

THE AVIATION MAGAZINE

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No: 57 Special Edition 2018

Volume 9, Issue 4



✈ VADOR, Images of the Belgian F-16 Solo Demo

✈ Brussels Air Museum, Belgium

1st Squadron "Stingers" BAF



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Cover: "Tango" in his F-16AMLU at Florennes AB, Belgium, by László Nyáry
Index page: 1Sqn diver at Florennes AB, Belgium, by Ralf Peter Walter



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AIR TO AIR



Photography by Laszlo

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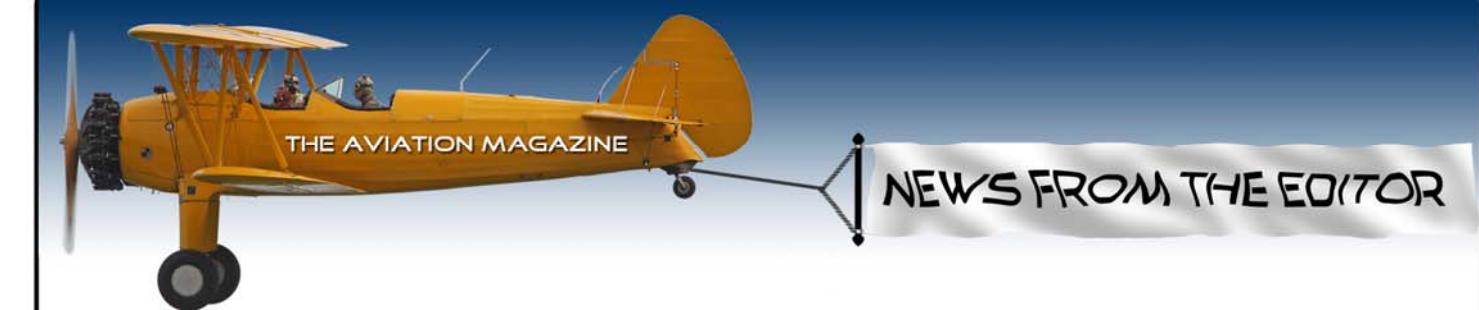
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Welcome to our 1st Special Edition for 2018 of **THE AVIATION MAGAZINE** in which we feature exclusively our visit with the 1st Squadron Stingers at their home base at Florennes AB, of the Belgian Air Force.

Our visit was a result of my winning their drawing contest for their 100th year anniversary aircraft. This drawing will be available soon (being printed presently) from Stingers from their official tent at air shows throughout Europe, and from their website <http://www.1sqn.be/goodies/>

While at Florennes Air Base we also had an opportunity to see the new colours of the F-16 Solo Display in action which is flown by "Vador" a pilot from the Stingers squadron. Vador will be flying this beautiful "Dark Falcon" for the next three seasons.

We also had the opportunity to visit the Brussels Air Museum, which is a must see, if you are in Belgium. The museum has approximately 100 aircraft on display, all indoors, which is quite important preserving these valuable aircraft.

We will be changing our magazine reader platform from Joomag to Issuu, to keep the ever increasing cost manageable and to continue with our slogan "**The BEST and FREE e-based magazine since 2009**". Our new Managing Editor can be contacted editor@theaviationmagazine.com





BASE
J.OFFENBERG

Visiting the 1Sqn Stingers

REPORT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY LASZLO NYARY
WITH ADDITIONAL IMAGES BY RALF PETER WALTER





Visiting the 1st Sqn Stingers on a foggy May morning our Managing Editor, Ralf, and I arrived at Florennes Air Base. The weather was rather brisk, but had a lot of potential as the fog slowly disappeared and was replaced by much needed sunshine. We were hoping for the temperature to rise too from the 9°C to around 16-18°C. The weather Gods were with us, as it turned out to be an excellent day!

Before we begin our visit with the 1st Squadron let us start with a brief history of the base and of the 1st Squadron.

BASE HISTORY

Florennes Air Base officially known as "Base Jean Offenberg", is located approximately 102 km south of Brussels, coordinates are 50°14'36"N 004°38'45"E. It is the home of the 2nd Tactical Wing, part of the Air Component of the Belgian Armed Forces. One of two fighter wings operating the General Dynamics F-16 Fighting Falcon.

The Wing consists of the 1st Squadron "Stingers" that has the Scottish Thistle as their symbol and the 350th Squadron. Both of the squadrons currently fly the Societe Anonyme Belge de Constructions Aeronautiques (SABCA) built under licence from General Dynamics (now Lockheed-Martin) F-16 MLUs while their F100 engines were manufactured by Techspace Aero, formerly Belgian Fabrique National. Currently there is a competition between the F-35 and the Eurofighter Typhoon to replace the F-16 fleet. Decision should be taken in July, 2018.

