

OCEAN SKY 2025

ARTICLE BY BRAM MARIJNISSEN AND
RENE SLEEGERS - LOWPASSAVIATION.COM
PHOTOS BY RENE SLEEGERS UNLESS NOTED



Multiple reasons to travel to Gran Canaria captured in one picture, Spanish Hornets, Indian Su-30s and the lovely background



Exercise OCEAN SKY 2025 took place from 15 to 31 October at Gando Air Base, which is at Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, Spain. Gando is home to the Spanish Air Force Ala 46,

OCEAN SKY is one of Europe's most advanced multinational air combat and air mobility cooperation events and an Invitation to an Exercise (INVTEX), which takes place every two years.

Its purpose is to train in air to air missions, creating a highly demanding operational environment and contributing to the promotion of operational readiness, combat capability, and cooperation of the participants in a multilateral and allied context.

The missions included:

- ❑ Offensive Counter Air (OCA)
- ❑ Defensive Counter Air (DCA)
- ❑ High Value Airborne Asset Attack/Protect (HVAA Attack/Protect)
- ❑ Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR)

The air defense of the Canary archipelago, like that of the rest of Spanish territory, is the responsibility of

NATO with national means placed at its disposal.

The OCEAN SKY exercise increases the level of preparation for air to air combat of fighter units and contributes to improving the security and defense of Spanish airspace. As in previous years, OCEAN SKY 2025 was a success and contributed to strengthening the military capacity of Spain and its international allies. The stable weather and low air traffic density uniquely enabled complex large force scenarios and engagements between large and combined air forces.

EXERCISE AREA AND SCENARIO

Exercise OCEAN SKY operated in the airspace south of Lanzarote, providing a realistic setting from 2,000 feet to unlimited altitude for unrestricted training.

A fictional geopolitical scenario divided the region into three countries:

- ❑ Bluceronia – friendly democratic nation
- ❑ Feroxia – aggressive single party regime
- ❑ Neutinex – neutral state aligned with Feroxia

The scenario was driven by escalating tensions over a contested mining deposit and oil basin stretching

across the borders of Bluceronia and Feroxia.

Due to the first ever participation of the Indian Air Force with its Russian built Sukhoi Su 30, OCEAN SKY 2025 marked a historic milestone. India is the first non NATO nation to take part in the exercise and served as the most tactical highlight of the event.

The Spanish Air Force deployed several specialized command and support units to OCEAN SKY, each providing a critical function within the national and NATO air defense architecture. GRUALERCON and GRUCEMAC form the core of Spain's air surveillance and command and control network, delivering real time air picture management and tactical fighter control, while GRUNOMAC provides regional C2 coverage in the northern sector. EADA and SEADA supply expeditionary air base support and force protection elements, enabling secure operations at deployed locations. GRUMOCA contributes mobile radar and deployable air control capabilities, and CIGES adds electronic warfare training and threat simulation expertise. The Guardia Real complements these forces with security and ceremonial support. Together, these units create a fully integrated operational framework that underpins the complexity and realism of Exercise OCEAN SKY.

OCEAN SKY 2025 – PARTICIPANTS

Country	Unit	Aircraft	Base
Spain	Ala 11	EF-2000	Moron
Spain	Ala 12	EF-18	Torrejon
Spain	Ala 14	EF-2000	Albacete
Spain	Ala 15	EF-18	Zaragoza
Spain	Ala 46	F/A-18+	Gando
Germany	TaktLwG 74	EF-2000	Neuburg
Greece	347 Mira	F-16	Nea Anchialos
Portugal	201 Sqn	F-16	Monte Real
USA	48 FW/492 FS	F-15E	Lakenheath
India	24 Sqn/15 Wing	Su-30	Bareilly





A Hellenic Air Force F-16C *Fighting Falcon* taxis past a U.S. Air Force F-15E *Strike Eagle*
U.S. Air Force/Staff Sgt. Elizabeth Davis



