exercises will take place more often in the near future.



F-16C-40-CF 536 from 101 "The First Fighter" squadron is taxiing towards runway 25 for another mission out of Nörvenich. Above the canopy, the flags from the participating countries Israel and Germany are visible. Nörvenich is a great place for photographers and during the exercise many have been there. Rene Slegers was one of them on 20 August 2020.