Florennes Air Base can trace back its origins to the mid thirties as civilian aviation flourished in the region. The actual air base construction was by the Todt organisation for the German Luftwaffe in the early days of WWII, for their Junkers Ju 87 bombers and Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighters in support of the Blitzkrieg. As German advance stopped and the Allied mostly RAF bombers attacking at night the Germans more frequently from March 1943 onwards Messerschmitt Bf 110Fs and Junkers Ju 88C6B and Ju 88G night fighters operated from this airfield. They were supplemented by Focke-Wulf Fw 190A8 day fighters in November 1943, to combat the USAAF bombers, which operated by day. In August 1944, the Germans decided to withdraw and blew-up most of the facilities and the airfield, officially it was liberated by American troops in September, and it was designated as "A-78" by them.

On September 16, 1944, the first US Army Air Force unit, the 422nd Fighter Squadron with the Northrop P-61 Black Widow and Douglas A-20 Havoc, arrived from Chateaudun, France. They were joined on September 23rd by the 370th Fighter Group, equipped with Lockheed P-38 Lightning, and later by the 474th FG, also with the P-38. In late January 1945, the 370th was replaced by 365th FG, operating the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, until March 1945 when all FG units left. In April 1945 the 344th Bombardment Group equipped with Martin B-26 Marauders took their place until September 1945, when the airbase was completely abandoned by the US Forces. The first Belgians arrived in May 1946, when a detachment of 60 people were assigned to guard and maintain the facility which still required much needed repairs and rebuild.

In October 1947, the first batch of Belgian Air Force aircraft landed at Florennes: a single Airspeed Oxford, a pair of North American Harvards and a pair of Supermarine Spitfires. In February 1948, the 161st Day Fighter Wing had been renamed the 2nd Day Fighter Wing and its squadrons had become No. 1 Thistle (squadron code "3R-"), and No. 2 Comet Squadron (squadron code "UR-"). By the end of 1948, 17 additional Spitfires were stationed at Florennes. Soon a third squadron, the No. 3 Holly Leaf Squadron, was established at Florennes Air Base, equipped with Spitfires.

The jet era arrived to Florennes in June 1951 when 21 Republic F-84E Thunderjets were delivered to the 2nd Wing. In April 1952, the more powerful F-84G replaced the F-84E. Each of the three squadrons received 25 aircraft of this type. At the same time the infrastructure of the air base underwent major changes with a new runway and the numerous new buildings considerably improved the operations at Florennes. The 2nd Wing became supersonic in August 1955 with the delivery of the first Republic F-84F Thunderstreaks.

In 1956, Florennes Air Base was named Base J. Offenberg, in honour of Jean Offenberg, a Belgian fighter pilot who was killed in action during the Battle of Britain.

In 1958 No 3 Squadron was deactivated.

In June 1970, the F-84F fighter-bombers were phased out in the favour of the Mirage 5 from June 1970, onwards. The Mirage came in two versions: a fighter-bomber, and as a dedicated reconnaissance aircraft. Due to this the No.1 Thistle Squadron was relocated to the Bierset Air Base, near Liège, to make place for No. 42 Mephisto Squadron, the dedicated reconnaissance unit of the Belgian Air Force.

In May 1977, Belgium signed an initial contract for 116 General Dynamics F-16 Fighting Falcons (96 A-model single-seater and 20 B-model two-seaters). These were phased in to replace the Mirage 5BA and 5BR respectively.

In 1984, the USAF installed its 485th Tactical Missile Wing (TMW) armed with the General Dynamics/Mc Donnell Douglas BGM-109G Gryphon nuclear capable ground launched cruise missile (GLCM). On December 8th 1987, the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty (INF), was signed by the USSR and the USA which called for the immediate withdrawal of the GLCM by both sides from the European theatre, and by February 28th, 1989 the 485th TMW was dissolved and left Belgium.



Parts of the vacated infrastructure became the new home of the Allied Air Forces, Central Europe (NATO) AIRCENT Tactical Leadership Programme (TLP) from April 1989 until June 30, 2009 when it was relocated to Spain.

On March 15th, 1989, No. 1 Thistle Squadron returned to Florennes. The Thistle Squadron also took up the reconnaissance role after the Mirage was withdrawn from service in 1994 and No. 42 Squadron disbanded.

The end of the Warsaw Pact (heralding in the end of the Cold War) led to major changes in the Belgian Air Force. All training air bases were closed and their units brought together at Beauvechain Air Base, which became the Air Force's Air Academy.

