



now its primary roles are Close Air Support (CAS) and attack. The Alpha Jets are armed with a 27mm Mauser cannon, Mk 82 bombs, BL 755, Canadian CVR-7 bombs and Folding Fin Aerial Rockets (FFAR). They are also taking on an EW role, which has seen eight Alpha Jets fitted with ECM kits — taking up a prominent position on the back seat, they are affectionately known as R2D2s (of Star Wars fame!). A reconnaissance role is also being explored, with OGMA developing a recon pod from fuel tanks formerly used on G-91s.

If it is not to be Alpha Jets for the newly-qualified jet pilot then these days there is only one real option left — the F-16 at Esq 201. (Although the FAP still flies A-7 Corsairs, pilots are no longer converting onto them.)

This squadron became operational at Monte Real on July 1, 1994, with six pilots who had all trained at Tucson ANGB, Arizona — two formerly flew G-91s, three were A-7 pilots and the other a T-38 instructor. The latter, Capt Alberto Francisco, hit the headlines in May 1996 when he nursed his F-16 back to base after colliding with an RAF Hawk at Beja airshow (see, July 1996, p91).

Lt João Pereira, who had just joined the squadron from Esq 101 at Beja, where he had spent two years, having previously flown A-7s told AFM: "Upon arriving at Esq 201 from Esq 103 or 301, or the A-7s of 304, the pilots will undergo a year-long

Left: One of only two TA-7Ps remaining in operation with Esq 304 last year. (Carlo Brummer/MIAS)
Below: A-7P 15531 of Esq 304 returns to Monte Real after a sortie. The Corsair will be retired next year, and crews are now converting to other types or becoming desk bound. The last A-7 conversion course took place in mid-1995. The other Corsair unit, Esq 302, disbanded in May 1996. (AFM-Alan Warnes)



familiarisation course in which they will get to know the aircraft, procedures and the area. Three qualifying programmes have to be successfully overcome, the Initial Qualification Training (IQT) where you learn how to fly the jet and basic fighter employment, like intercepts (INT); Basic Fighter Manoeuvres (BFM); Air Combat Manoeuvring (ACM); Air Combat Tactics (ACT); Surface Attack (SA), Surface Attack Tactics (SAT); and Air-to-Air Refuelling (AAR). Then there is the Initial Mission Qualification Programme (IMQP). Pilots who have A-7 or Alpha Jet operational experience embark on a shorter course. Part of this period is also spent on Initial Mission Qualification Training (IMQT) where, for example, you get the chance to tactically employ the aircraft on a squadron mission, Combat Air Patrol (CAP), Sweep, Escort, Close Air Support (CAS) and Air Interdiction (AI). Once completed, the pilot is detailed as Limited Combat Ready (LCR). Then finally you have the Mission Qualification Programme (MQT) that once completed, allows you to employ tactically all the armament and fly all squadron missions as Combat Ready (CR).

"Once we reach this level of operational capability we have to maintain it by flying a minimum of sorties/hours per month and per year. Otherwise you will be LCR again until qualification is accomplished. Pilots who have A-7 or operational experience will embark on the same qualification programme, but on a shorter course. In addition to this, it is extremely important we meet NATO's level of combat readiness, to do this we fly VFM and interception missions

every six months, and just like 'limited combat ready' if we don't — we have to qualify. According to NATO standards the unit should fly 4,200 hours a year or a minimum of 3,800 hours. There are currently 24 pilots on the unit, which fulfils the squadron module.

"Although air defence is the unit's primary role, it now has a secondary fighter-bomber role to enable it to fulfil NATO's multi-role requirement. This allows NATO to call upon the unit for a Rapid Reaction Deployment, which in fact saw Esq 201 deploy to Aviano for the first time in November [News, February, p.4] to gain an insight on air-ground procedures in Operation *Deliberate Guard*. Last year we sent two observers to a *Red Flag* exercise at Nellis, and it's possible that the unit will go there in 1999."

Because of its roles, there is a number of missions which the pilots must first qualify on, including live missile firing, bomb drops, air-to-air refuelling and air-to-air gunnery, and this has led to an F-16 being fitted for target-towing. During early February, Esq 201's F-16s deployed to Volkel, Netherlands, for air-to-air refuelling training with the Dutch Air Force's KDC-10 tanker.

"For air-to-air training missions the F-16s usually carry two AIM-9L Sidewinders, but they can carry up to six. At the turn of the century the FAP hopes to acquire AIM-120 AMRAAMs. We can also carry BDU-33 and SUU-20 ordnance for bomb drops. For the latter we fly to the Coca/Alcochete bombing range just north of Montijo and for tactical flying we use the range at Santa Margarida."

On January 26, 1996, another task was added to the unit's ever-increasing list of duties when the squadron took over the Quick Readiness Alert (QRA) at Monte Real from Esq 302 which operated A-7Ps until disbanded in mid-1996.

The FAP has made a request to the US Government for another 25 F-16A/Bs free of charge, so that it can afford to upgrade them to at least MLU standard. Once any deal is sanctioned, deliveries will probably be made to Esq 304 which is expected to retire its A-7s next year.

The FAP is now proving itself as a combat capable air force, working alongside other NATO countries to protect European skies as well as those over Portugal.

AFM



Above: At Sintra, Air Force Academy screening is now carried out on the newly-converted 180hp Chipmunk.

Left: A fleet of TB-30 Epsilons are used by Esq 101 for basic flying training at Beja. The students will arrive at the squadron after graduating from the Air Force Academy at Sintra. (Photos-Alan Warnes)