

Red Flag 13-3 Nellis Air Force Base

February 27, 2013

Between February 25th and March 15th 2013, the Red Flag 13-3 air combat training exercise was held at Nellis AFB and the Nevada Test and Training Range. The three week event is the US Air Force's largest and most important air combat training exercise.

The Red Flag exercises were begun in 1975 to offer USAF pilots and weapon systems officers the opportunity to fly realistically simulated combat missions in a safe training environment with measurable results. Red Flag exercises feature Blue Forces (friendly) who engage Red Forces (hostile) in realistic combat scenarios. Primarily the Red Forces consist of F-15s and F-16s from the 57th Adversary Tactics Group. Blue forces are represented by various USAF, Navy and Marine air units.

Additionally, these exercises afford an opportunity for the air forces of US allies to train with the US Air Force and Navy Blue Forces. This cooperation will provide a level of readiness in key regions should any military activity be needed in the future.

Depending on the day's missions, up to 125 aircraft were launched from Nellis AFB. Usually the E-3 AWACS and tankers launched first and then the sequence was determined by the mission requirements. Each Red Flag exercise normally involves a variety of missions including but not limited to fighter interdiction, attack, air superiority, airlift, aerial refueling, and reconnaissance. The NTTR provides an area of more than 12,000 square miles of airspace where these exercises take place. The 414th Combat Training Squadron is responsible for executing Red Flag exercises.

Participants included:

- F-22A from the 1st Fighter Wing, 27th Fighter Squadron, Langley AFB, VA
- F-16C from the 114th FW, 175th FS Joe Foss Field Air National Guard Station, SD
- F-15C from the 422nd Test and Evaluation Squadron, F-15Cs, Nellis AFB, NV
- F-15C from the 85th Test and Evaluation Squadron, F-15Cs, Nellis AFB, NV
- F-16CMs from the 20th Fighter Wing, 79th FS, F-16CMs, Shaw AFB, SC
- EC-130s from the 55th Electronic Combat Group, Davis-Monthan AFB
- EA-18Gs from Carrier Air Wing 11, Electronic Attack Squadron 135, NAS Whidbey Island, WA
- EA-6Bs from 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron 2, MCAS Cherry Point, NC
- B-2s from the 509th Bomb Wing, 393rd Bomb Squadron, Whiteman AFB, MO
- F-15E from 48th FW, 492nd FS, F-15E, Royal Air Force Lakenheath, England
- A-10S from 57th WG, 422nd TES, A-10s, Nellis AFB, NV
- HC-130J from the 23rd WG, 79th RQS, Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ
- E-8s from the 116th Air Control Wing, 16th Airborne Command and Control Squadron, Robins AFB, GA
- RC-135s from the 55th WG, 343rd Reconnaissance Squadron, Offutt AFB, NE
- HH-60s from the 23rd WG, 66th Rescue Squadron, Nellis AFB
- CH-47s from General Support Aviation Battalion, Texas Army National Guard, Texas
- KC-135s from the 6th Air Mobility Wing, Red Flag Tanker Task Force, MacDill AFB, FL, and Travis AFB, CA
- E-3s from the 552nd Air Control Wing, 964th Airborne Air Control Sq, Tinker AFB, OK
- F-16Cs from the 57th ATG, 64th AGRS, Nellis AFB, NV
- F-15Cs from the 57th ATG, 65th AGRS, Nellis AFB, NV
- F-5s from the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing, Marine Fighter Training Squadron 401, MCAS, Yuma, AZ

- T-38Cs from the 12th Flying Training Wing, 560th Flying Training Squadron, T-38Cs, Randolph AFB, TX and the 49th Wing, 49th OSS, T-38Cs, Holloman AFB, NM

Foreign participation included:

- Royal Australian Air Force flying Boeing E-7s from No. 2 Squadron
- Royal Air Force Gr.4 Typhoons from 12B SQN RAF Lossiemouth
- Royal Air Force Eurofighter Typhoon FGR4 from 11 SQN RAF Coningsby

We were brought on base about noon and situated between the runways. Some UAE Mirage 2000's, which were participants on the concurrent Green Flag exercise, recovered on the left. Then the USAF Thunderbirds demonstration team launched the diamond and then the soloists. After a pass over the field, they headed out to practice. Soon the Red Flag aircraft were launching on both runways - F-15s, F-16s, F-22s, A-10s, a couple of tankers and a B-2. The Navy Growlers and Prowlers launched as did one of the RAAF E-7s. The F-16s from the South Carolina Air National Guard launched with live ordnance. The RAF Typhoons and Tornados departed with glowing afterburners as well.

While the Red Flag participants were out at the range, the Thunderbirds did a break over the field and landed. The UAE Mirage 2000's launched as well.

Soon groups of fighter streaked overhead, performed a break and recovered on both sides. The last groups to land included the Growlers and 65AGRS F-15s. As the sun got lower, the late day recoveries basked in the beautiful light of the desert sunset.

While the daytime flying missions were done, the careful debriefing and analysis was just beginning.

Here are some photos from the 27th of February. For more photos visit our Red Flag 13-3 Gallery at www.JetImagesOnline.com :

The RAAF brought two of their new Wedgetail aircraft to participate, they provide AEW&C (airborne early warning and control) capability:



An F-15E Strike Eagle from RAF Lakenheath returns after a sortie:



Red Air F-15 launching:



Aggressor F-16C Viper launching:



Aggressor F-15C Eagle launching:



Lobos F-16 departing:



A-10 heading out to the range:



Late day recoveries:



Thanks to the 99th ABW Public Affairs Office for organizing the media day and their assistance.