As a consequence, on March 4th, 1996, a third F-16 Squadron arrived at the base. This was the 350 Squadron, which had been formed during the Second World War as a Belgian RAF squadron. Between 1946 and 1996 it was part of No. 1 Wing at Beauvechain. As noted above, Beauvechain AB became the new training centre for the Belgian Air Force. Further force reductions in April 2001 led to the disbandment of No. 2 Squadron of the 2nd Tactical Wing in Florennes. Currently No 1 Squadron and 350 Squadron are the only Squadrons that are operational at Florennes AB.

Florennes celebrated its 75th Anniversary as a Belgian Air Force air base in 2017.





HISTORY OF THE 1SQN STINGERS



A brief history of the Stingers started with when a Royal Decree was issued on 16 April, 1913 for the Compagnie des Aviateurs (Flying Corps) the forerunner of the Belgian Air Force. Thus the Escadrille 1 (Squadron 1) was formed, initially with four units, they were based at Brasschaat, north of Antwerp.

However, the 1 Squadron, known as the 1ère Escadrille de Chasse (1st Fighter Squadron) at the time, elected their starting date from August 1917 when they were equipped with the Hanriot-Dupont HD.1, and with a number of Sopwith Camels Fighters, as illustrated on the right page.



Hanriot-Dupont HD.1



Sopwith Camel

Photography and illustration by Lászlo Nyáry



A.V.Roe AVRO 504K
Aviation Militaire Belge operated a number of 504K and later the N version from 1921 to 1940. This aircraft was operated by the "Thistle" squadron.

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Fokker D.VII F-2
Fokker D.VII F-2 6693/18 of N° 9 Squadron "Thistle" at Evere airbase in July 1919. Between 1919 and 1931 at least 35 of these aircraft were used by the Aviation Militaire Belge and later the Aéronautique Militaire Belge with various squadrons.

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With the introduction of the Hanriot-Dupont HD.1, in 1917, the squadron badge, the Scottish Thistle or Chardon d'Ecosse, appeared for the first time on their aircraft. The original design was painted by pilot André de Meulemeester and consisted of a slim stalk with a number of leaves and a flower resembling the cork of a bottle of Champaign. The design was redesigned by Willy Coppens with more detail to the flower. The inspiration for the thistle most likely came from a unit of the Regiment of Scots Guards, stationed near their airfield. The motto "Nemo me impune lacescit" (no man provokes me with impunity) had British origins as it was used by the Most Noble and Most Ancient Order of the Thistle, formed in 1687 by King James II.

As WWI came to an end, and the period prior to WWII, the 1 Sqn went through several changes and locations, flying a wide variety of aircraft. They included:

- Avro 504K and N versions
- Fokker D.VII F-2
- Morane Saulnier MS.30.E1 (for evaluation)
- Spad XIII
- Nieuport D29
- Fiat CR1 (for evaluation)
- Avia BH21
- Nieuport ND-72
- Fairley Firefly IIM



Morane Saulnier MS.30.E1
In 1918 three MS.30E's were supplied to the Aviation Militaire for evaluation. One of them was evaluated by the 9th Squadron "Thistle" and it was in use until 1924.



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Spad S.XIII C1

Aircraft of the 1re Escadrille de Chasse of the Aviation Militaire Belge, 1921-27.





Nieuport-Delage 29C1

In 1922 the Belgian Government ordered 108 NID 29 C1 from the French company. Under licence 88 of these fighters were built by the newly founded aeronautics company Sabca. #97 was used by the 2/I/2Aé "Thistle" until 1927.



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Avia BH-21

In use by the 2/I/2Aé "Thistle" squadron from 1927 to 1929



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Fiat CR.1

One of the two Fiat CR.1 evaluated by the Belgian Aéronautique Militaire, 1925



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Nieuport-Delage NiD72C.1

Three were purchased for evaluation, #3 is shown as tested by the 2/I/2Aé "Thistle" squadron in 1929, in service until 1931.



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Fairey Firefly IIM
In use by the 2/I/2Aé "Thistle" squadron from 1931 to 1939