Main: U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Ziarra Williams, 492nd Fighter Generation Squadron crew chief, prepares a U.S. Air Force F-15E Strike Eagle for takeoff *U.S. Air Force/Staff Sgt. Elizabeth Davis*
Inset: U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Edward Hendricks, 492nd Fighter Generation Squadron crew chief, marshals a U.S. Air Force F-15E Strike Eagle for takeoff *U.S. Air Force/Staff Sgt. Elizabeth Davis*





Main: Departing with full afterburner from O3R for another mission
Inset: Returning from a mission and braking above the base are four F-15E *Strike Eagles*



Top: F-15E 91-0312 with special tail for 48 Operations Group
Above: F-15E 97-0221 with special tail for 492 Fighter Squadron



Left: When aircraft are low enough you have the village Carrizal in the background
Right: And a little bit further in the landing you have nice mountains in the background
Above: Landing with speed brake fully deployed







Main: Indian Su-30 on the taxiway waiting for ATC clearance to enter the runway to line-up for takeoff
Inset: The afterburner of the Su-30s has blue flames



Left: Indian Su-30 heavily banking above the base
Top right: Indian Su-30 landing in the sun with a cloudy background
Bottom right: During landing the Su-30s use their speed brake on the back of the aircraft



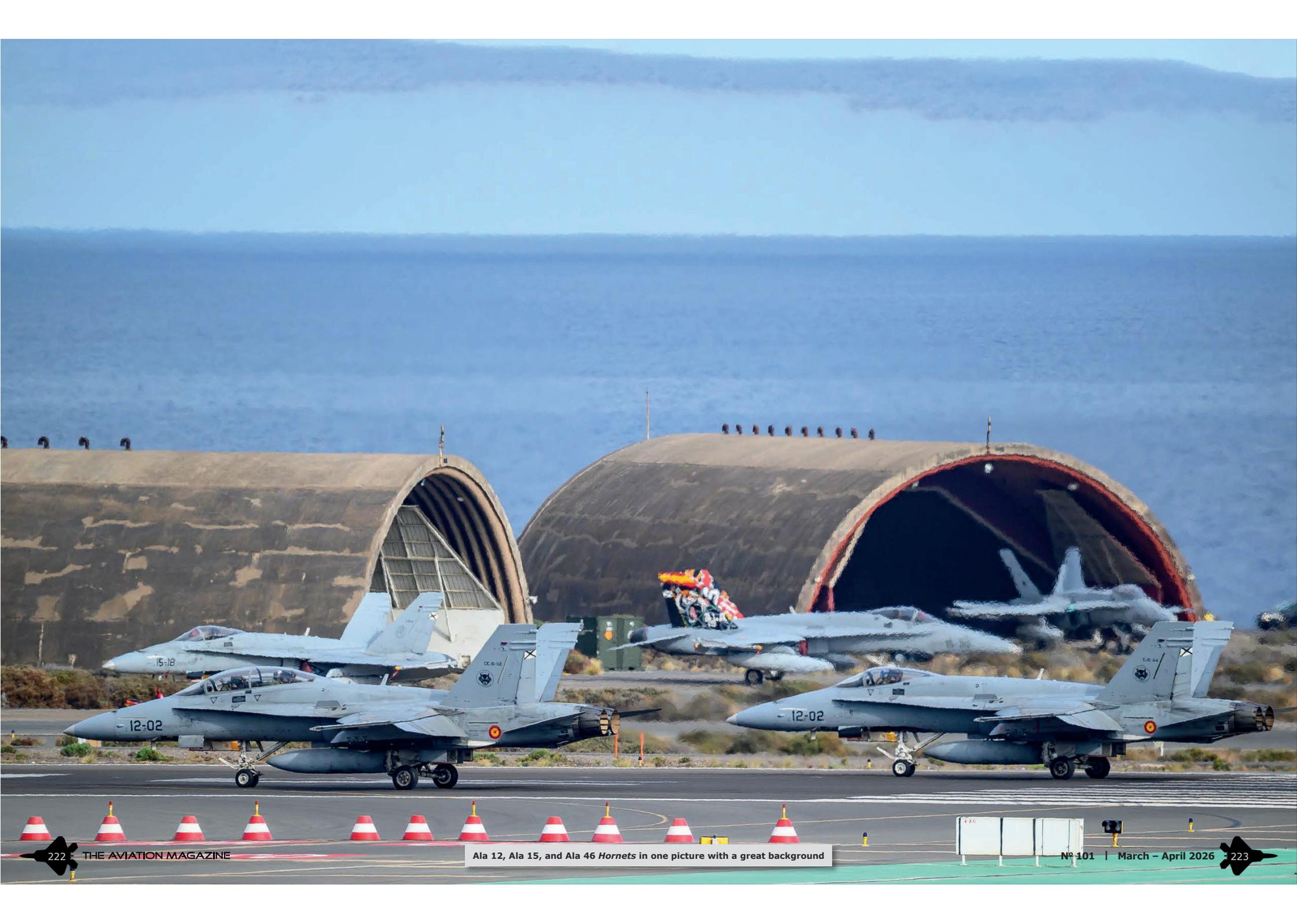


Main: Three Ala14 EF-2000 *Typhoons* lining up before their departure
Left: Ala11 based at Moron participated with four EF-2000 *Typhoons*
Right: Ala 14 based at Albacete participated with six EF-2000 *Typhoons*





Left: TaktLwG 74 based at Neuburg participated with six EF-2000 *Typhoons*
Right: Returning after a mission is this German EF-2000
Above: Special color scheme for the NATO Tiger Meet 2025



HISTORY OF ALA 46

Ala 46 was established on 9 January 1928 in the Sahara as the 1st Spanish Military Squadron, deployed between Cape Juby and Villa Cisneros. This unit was reorganized and renamed the 1st Desert Squadron in 1935. The first detachment of Spanish military aviation arrived in Gando on 3 February 1939, becoming the Atlantic Forces on 1 September 1939. It was the first official representation of the Air Force in the Canary Islands.

