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OPERATION SINDOOR

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CC-150 Polaris: An inconspicuous but vital role



Early morning at a still empty platform, waiting for things to come.

During Exercise Ramstein Flag 2025, flying operations at Leeuwarden AB in the Northern part of The Netherlands attracted lots of spectators. Dozens of jet aircraft taking off and landing every day was a spectacular sight for locals and aviation enthusiasts alike. However the casual observer wouldn't have noticed that other aircraft than fighter jets also played a very important role in the exercise. A Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Airbus CC-150 Polaris tanker aircraft was one of those.

This aircraft was based at Eindhoven AB for the duration of the exercise, some 3,700 miles (5,900 km) from its homebase CFB Borden. Asked why flying such a distance for an exercise was worth the effort, Air Task Force Commander Major Scott Woods explained: "Participating in Ramstein Flag 2025 enhanced the RCAF's ability to operate in high-intensity, large-force tactical air combat scenarios and strengthened our global response capabilities. While most of our exercises take place in Canada or the United States, Ramstein Flag offered a



Some thirsty Swedish and French participants go through refuelling operations alongside the Canadian CC-150 Polaris.

valuable opportunity to operate in a complex, multinational NATO environment.”

Together with the CC-150 the RCAF deployed no less than 35 personnel. Apart from the flying crew these included support personnel from 8 Wing, 437 Transport Squadron at Trenton and Air Battle Managers (ABM) from 22 Wing at CFB North Bay. Intelligence personnel and other support trade such as logisticians were also deployed.

The CC-150 Polaris carried out aerial refueling missions throughout the exercise. Major Woods: “We supported every mission where our capabilities were required, in total offloading over 650,000 pounds of fuel to allied aircraft. The Polaris use drogue refueler, which is compatible with specific aircraft. During the exercise, we refueled Hungarian and Swedish Gripens, Finnish and Spanish F/A-18 Hornets, French Rafales, and German and British Eurofighters.”

As is common in military aviation, before and after every mission an extensive briefing was held. While preparing for this, each crew member had his or her own responsibilities:

–the Aircraft Commander (AC): responsible for the overall execution and safety of the mission;



The CC-150 returning to its temporary home Eindhoven AB.

–the Flight Refuelling Specialist (FRS): responsible for the air-to-air refuelling portion of this mission;

–the First Officer (FO): responsible for flight-specific detail, such as weather, NOTAMS, airport conditions etc.;

–the Load Master (LM): responsible for the safe loading of fuel and also cargo and passengers if applicable.



A Finnish F/A-18 Hornet takes in fuel while the sun sets.

Prior to aircraft engines start the crew met, with each crew member briefing their portion of the mission plan. This provided a detailed overview of the entire mission and allowed for the opportunity to confirm any details with respect to how the mission would be executed. Once the mission had been completed, the crew met again to discuss the overall execution of the mission and raise any points (positive or negative) that were recognised during mission execution.

For the duration of the exercise a large tanker task force was formed by several NATO nations. Next to 437 Squadron's CC-150 this consisted of NATO's own Multinational MRTT Unit (MMU) A330's based at Eindhoven, a Turkish KC-135 temporarily operating from RAF Fairford in the United Kingdom plus British, French, Italian and USAF tankers flying from their respective homebases. The size of the tanker task force underlined the importance of the ability to refuel in flight during large

scale operational missions. This importance is emphasised by the fact that the two Canadian CC-150s that have been converted to tanker aircraft will in the near future be replaced by no less than nine CC-330 Huskies, an Airbus A330-based Multi-Role Tanker Transport (MRTT) jet. But before that happens, Major Woods promised, Europe should be able to see the CC-150 at least once more during an international exercise. He concluded: "Ramstein Flag 2025 was a great experience for all RCAF members involved. The exercise advanced training opportunities in mission planning, execution and operational procedures, and thus contributed toward ensuring seamless integration and interoperability with our NATO allies and partners for the future." ➡

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Photographs provided by the RCAF

During the Second World War, 437 Squadron was formed in the United Kingdom as part of the RCAF. Their first operational mission, flying Dakotas, was towing gliders and hauling cargo as part of operation Market Garden over Arnhem, The Netherlands. The casualties they suffered are buried at Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery containing the largest number of Canadian war dead in the Netherlands. Canadian airmen of multiple squadrons rest in 141 of the graves. Two of them were shot down in 1942, but not discovered until 20 years later. During their stay at Eindhoven AB, the RCAF visited the Groesbeek cemetery. The visit was a deeply emotional experience for all involved and it provided an opportunity to honour and reflect on the sacrifices made by Canadian and Allied forces during the conflict.



Part of the detachment at Groesbeek.