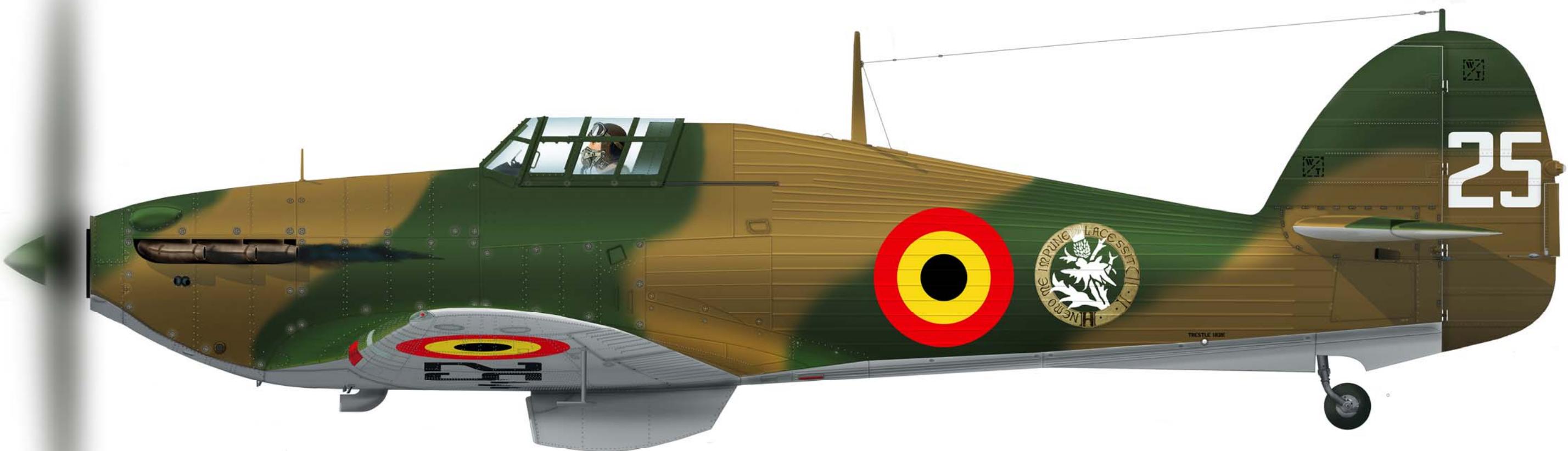


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In 1924, the 1ère Escadrille was renamed 2ème Escadrille of the IVème Group (2/IV). Then in 1926 it was disbanded however, their traditions were adapted by the 3ème Escadrille/Ière Group and it was known as (3/I/2Aé). In 1929 the Belgian Military Aviation was reorganized and the unit once again changed into 2ème Escadrille (2/I/2Aé).

In 1938, 2/I/2Aé received a more modern mono wing fighter the Hawker Hurricane Mk.1, based at Schaffen airfield. On May 10, 1940 the Germans invaded Belgium, and the Luftwaffe did not waste any time in attacking and destroying as many Belgian aircraft as they could. In Schaffen, 9 out of 11 Hurricanes of the 2/I/2Aé were destroyed. The two surviving aircraft, as well as third aircraft that had survived the German attack in maintenance, escaped to Beauvechain airfield. The Luftwaffe kept on the pressure and destroyed two of the three remaining Hurricanes and the Thistle squadron was disbanded the following day. Many of the pilots escaped to England and joined the RAF, to fight the Germans.

After WWII, on 1 November 1946, No. 351 Squadron was created as third Belgian Spitfire XIV unit to complement the Nos. 349 and 350 Fighter Squadrons, which were formed during the war as RAF Squadrons. It soon adopted the pre-war emblem of the Scottish Thistle and received the squadron letter code 3R.



Hawker Hurricane Mk1





Supermarine Spitfire F(R)14.E

1st Squadron "Stingers", 2nd Wing, Florennes Air Base, Belgium, 1949
The Stingers flew Spitfires from 1947 to 1949.





Noorduyn Harvard IIB AT-16-ND
1st Squadron "Stingers", 2nd Wing, Florennes Air Base, Belgium, 1951



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The No. 351 Squadron were based at Florennes AB from the middle half of 1947. In January 1948, No. 351 Squadron was renumbered and became No. 1 Fighter-Bomber Squadron. The Thistle Squadron was back, and with the No. 2 Comet and No. 3 Holly Leaf Squadrons they formed the 2nd Wing all equipped with the Supermarine Spitfire XIV.

In addition to the Spitfire the 1st Sqn also flew the Canadian built Noorduyn Harvard IIB, later on the Harvards were successfully used during the Congolese rebellion in July 1960 in the Belgian Congo. Sixteen Harvards, based initially at Kamina were armed with two 7.62 calibre machineguns, two Alcan 261 bomb racks and two Matra 13 rocket launchers.

The jet-age arrived to the 1st Sqn in June 1951, with the Republic F-84E/G Thunderjet the fighter-bomber. In 1955, the first of the Republic F-84F Thunderstreak were delivered to 1st Squadron at Florennes. On 30 June 1971, 1st Squadron moved to Bierset Air Base where it received its first Dassault Mirage 5BA in January 1972. In March 1989 the Mirage 5ABs were replaced with the more advanced SABCA built under licence from General Dynamics (now Lockheed-Martin) F-16.

The Thistle Squadron moved back to Florennes on 15 March 1989, where it still is based to date.