In the early 1940s, it was renamed the 11th Squadron. As a result of a new organization of the Air Force, the 112th Group was integrated together with the 54th Hydro Squadron based at Las Palmas on 17 October 1940.

On 30 May 1941 this unit formed, together with the 29th Expeditionary Hunting Group, Mixed Regiment No. 4, the origin of the current 46th Wing. This Mixed Regiment No. 4 operated Fiat CR.32s, Junkers 52s, and Dornier Walf flying boats. The 462nd Squadron was founded and operated the Fiat CR.32.

The Ifni Sahara War, which lasted from 1957 to 1975, was the scene of action where the 462nd Squadron wrote the most glorious pages of its history. Various units were deployed by the Air Force in the Sahara; those units lived an intense period of constant surveillance and patrol missions over the desert territory.

In 1975, the 464th Squadron was activated to provide combat aircraft with operational capabilities in the Canary Islands. In 1982, the 462nd and 464th Squadrons were merged into 462nd Squadron, coinciding with the arrival of Mirage F1 fighter aircraft. In 1999, the Mirage F1s were replaced by F/A 18 Hornet aircraft, which are still operational but not for much longer but unfortunately not for long anymore. The F/A 18 is in the twilight of its his career within the Spanish Air Force.

Escuadrón 462 Halcones is the only unit in the Air Force still flying the 'Legacy' Hornet. Operations with

the type are steadily winding down, with most of the squadron's aircraft already taken out of active service and sent to retirement.

The Hornets of ESC462 are being replaced by the much more modern EF 2000 Eurofighter, in Spain better known as the "Tifón." Many of the squadron's personnel are currently undergoing education and training at the EF 2000 conversion unit in Morón for the transition to the Eurofighter. It is expected that the first EF 2000s for the squadron will soon arrive at Gando Air Base, with the first flying operations starting in early 2026. The unit's last F/A 18s will be retired from active service in early to mid 2027.

Next to 462nd Squadron, Ala 46 also consists of 802nd Squadron, operating CN 235 maritime patrol aircraft and H215 helicopters for Search and Rescue (SAR) missions.

