

**Carlow GP Dr Declan Woods has had a lifelong interest in military aviation and photography. He has travelled the world to both capture the images and see at first hand the enormous technological advances behind these extraordinary aircraft. The Mullingar native has run a medical practice in Carlow since 1980. His surgery is located at Shamrock Plaza, Carlow and he lives in Oak Park.**

**In this article, Dr Woods takes a look at the US Air Force's tactics in the Vietnam War and recent NATO manoeuvres in Turkey**

# Turkish delight as Eagle flies high

LOCATED at the Turkish Air Force's third main jet base in Konya, central Turkey, the Anatolian Eagle Training Centre (AETC) organises and hosts the Anadolu Kartali (Anatolian Eagle) series of live exercises for fighter pilots from many countries.

The AETC includes a dedicated ramp and purpose-built facilities for planning, briefing, command and control and the various other functions associated with the exercises. Anatolian Eagle has become the premier training exercise of the Turkish Air Force. Because of the numbers of aircraft involved, the diversity of international participants and access to 120,000 square kilometres of unrestricted air space, it has gained a reputation as one of the world's leading fighter aircraft training events. Outside North America, it would certainly appear to be the leading exercise of its kind.

## ORIGINS

Despite a history of overwhelming success in World War II and the Korean War, US fighter pilots in the early years of the Vietnam War found themselves losing the battle for

control of the skies over the north of that country. US Navy pilots had recorded success rates of 15:1 against the Japanese in the Pacific and their Air Force counterparts had recorded rates of 7.5:1 flying F-86 Sabre jets against Communist Mig 15s of similar capability.

By comparison, America's tactical performance over North Vietnam was abysmal, at times sinking to 1:1 in certain engagements during 1968. This was more remarkable when one considers the expense and sophistication of the aircraft, weapons and pilot training on the US side compared with the North Vietnamese reliance primarily on subsonic, 20-year-old design Mig 17s, plus a handful of supersonic but mediocre Mig 21s. The world's most powerful air armada frequently found itself humbled in dogfights with what was regarded as a 'peasant'-based air force.

No country, not even the United States of America, could afford to continue trading expensive fighter aircraft and valuable aircrews on a 1:1 basis, particularly when the US crews were likely to become prisoners of war after bailing out of their aircraft, whereas

North Vietnamese pilots were likely to return to their squadrons. Somewhere along the line, crucial lessons had been lost and answers were needed.

In 1968, the US Navy commissioned an investigation, which issued the now famous *Ault Report*. And it didn't pull any punches. One of its main recommendations was a call for more realistic air-combat training, and many US senior

commanders expressly forbade the practice of dogfighting, even during times of war because of the associated increased risk of losing aircraft and pilots.

Captain Ault recommended the establishment of a fighter pilot's graduate school, providing the equivalent of a master's degree in air combat manoeuvring (ACM) and weapons usage. Ideally, this would be against dissimilar aircraft-flying enemy tactics. It was also realised (by the Air Force) that once a pilot had completed ten combat missions his chance of completing his tour of duty rose dramatically. These courses were designed to simulate a wartime



A Turkish Air Force F-4E 2020 111 Filo based at Eskisehir

environment and so give the pilot the equivalent of his first ten combat missions, thus reducing the risk of being shot down.

A class for Navy fighter crews to perfect ACM was established in 1969. This later became 'Top Gun', which, with some poetic licence, was portrayed in the film of the same name. As a direct result of this action, US Navy losses dropped and success rates improved. By the end of the war in 1973, the US Navy kill-to-loss ratio had increased to 12:1.

The US Air Force, however, had a continuing poor air-to-air record until

the war's end. Eventually, the errors were recognised and *Exercise Red Flag* was established in 1975. This was essentially similar to the Navy Fighter Weapons School (Top Gun). Both the Navy and USAF have continued these programmes to the present day. In 1978, a similar exercise was established by Canada at Cold Lake Air Force Base, Alberta. Anatolian Eagle continues the process started more than 40 years ago.

## HISTORY OF ANATOLIAN EAGLE

From the early 1980s, the Turkish Air Force adopted a philosophy of 'no matter how modern the weapons are, it is the men who use them that counts'. With

this in mind, observers were sent to Red Flag exercises at Nellis AFB in Nevada and Turkey participated for the first time with six F-16 fighters in 1997. With the experience gained in these exercises, involvement in internal security operations, and the Bosnia and Kosovo wars, the Turkish Air Force was in a position to offer training to its international partners and allies, with the first Anatolian Eagle exercise taking place in 2001.