Republic F-84G "Thunderjet"
1st Squadron "Stingers", 2nd Wing, Florennes Air Base, Belgium, 1953
FZ-153/3R-F Serial # 2542-1224B, built 1952 served until Jul 1957.



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Republic F-84F "Thunderstreak"
1st Squadron "Stingers", 2nd Wing, Florennes Air Base, Belgium.
The F-84F was in service from 1955 to 1972 with the Belgian Air Force.



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The Mission of 1st Squadron Stingers

Since the end of the Cold War, the Stingers of the 2nd Tactical Wing participated in numerous international peacekeeping and air policing operations:

- 1997 Yugoslavia
- 1999 Kosovo
- 2004 Lithuania Air Policing
- 2008-2014 Kandahar, Afghanistan
- 2011 Libya
- 2013 Lithuania Air Policing
- 2014-2015 Iraq
- 2015 Poland
- 2016 Estonia Air Policing
- 2016-2017 Iraq and Syria



**Dassault Mirage 5BA "Blackbird"**
70th Anniversary of the 1st Squadron Stingers 1917-1987
Florennes Air Base, Belgium


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**General Dynamics F-16A "Blackbird II"**
75th Anniversary of 1st Squadron Stingers, 1917-1992
Florennes Air Base, Belgium


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**General Dynamics F-16 AM**
1st Squadron Stingers, Florennes Air Base, Belgium 2001


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INTERESTING LIVERY OF ANNIVERSARY AIRCRAFT OVER THE YEARS



Illustration by László Nyáry



Illustration by László Nyáry





...back to our visit.

At 09:00 sharp we were met at the front gate by Tango, a Captain in the Belgian Air Force and a member of the 1st Sqn Stingers (we will only use call sign names) who was my contact. We went over to Security, to pick up our visitor's badges as we surrendered our passports, which we would get back upon returning the badges upon our leaving.

One of my requests was to photograph all the older aircraft on display at various locations throughout the base. There were four aircraft: F-84G Thunderjet, F-84F Thunderstreak, Mirage 5BA and the earliest F-16A Fighting Falcon delivered to the Belgian Air Force, which represented all the major types operating since the jet age.



F-84G above and the F-84F below



Mirage 5BA above F-16A Fighting Falcon below.



After my photographing the above we were taken to the 1st Sqn Stingers HQ building. Here we met the 1st Squadron Commander "BK" as we were showed around the facilities. The squadron is not a large one, it consists of 12 active pilots, several of them were already up in the air when we arrived at the air base. Tango informed us that we will be going out to the airfield to watch some additional taking off later on, but first we were given a briefing on the history of the airfield, the squadron and their aircraft as well as their roles.

F-16s are used in the following three roles:

1. air-to-air interception /interdiction
2. Air-to-ground Close Air Support (CAS) of ground troops and taking out targets
3. as well as for Reconnaissance (Recce) missions at the same time when the Sniper Targeting pods are used.

We had plenty of opportunity to ask questions and clarifications during the briefing, but we will not go into those.

After the briefing we met Christian, who helped our access to the base and he mentioned that he will take over the hosting in the afternoon, as Tango would have to leave for an important officer's meeting. Shortly after that we were taken by a minibus to another building close to the control tower, where the pilots change into their flight suit and gear, and where aircraft are assigned to the pilots for their missions. Here Tango picked up his helmet, flight gear and the available aircraft for our photo-shoot with him. He drove us out to the hardened shelter and apron where that F-16 was parked. Each F-16 is housed in its own shelter quite a distance from each other.

After our photo-shoot, we drove back to the change facility, and it was approaching noon, time for lunch. In order not to miss the take offs of several F-16s, we just grabbed our ham and cheese sandwiches and we ate them on the way to a space between the runways, for our photography. Our spot was between the two parallel runways 08R/26L and 08L/26R (the main runway).





Tango mentioned that we are in luck as the new Belgian Air Force F-16 Solo Display F-16AM "Dark Falcon" piloted by Commander Stefan Darte "Vador" will be taking off soon, and we will be the first ones to see (from a media/public perspective) the typical air show routine he will be performing in 2018.

Indeed, about 15 minutes later Vador took off. More images of Commander Stefan Darte "Vador" later on page 46. The display was very impressive, with the smokewidens attached to the wing tips making interesting visual trails in the sky, especially when he performed loops. Vador displayed his flying abilities as well as the agility of the F-16 Fighting Falcon. Upon landing Vador rolled by us, giving us a closer look, as he flashed the universal peace sign. While he was taxiing back, Tango mentioned that he could set a brief meeting with him if we like, apparently Vador saw my drawing of the Blackbird and he was impressed by it.