A contract was recently signed with Airbus in Seville for the delivery of eight new C 295 SAR aircraft for the Spanish Air Force. The first of these new aircraft completed its first flight in November 2025 and is expected to be delivered to Escuadrón 802 at Gando Air Base, which will be the first squadron within the Spanish Air Force to receive the new aircraft. They will replace the old CN 235 SAR aircraft that the unit has operated since 2008, which are in urgent need of replacement. Escuadrón 802 will receive three to four of the new aircraft.

Today Gando Air Base and the 46th Wing constitute the first means of air defense and logistical support in the Canary Islands, maintaining close collaboration in joint operations and exercises with units of the Army and the Navy. ✈️



Top: Landing at its homebase with the sea in the background
Above: The Ala 46 F/A-18s are ex-United States Navy aircraft



46-14

C15-86

The days for the ageing Ala 46 F/A-18s are counted and it will not last long before the first Ala 46 EF-2000 *Typhoons* will be delivered





Main: Wearing its new code, matching with the serial on the tail is this EF-18B from Ala 12
Inset: Ala 12 participated with two EF-18B double-seat aircraft



During landing, high lift coefficients on the wings and extended flaps generate localized pressure drops, causing the humid ambient air to condense into visible vapor trails. These white aerodynamic condensation clouds form under high-load, high-humidity conditions and dissipate immediately as pressure normalizes





Top: Ala 15 EF-18 Hornet with a small trail during its landing
Above: Ala 15 EF-18 Hornet landing with a nice background



What a beautiful sight of Spanish Hornets



EUROPEAN AIR REFUELING TRAINING

Running in conjunction with OCEAN SKY was the European Air Refueling Training (EART) exercise.

EART 2025 took place from 15 to 31 October at Lanzarote Air Base, Canary Islands, Spain. Lanzarote does not have permanently based military aircraft; it is used by Air Force troops and an air defense radar covering the eastern Canary Islands and maritime area up to the Sahara.

The exercise underscores interoperability among

global tanker and fighter aircraft communities. The multinational exercise allows the practice and refinement of advanced air to air refueling tactics, techniques, and procedures within a dynamic training environment. By introducing a Combined Air Terminal Operation (CATO) at Lanzarote Air Base, logistics were optimized, maximizing throughput and coordination among participating countries. During the exercise, more than 600 tons of kerosene were planned for offload during 58 sorties, simulating NATO standard tactics and complex refueling scenarios relevant for modern coalition warfare.

Each fighter aircraft must be certified to receive fuel from specific tanker types; not every fighter can refuel from every tanker due to compatibility and safety requirements. The Spanish EF 2000s can receive fuel from the Italian Boeing 767, but the German EF 2000s cannot because they are not certified for that tanker.

The main goal of the European Air Transport Command (EATC) is to achieve full certification and clearance across all partner nations and their tankers to enhance interoperability among allied forces.

CONCLUSION

OCEAN SKY and EART 2025 demonstrated the importance of interoperable, coalition based training and future ready mobility, tankers, and transport capabilities for evolving European and allied air combat operations.

The authors would like to thank all involved personnel of the Spanish Air Force for their hospitality, time, and support during the visit to Exercise OCEAN SKY at Gando Airbase. ✈️

A Royal Netherlands Air Force A-330MRTT assigned to the European Air Transport Command's Multinational Multi-Role Tanker Transport Unit (MMU) participated in exercise EUROPEAN AIR REFUELING TRAINING (EART), which ran simultaneously with OCEAN SKY



EUROPEAN AIR REFUELING TRAINING PARTICIPANTS			
Country	Unit	Aircraft	Homebase
Spain	Ala 31	A-400M	Zaragoza
Italy	14 Stormo	KC-767A	Pratica di Mare
France	ERVTS01.031	A-330MRTT	Istres
Netherlands	MMU	A-330MRTT	Eindhoven

Overhead is MMU A-330MRTT with two Greek F-16s returning after a mission









Inset: Also based at Gando is 802ESC operating three H-215 helicopters
Main: The Salvamento Maritimo participated with this CN-235