

A Swedish Air Force Tp84 Hercules makes one of several supply trips during the three-week exercise. All images by the author.



Ice Cold in Keflavik

Martin Kaye braved the elements and flew to Keflavik in Iceland for the inaugural fighter meet by Scandinavian air forces

THE ICELAND Air Meet 2014 (IAM 2014) was held from January 31 until February 21 at Keflavik, the only military installation on the island. It brought together participants from NATO member nations Norway and Iceland, and from partner countries Finland and Sweden, to conduct a wide range of air defence-related flying activities. Norway acted as the sponsor nation for Finland and Sweden, which were deploying to Iceland for the first time, controlling their operations, and also provided the training director for the exercise. The Netherlands and the US also participated by providing air-to-air refuelling tanker aircraft operating from their home bases, and a NATO E-3A was involved as well.

At the media briefing it was emphasised that IAM 2014 was



One of the Iceland Coast Guard's Super Pumas takes off on a mission.

a 'training event' as opposed to a 'NATO exercise', the difference being that an exercise is based around a military scenario with operational objectives for the participants, whereas a training event is used to practice tactics and

procedures that can be repeated the following day to ensure lessons are correctly learnt.

From its Combined Air Operations Centre in Uedem, Germany, NATO acted as the overall coordinator for the event. The air meet had four main aims: to

maximise the value of training; to develop NATO and Nordic defence cooperation; to increase NATO interoperability; and to train to Allied Command Europe force standards. Missions trained included deployment, defensive counter air and composite air operations, air-to-air refuelling (AAR), airborne early warning, and search and rescue (SAR).

Two other events occurred during IAM – one was a meeting of the foreign and defence ministers of Iceland, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden to strengthen Nordic defence cooperation and discuss topical foreign and security policy issues, and the other was the deployment of a Norwegian air defence detachment on January 27 to conduct regular NATO peacetime preparedness mission training. Six F-16 aircraft were deployed, which also participated in IAM.



A Royal Norwegian Air Force F-16AM taxis out in the early morning light at Keflavik.

Location: Keflavik, Iceland
 Participants: NATO, Finland, Iceland,
 Netherlands, Sweden, USA

Participants

With no standing armed forces, Iceland's defence and security needs are the responsibility of the Icelandic Coast Guard. Amongst other tasks, it is required to operate the Icelandic Air Defence System (IADS), patrol security zones and participate in exercises and deployments. An example of the latter occurred during IAM, when the Coast Guard's Dash 8 aircraft was deployed to southern Italy as part of European efforts to monitor refugees and immigrants coming from North Africa. Given its strategic location, the key function of the IADS is to maintain a surveillance picture for its allies of its area of responsibility, which stretches as far as Greenland and towards the UK. As well as land-based surveillance radars, surface vessels also contribute to the radar coverage.

The key challenge for the Coast Guard in hosting IAM was to provide the required facilities at Keflavik, which has limited ground support services and hangar space. The participating nations had to bring their own support equipment, keeping it to a minimum to reduce the logistics burden. Other challenges faced were the unpredictable weather at that time of year, consideration of the increased aircraft noise, and the need for awareness of the media spotlight, which was focused on such a significant event for Iceland.

As well as providing the host base, Iceland also contributed its command and reporting centre (CRC), which is located at Keflavik, and two Coast Guard Eurocopter AS332L Super Puma helicopters. These, and the Finnish NH90s, would be vital if any SAR was to be required, given that the majority of the training areas were over the sea.

Nations also brought fighter controllers to work together in the CRC. To make maximum use of the training opportunity,

A Finnish Air Force F-18C taxis into the hardened aircraft shelter complex at Keflavik.



Aircraft participants

Nation	Type	Unit	Home base	Notes
Iceland	2x AS332	Coast Guard	Reykjavik	
Norway	6x F-16	132 AW	Bodo	NATO QRA tasked
Sweden	6x JAS 39	212 Sqn	Luleå	
	1x Tp84	71 Sqn	Sätenäs	AAR configured
Finland	5x F-18	FS 21	Tampere	
	2x NH90	UJR	Utti	
USA	1x KC-135	100 ARW	Mildenhall	Home-based
Netherlands	1x KDC-10	334 Sqn	Eindhoven	Home-based
NATO	1x E-3A	NAEWF	Gellenkirchen	Home-based



Above: Finland also sent along a brace of NH90 helicopters to accompany the five F/A-18 Hornets.
 Below: A Swedish Air Force JAS 39D Gripen holds at the runway threshold while Norwegian F-16s get airborne.

Sweden and Finland rotated their aircrews halfway through the flying phase of the meet.

The exercise

Missions were scheduled at the same time each day, at 1000, 1400 and around 1930 hours. With daylight hours changing during the three-week period the night mission was launched progressively later – from 1915 in the first week to 1945 during the third. The morning mission was typically more than two hours, as this was when AAR was practised; the afternoon mission was typically 1.5 hours. The NATO E-3A was scheduled to be available for six of the missions. The fighter controllers were tasked with producing a recognised air picture and also with ensuring de-confliction with the transatlantic air traffic routing over Iceland.

Half-way through the training event all the participants enthused about the value they were achieving, with only one mission having to be cancelled due to extremely high winds, and with only one or two aircraft sorties lost due to technical reasons.

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