We witnessed four aircraft taking off with tail numbers FA-86, FB-21, FA-89 and FA-109. Although, I had a long lens 200-500mm lens on my camera, there was heat haze reflecting off the runway which effected most of my take off images, due to distance we were from the aircraft taking off.

We then returned to one of the administrative buildings in the base as Tango had something to deal with, while waiting for him I took some images of a rock slab statute with squadron emblems near an F-16 on display. Shortly, Tango returned and mentioned now we will go to see Vador for a couple of minutes. I've spoken with him about perhaps doing a profile drawing similar to the Blackbird of the 1st Squadron, of his Dark Falcon. I received two patches from him for my collection.

We returned to the 1st Sqn Stingers building, to relax a bit, and we said our good-byes to Tango as he had to leave. Christian took over and mentioned that now we can go to the museum, as he will provide a driver to take us there.

Our last activity was to visit the Musée Spitfire, a museum located inside the air base and prior arrangements have been made by Tango. Unfortunately, there was a miscommunication somewhere and we were not able to visit. Christian was just as disappointed as we were. Perhaps at another time we will review the museum.



Photo by Ralf Peter Walter



Photo by László Nyáry

Tail #FA-86 (F-16AMLU) was the first to take off,
bottom image, followed by #FB-21 (F-16BMLU)
top image

Over all we had an outstanding visit with Stingers and seeing the Belgian Air Force F-16 Solo Display F-16AM "Dark Falcon" and meeting Vador was a bonus.

We wish to thank 1st Squadron Commander BK, Tango, Christian and all the wonderful personnel of the 1st Sqn Stingers who made our visit so enjoyable.

Tail #FA-89 (F-16AMLU) was the third to take off, top right image, followed by #FA-109 (F-16AMLU) main image, notice the small inert practise bombs.



Photo by Ralf Peter Walter



Photo by László Nyáry

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"VODOR"



Photo by Ralf Peter Walter



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"VADOR"



Photo by Ralf Peter Walter



Images unless noted by László Nyáry





Images unless noted by László Nyáry



Brussels Air Museum

Report and images unless noted by László Nyáry





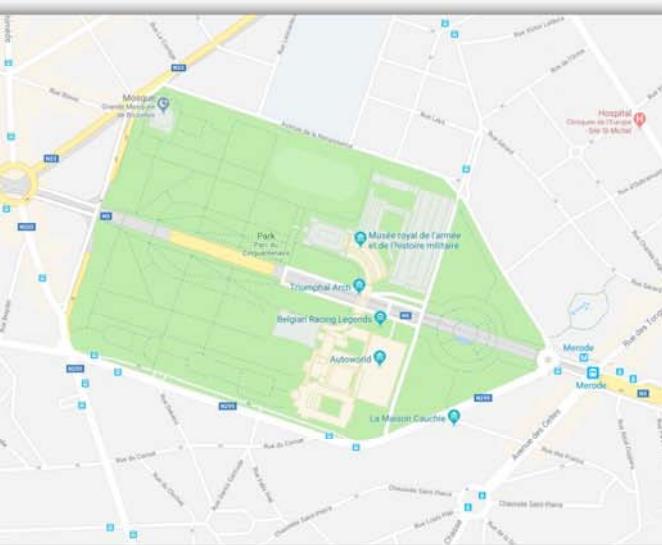
Marc Ryckaert -Wikimedia

The Brussels Air Museum is located in a section of the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and Military History. This museum is located at the Parc du Cinquantenaire, "Park of the Fiftieth Anniversary", a 30-hectare very scenic park in the eastern part of Brussels. The complex contains several buildings, joined by the Triumphal Arch, and they form a large U. The buildings were built under the patronage of King Leopold II for the 1880 National Exhibition commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Belgian independence. The centre-piece triumphal arch was erected in 1905.

The Royal Military Museum has been the sole tenant of the northern half of the complex since 1880. The southern half is occupied by the Jubelpark museum (Cinquantenaire Museum) and the AutoWorld Museum.