Turkey's geopolitical position, between Europe and Asia, its proximity to the major energy sources of the world and its legacy of being NATO's eastern bulwark against the Soviet Union have resulted in it having one of the world's largest air forces. This force is modern and well equipped, manned

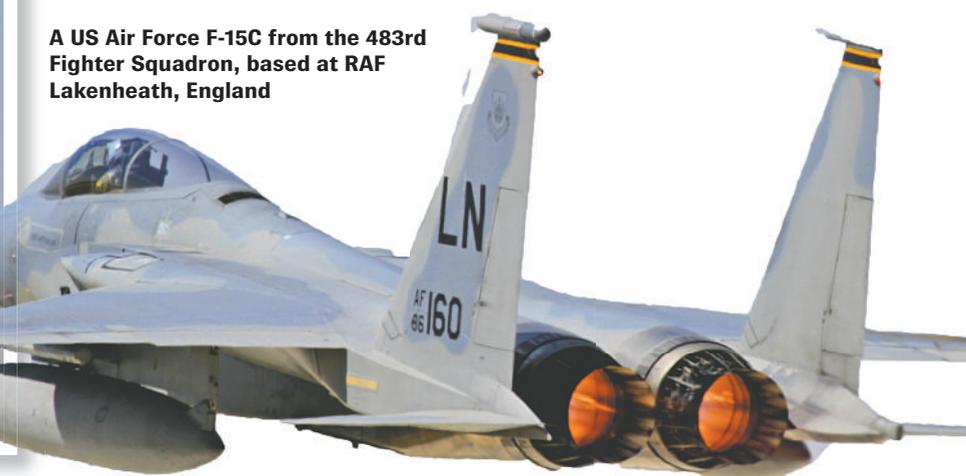
by highly-trained and motivated personnel.

Anatolian Eagle exercises strive to provide an environment that is as close to real war as possible. The basic scenario consists of an attack by 'blue' forces, usually consisting of Turkish and international squadrons, with combined air operations on tactical and strategic targets in 'red' land, which is defended by fighter aircraft and simulated surface-to-air missiles. The exercises are high-tech, highly computerised and sophisticated. The command and control centre observes all participants through air combat manoeuvring instrumentation (ACMI) pods carried externally by the fighter aircraft through the AWAC aircraft and also through land

Turkish Air Force F-16C 141 Filo, based at Ankara. A USAF F-15C takes off in the background



A US Air Force F-15C from the 483rd Fighter Squadron, based at RAF Lakenheath, England



radars. This allows for extremely accurate post-mission debriefs and precise analysis of all missions flown.

Countries sending detachments to Anatolian Eagle do so at significant cost and therefore expect a good return on their investment. To date, 14 countries have attended AE exercises and most of these have been

The stated aims of AE 2015/1 were:

Improving the capabilities of international elements in daytime joint operations and also improving their mutual support capability

Enhancing training levels of participants by providing a realistic operational environment within a generic scenario, from simple to complex. This includes planning and executing combined air operations against well-defended targets

Providing opportunity to try new tactics and techniques.



repeat participants.

### ANATOLIAN EAGLE JUNE 2015

This exercise took place between 8-19 June 2015 in Konya and attracted more than 100 fighter aircraft from the host nation, USA, Britain, Germany, Spain and Pakistan. Here, East met West and offered a rare opportunity for interaction between squadrons which, in the normal course of events, would never meet.

The exercise used the tried-and-tested formula of a 'blue' team attacking targets defended by the 'red' team, providing a robust and aggressive adversary force. Air-to-air refuelling was provided by Luftwaffe (German Air Force) A310 and Turkish Air Force KC-135 tankers. Airborne warning and control capability was provided by Turkish Air Force Boeing 737-7ES Peace Eagle and NATO Boeing E-3 Sentry aircraft.

The United States Air Force in Europe

A Spanish Air Force EF-18M, Ala 15, based at Zaragoza



deployed 12 F-15 fighter aircraft from the 48th Fighter Wing from RAF Lakenheath in England. They flew a total of 72 sorties (122 flying hours) and were accompanied by approximately 250 personnel.

Lt Colonel John Stratton, 493rd Fighter Squadron commander, said the large-force training was similar to Red Flag: "It increases our inter-operability because it gives our pilots a chance to come together, to mission plan, brief, execute and debrief. We can see what works and what doesn't in a joint coalition setting, so we know how well we are going to be able to execute in any future mission."

Lt Colonel Abidin Tannrisever of the

Turkish Air Force 123rd Weapons and Tactics Squadron said Anatolian Eagle presents realistic training environments for allied and partner nations with similar practices and doctrines. "Recent woperations show that close co-ordination and precise communication is very important in the execution of the operational plan," he said.

The Turkish Air Force is a modern, sophisticated organisation.

It has state-of-the-art aircraft and equipment with highly trained and motivated aircrew and support personnel. It has shown itself capable of accomplishing a wide variety of missions and of passing on that expertise to other air forces.

### Acknowledgements:

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An evocative scene from Konya as a 171 Filo F-4E returns from a mission



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