

RAF Typhoons hand over NATO Romania duties to Canada

On 28 August four Royal Air Force Typhoon FGR4 fighter aircraft departed Romania ending the UK's five-month leadership of NATO's enhanced air policing mission in the country.

Since April the Typhoons – from 3(F) Squadron, RAF Coningsby – had spent alternate weeks on high-readiness standby to defend NATO's airspace over the Black Sea, augmenting the Romanian Air Force's existing air defence capability. The Royal Canadian Air Force is now preparing to assume responsibility for the NATO mission, while two of the RAF's Typhoons proceed to Estonia to join NATO training with the British Army.

In Romania the Typhoons deployed to Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base, near the Black Sea port of Constanta, as part of the RAF's 135 Expeditionary Air Wing (EAW) under the code-name Operation BILOXI.

More than 300 regular and reserve RAF personnel from 16 RAF units – supported by Royal Engineers – were involved in the mission.

Typhoons launched once in response to Russian air activity over the Black Sea, and flew more than 280 sorties to support NATO training with Romanian, Hungarian and Bulgarian armed forces. Towards the end of 135 EAW's tour of duty, eight of its personnel were awarded the Romanian Air Force's highest peacetime honour for their work in the country.

135 EAW's Commanding Officer, Wing Commander Andy Coe, said: *'As we hand over NATO duties to our colleagues in the Royal Canadian Air Force, the men and women of 135 EAW can be proud of what we have achieved. In our five months here, we were ambassadors for the RAF Whole Force, and for a truly global Britain. We learned much from our Romanian friends, even as we passed on our experience to them and to our other allies in the region. It has been a privilege to lead a team who have embraced NATO's principles with complete enthusiasm and dedication.'*

The RCAF's Air Task Force Romania, comprising 135 specialists from across the Canadian Armed Forces, is preparing for a vital NATO certification on 31 August – the final stage in its preparation to lead the enhanced air policing mission. Four RCAF CF-188 Hornet fighter aircraft from 409 Tactical Fighter Squadron arrived in Romania on 20 August, and will be patrolling the skies shortly after the NATO certification.

Air Task Force Romania Commander Lieutenant-Colonel Mark Hickey commented: *'As we bid farewell to our British friends, my entire team's focus is now on supporting Canada's allies here in Romania and across the wider region. Canada will always stand up for the freedom and collective security of our NATO allies; that is why we are happy to assume leadership of this important mission. My team will make Romania and Canada proud.'*

Picture credits:

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Deployed to Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base, near Constanta, as part of Operation BILOXI, more than 300 regular and reserve RAF personnel from 16 RAF units – supported by Royal Engineers – were involved in the mission.

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