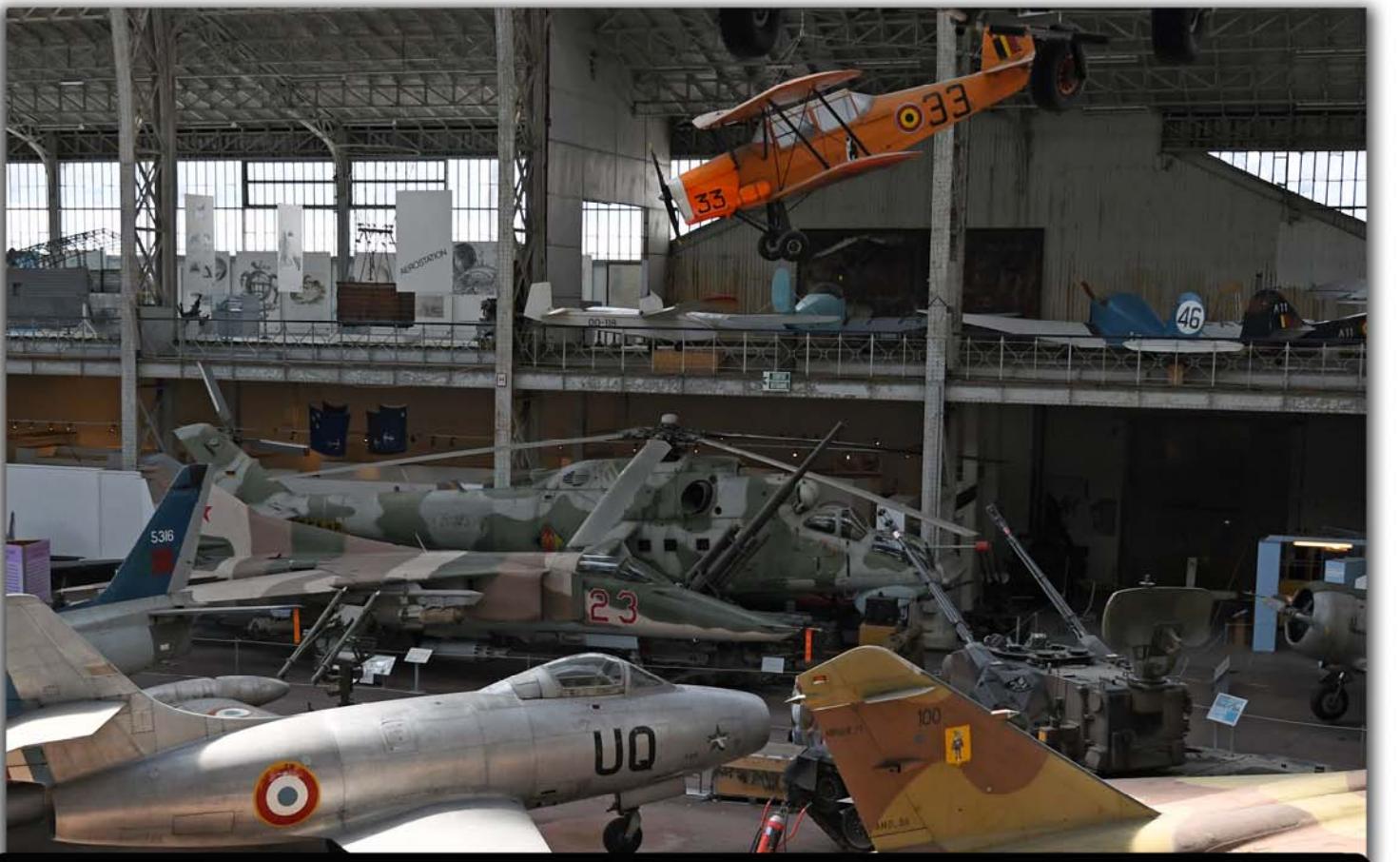
The Brussels Air Museum section has a very good collection of aircraft, and a few armoured vehicles too. As I was in Belgium to see the 1st Squadron, I decided to visit the exhibition as well. My guide to the Museum was Ralf, who is the new managing editor for the magazine. We spent about four hours at the museum, and it was worth every minute of it. More information can be found here:

<http://www.airmuseum.be/en/bezoekers.php>



Once inside the main exhibit the first thing one sees is the Flakpanzer Gepard
Adjacent to the right of the entrance is the Mil Mi-24 Hind





MiG-23 Flogger and Mil Mi-24 Hind others from the upper level
Sikorsky HSS1 - S58 below



Westland Sea King SAR helicopter, above
A row of old jets that includes the CF-100 Canuck, Hunter F-IV, Meteor Mk XI and a Mk VIII





Looking down from the upper level: RF-4 Phantom dominates, F-104G Starfighter, and the F-86F Sabre in Portuguese markings are behind it, flanked on one side by helicopters and on the other by F-84F, RF-84F, CF-100, and F-84G among others.



Bristol Bolingbroke IVT (ex Canadian aircraft) with RAF colours, above
Bücker Bü 181 Bestmann, below



Nord 1002 Pingouin (Messerschmitt Bf 108 Taifun), above
Bücker Bü 181 Bestmann, below





- Fairchild C-119 Flying Boxcar, main top image
- De Havilland DH.89A Dragon Rapide, right
- Percival Pembroke C.51, below

A closer look at the Republic F-84F Thunderstreak, F-84G and a row of early cold war era of fighters in a row and above them some ultra light aircraft and gliders.





