



Left: The Portuguese Air Force operates 20 F-16s, including three two-seaters. The sleek lines of F-16A 15116 are shown off over the River Tejo. (Christian Sap/MIAS)

Below: Mobility is the Portuguese Air Force's main objective, and the F-16s are now part of NATO's Rapid Reaction Force. To meet such criteria, the crews have to be competent in air-to-air refuelling and so regularly work with the Royal Netherlands Air Force KDC-10s. (Henk van Dijk/KLU)



at Spanhoe Manor in the UK was completed during 1996, but OGMA at Alverca will now convert the remaining six aircraft — it delivered its first conversion to the FAP's Esq 802 on May 14, 1997.

Flying training

Having spent four years training to become an officer at the Air Force Academy at Sintra, the successful graduate and aspirant pilot, will be posted to the FAP's largest base, Beja. Situated 125 miles (200kms) southeast of Lisbon, the base supports the pilot training programme and the FAP's fleet of Alpha Jets, Epsilons and Alouette IIIs. From 1980-1994 the Academy shared this facility with a *Luftwaffe* training unit operating Alpha Jets it still boasts a factory complex built by the Germans with the intention of manufacturing their own aircraft. However, these plans never reached fruition and the large building was left unused until the FAP took to storing several of its aircraft there.

Esquadra de Instrução Elementar de Pilotagem 101 operates 15 of 18 TB-30

Epsilons delivered in 1989/90 and aims to teach the basics of flying. It moved from BA 1 at Sintra in May 1993 to take advantage of a base offering improved facilities and better weather. Each October, the unit receives an intake of newly-graduated officers and for the next nine months their lives are dedicated to flying.

One of the squadron's instructors, Lt Helder Santinhos explains the FAP's basic flying training course. "It starts with basic contact, lasts about 27 missions and covers aspects such as take-offs/turns/stalls/spins/loops/aileron control, then there's a phase check. Next comes advanced contact when aerobatic manoeuvres such as clover leaf/chantaille/Immelman must be successfully completed within 16 missions. For instrument training, the student will fly in the local area, using only his basic instruments, that takes up another 18 missions and for the first time the canopy hood goes up, thus forcing the student to use his dials rather than his eyes. Then it's training — flying 12 VFR (Visual Flight Rules) and 14 IFR (Instrument Flight Rules) missions; for the latter, the hood is used again. Finally it's on to formation flying — that covers wing work, pulling 2-3gs and instrument appraisal. Of course the student can also put in extra time and gain additional experience on the squadron's simulator; an exercise we strongly recommend. After each course mode there is always a check ride.

"Approximately 70% of the course succeeds, the other 30% will have to go back to the Academy and retrain for another trade, some even leave the air force. This we know is a waste and we are now making a bid to highlight possible failures at Sintra during the Flight Screening programme. Roughly about 30% will head to Esq 301 for fast-jet training on Alpha Jets, while the remainder will go onto helicopters with Esq 552 — either course will see the newly-qualified pilot stay at Beja. If it's transport flying, then it's on to the Multi Engine Training School (METS) also at Sintra."

