

# History of Tactical Leadership Programme (TLP)



In January 1978, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Netherlands, United Kingdom and the United States founded the Tactical Leadership Programme (TLP) which was located at Furstenfeldbruck airbase which is in the south of Germany. The courses began as a two week academic and doctrine course only in which experienced crews presented, debated, evaluated and formulated tactics, techniques and procedures with each other. In September 1979, the TLP moved to Jever airbase which is in the north of Germany. Next to the academic and doctrine courses also a flying course was added, extending the total course from two till four weeks. The TLP was held for 10 years at Jever and during these years a total of 71 flight courses were conducted, graduating about 2,000 pilots and crew members!

In March 1989, the TLP moved to Florennes airbase, Belgium and the course was restructured into three groups; Flying branch, Academic branch and Support branch. A liaison officer from the French Air Force joined the TLP staff and also France began to participate in the courses,

followed by Denmark and Italy in 1996. Due to the fall of the Berlin wall Canada withdrew its forces in Germany and they left the programme but retained a liaison officer and continued to participate in the courses. The TLP





fourth plus and now with the fifth generation aircraft.

## Explanation of Tactical Leadership Programme (TLP)

The mission of the Tactical Leadership Programme is to increase the effectiveness of allied tactical air forces through the development of leadership skills, mission planning, briefing, tactical flying and debriefing skills and conceptual and doctrinal initiatives. The TLP trains young students which can go to larger exercises after their graduation with the TLP. At the moment the TLP Commander is Colonel Cesar Acebes from the Spanish Air Force, also the TLP warrant officer, Finance officer and the Secretary are all from the

needed a training area that would be representative of possible future conflict scenarios and due to limited weather conditions as well as the very busy airspace with commercial flights and also the prohibition of night flight courses the TLP was searching for a better place to develop their tactical skills. The solution for all this problems was found at Albacete airbase in Spain. In the 20 years that the TLP was at Florennes a total of 107 flight courses were conducted, graduating 2,978 pilots and crewmembers.

In 2009, a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed, this MoU positioned the TLP outside of the NATO structure. Till 2009 France and Greece only had liaison officers within the TLP but they also signed the MoU, so a total of ten nations signed the MoU; Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom and the United States. On 1 October 2009, the inauguration of the programme took place at Albacete airbase, followed by the start of the first academic year only a few days later.

The first flying course began in November 2009. In the 15 years that the TLP is at Albacete a total of 34 flight courses and 130 academic courses were conducted, graduating around 5,000 pilots and crewmembers.

With its history of more than 45 years the Tactical Leadership Programme is one of the most prestigious and long standing training programmes of the European military aviation. Literally thousands of European and American pilots from most of the European and North American countries have participated with almost four technological generation aircraft, third, fourth, the so-called

Spanish Air Force. The French Air Force is responsible for the flying branch which contains operations, maintenance, air to surface, air to air and opfor. The German Air Force is responsible for the Academic branch which contains academics and doctrine, intelligence and synthetics. The Spanish Air Force is also responsible for the Support branch which contains administration, sofa, supply, IT and graphics.

In the Flying branch are two TLP courses: Composite Air Operations (COMAO) and Rescue Mission Commander (RMC). The COMAO course runs three till four times a year and has a duration of three weeks. During this course a total of twelve missions will be flown, nine live and three missions in the simulator. The RMC course is at the moment temporarily on evaluation. This course has a duration of two weeks in which seven live missions will be flown.





**Combat Employment:** Capability to generate combat power and cross maintenance activities. **Advanced synthetic training:** This is the most transformational pillar due to development of MACE simulator capabilities in which at the moment three missions are executed during the flying course and five missions during the COMAO Synthetic course. **Contested and Degraded Operations:** Complex orders of battle supported by a synthetic environment (MACE) and proper opposing forces needed. **Multi-domain Operations:** Ground, naval and special operations forces exploring integrating cyber and

In the Academic branch are three TLP courses: COMAO Synthetic, Intel and Support. The COMAO Synthetic course runs three times a year and has a duration of two weeks. During this course there are five missions in the MACE Simulator. The Intel course runs two or three times a year and has a duration of two weeks. During this course they train to support COMAO missions and have practical exercises in the simulator. The Support course runs two or three times a year and has a duration of two weeks. The main goal is the introduction to COMAO operations.

The Tactical Leadership Programme has five pillars. **Modern fighter integration:** At the moment there is a transition to the new generation platform, which was certified by the United States Air Force in 2019, and modern weapons system instructors are requested. **Agile**

space domains in all the TLP courses.