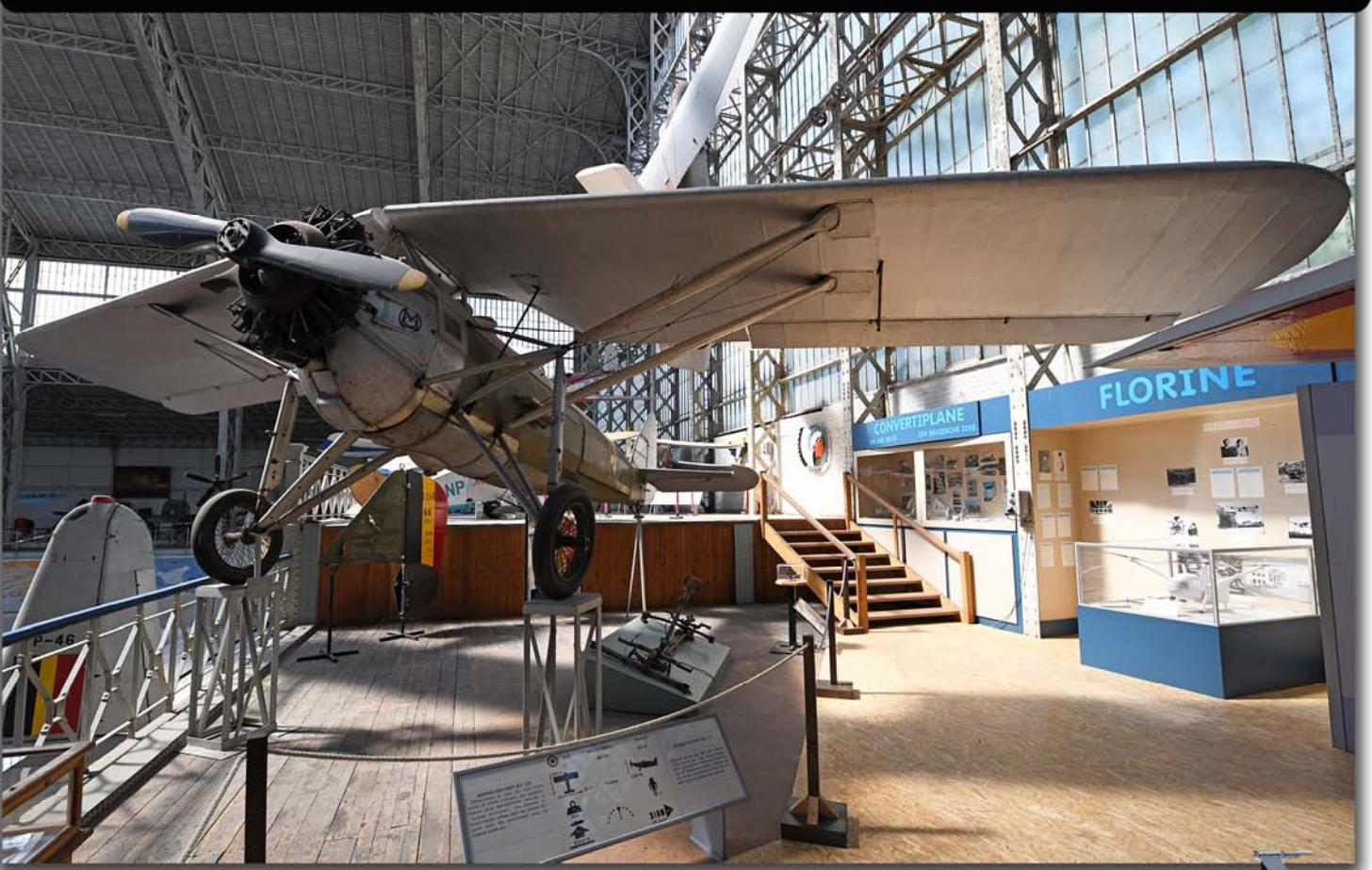
Sud Aviation SE 210-64 Caravelle VI-N, main image
Voisin - de Caters (1908) to the right



Royal Aircraft Factory RE8, above
Bristol Fighter F2B Type 17, below



Sopwith 1A2 Strutter, above
Morane Saulnier MS 230, below





Hanriot-Dupont HD1 of the 1st Sqn
"Thistle" aka Stingers

DHC-3 Otter with skies perched above a Douglas A-26 Invader to the right along with a Daimler Mk I Armoured Car





Spitfire XIV (center) a Douglas A-26 Invader (top) T-11 Vampire to right along with an Airspeed AS.10 Oxford I

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We will publish further notification regarding our move in our next issue!



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