

Turtmann and Buochs

Swiss AF wartime base closures

Under the Armee XXI programme, which comes into effect on 1 January 2004, the Swiss Army is reducing its forces to 119,000 'active' servicemen, with a reserve of 80,000. This compares to the 600,000 men of the Armee 61 programme and 400,000 of Armee 95. The new profile for the 21st Century has a post-Cold War posture, massively reducing the size of the country's army and restructuring its civil protection scheme. It will have a major impact on the traditional militia army, and on the Schweizer Luftwaffe (Swiss Air Force).

Since the F-5 Tiger is no longer considered to be fully capable of fulfilling its roles of air policing (Luftpolizeidienst) and air defence in a modern air war environment, the veteran Tigers will be gradually phased out. Part of Armee XXI is the disbandment of two Tiger squadrons during 2003, reducing the fleet from 85 to 54 aircraft. The 12 F-5F two-seaters will once more be used exclusively in the advanced training and jet conversion role, following the premature retirement of the Hawk T.Mk 66 (last operational flight on 13 December 2002). By 1 January 2004 the Alouette III force will have



Two F-5s taxi to the runway at Turtmann. The base's mountainous surroundings provided a challenge for pilots, even in good weather conditions.

been reduced from 60 to 35. In the meantime, the F/A-18 fleet will undergo an intensive upgrade programme (Kampfwertsteigerungsprogramm) including the incorporation of the Raytheon AIM-9X, helmet-mounted visor and MIDS datalink, a process planned to be completed before 2009.

As a consequence of the reduction from five to three Tiger squadrons, it was announced on 11 July 2002 that the war base (Kriegsflugplatz) at Turtmann would close by 1 April 2004. At the same time, it was announced that the war base at Stans-Buochs would also close in line with the retirement of the Mirage III/RS/DS fleet in December 2003. By closing Turtmann the Swiss treasury will save Sfr 1.2 million in maintenance and operations each year, and Sfr 9

million in planned investments. By comparison with 1994, when the Swiss Air Force operated some 350 fighters and could rely on some 12 war bases, from 1 January 2004 onwards the Schweizer Luftwaffe will have three F/A-18 and three F-5 Tiger squadrons. These will be operating from only three war bases – Payerne, Sion and Meiringen, of which only the latter has a cavern hangar structure. The remaining training airfields will be Emmen, Locarno and Dübendorf, although the latter is planned to end Tiger operations by 1 January 2005 and Hornet operations around 1 January 2007.

Goodbye Turtmann

Turtmann lies in the region of Oberwallis and is situated at an elevation of 2,000 ft (628 m). A Fliegerkompanie was based there as far back as 1929, and in 1943 a concrete runway was built. Between 1951 and 1958 the airfield was turned into a cavern-airfield (Kavernenflugplatz), when three caverns were constructed in the mountain on the south side of the airfield – two for aircraft and one for troop lodging.

From 1958 the airfield was occupied twice a year by two squadrons conducting two-week

F-5Es are seen during the last Wiederholungs Kurs (WK) at Turtmann. The aircraft at left carries a suitable message on its fuselage, while the badge on the nose is for Flugplatz Abteilung 3 and Fliegerkompanie 8, which maintained the base and aircraft, respectively.