The Tactical Leadership Programme has three main areas at Albacete airbase; Headquarters with hangar, ramp and hotel. The headquarter and hangar are near the ramp where the aircraft and helicopters for the flying course are. The TLP hangar is a modern hangar with six maintenance posts and the ramp has 32 parking slots. The hotel has a total of 450 rooms which can only accommodate half of all the TLP staff. The other half is staying in hotels in Albacete city which is also very good for the local community. The TLP also needs services and support from the airbase itself like Operations, Air Traffic Control (ATC), fire-fighting, fuel, medical services and security.

The main reason, despite the weather, to move the TLP from Florennes, Belgium to Albacete, Spain was the airspace availability. The airspace available for the TLP is at the moment 95 by 150 nautical miles large and contains for half above land and half above sea. In this airspace low level as well as supersonic flights are allowed. This airspace is larger than the airspace of the large exercise Red Flag in the United States of America. All points mentioned make this airspace for the TLP unique in Europe!



## Future strategic guidelines of Tactical Leadership Programme (TLP)

At the moment ten countries signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) but Portugal will be the eleventh country as of 1 January 2025. Other countries, like Czechia,



Finland, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden, also showed their interest in the TLP courses so it is possible that in the future more countries will sign the MoU. In the MoU is also stated that if there is enough interest the flying courses can be increased from four to six courses a year. At the moment there is two to three times more demand for all courses than what we can offer. More participants in the flying courses means more aircraft, more parking slots and more airspace availability but all those things are possible but it is up to the countries itself.

Other strategic guidelines are: Develop the five pillars: Integrate modern air combat aircrafts, promote ACE concept, enhance LVC capabilities, integrate contested and degraded operations and address multi-domain operations. Integrate new technologies: Faster innovation in the programme, evaluate new alternatives for OPFOR elements and improve existing TLP tools. Build-up a solid engagement plan: NATO as a priority, enhance other interactions (JAPCC, EAG and EPRC) and explore new opportunities with the Spanish Air Force. Adapt infrastructures to new operational requirements: Allow operations of new generation aircraft, MACE and future technological developments and improve lodging and other TLP facilities. Promote TLP image: Presence in relevant events and initiatives in the local community.

The TLP vision for the future is that the TLP will be the NATO standard for modern fighter integration by providing the highest end training programme, live and virtual, the optimal fighting airspace for its courses and the most challenging contested and degraded scenarios in Europe!

## TLP Flying Course (FC) 2024-04

The fourth flying course of 2024 (FC 24-04) started on 11 November 2024 and lasted till 29 November 2024. During this course Blue (Participants) took part with 22 and Red (Opponents) took part with 10 aircraft. There were 7 air support assets and various Surface Based Air Defenses (SBAD) like Spanish Mistral, Malline, SA-8, SA-11 and SA-17, German Roland, French Arpege, SA-15 and SA-17

and the United States TRTG, MALTS, LCTE, SA-8, ZSU-23, SA-17 and SA-14. During this course the briefing meteo, scenario and mission started at 10.00 with an estimated take off time at 15.00 and the latest landing at 18.00, all local time. After the mission the debriefing needs to be planned and executed. The last part of the day is which lessons were identified or learned? After this the day ends around 22.00 local time. It was the first time that Italian Air Force participated with the F-35 and the Hellenic Air Force participated with the Rafale during a TLP. The participants during Flying Course 2024-04 were:

### Blue (Participants) 22:

France: 2x Mirage 2000D from EC.01.003

Germany: 8x EF-2000 from TLG31 and 2x Tornado IDS from TLG33

Greece: 2x Rafale from 332 MPK

Italy: 2x F-35 from 32 Stormo and 2x EF-2000 from 36 Stormo

United Kingdom: 4x EF-2000 from 29 Squadron

### Red (Opponents) 10:

Germany: 2x EF-2000 from TLG73

Greece: 2x Rafale from 332 MPK

Italy: 2x EF-2000 from 51 Stormo

France: 2x Mirage 2000D from EC.01.003

United Kingdom: 2x EF-2000 from 29 Squadron

### Air support assets (7):

France: 1x EC-725 from EH.01.067

Germany: 1x Learjet 35A Jam kite

Italy: 2x HH-101 from 15 Stormo

Spain: 1x Casa 295 from Ala 35 and 1x MQ-9A

NATO: 1x E-3 AWACS



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