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CER SENIN

Romanian Air Force Magazine
No. 3 (186)
English supplement
www.roaf.ro/cersenin



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PHOTOS: *Romanian Air Force Staff archives, Romanian Air Force Magazine archives and personal photo collections from the* ***F-16*** *community*

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Romanian Air Force Staff
Șoseaua București-Ploiești, km 10,5, district 1, București
E-mail: ***cersenin@roaf.ro***
ISSN 3061 - 3574 ISSN-L 3061 - 3566
B 916.10; C 3146.18

Printed by
"Centrul Tehnic-Editorial al Armatei"

Responsibility for the magazine's typesetting and layout rests entirely with the editorial staff

#WEARENATO

TEN YEARS IN FORMATION

September 29, 2016: The first six F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft, wearing the national roundel, touched down on Romanian soil, opening a decade in which the Romanian Air Force has changed the way it trains, operates, and maintains its fleet, and the way it works alongside Allies.

A DIFFERENT WAY OF OPERATING

The F-16 replaced the MiG-21, but the transition went far beyond the aircraft itself. It brought new requirements across the force, from flight training and maintenance to mission planning, logistics, and cooperation with Allied air forces. Procedures had to become daily practice, and personnel had to adapt to a different operating environment.

That process began before the first aircraft arrived. The first pilots, engineers, and technicians trained in Portugal alongside their Portuguese counterparts, then brought that knowledge home to a system still building its infrastructure, supply chain, and training systems. Communications, safety, planning, and the way units prepared and supported each sortie all had to work together.

TEN YEARS IN SERVICE

What began with a single operational squadron is now expanding toward a three-squadron F-16 fighter force, while the European F-16 Training Centre at Fetești trains Romanian personnel as well as personnel from Allied and partner nations. Romanian F-16s have also flown NATO Air Policing missions in the Baltic States, working under common procedures alongside crews and ground teams from other nations. Interoperability comes from training together, communicating clearly, and meeting the same standards when it counts.

PEOPLE AND HISTORY

For this issue of CER SENIN – Romanian Air Force Magazine, our editorial team worked with members of the F-16 community to document the first decade from several perspectives. Pilots, instructors, mission planners, technicians, and logisticians describe the arrival of the F-16 and what it took to make it part of everyday operations. Our thanks go to the men and women who shared their time and experience with us.

None of this began in 2016. The F-16 community builds on more than a century of Romanian military aviation: the pioneers who first flew military aircraft, the heroes of World War II, and the generations who have flown and maintained the many types of aircraft in the Romanian Air Force inventory. The discipline, professionalism, and technical expertise of those generations shaped the standards the F-16 community inherited.

LOOKING AHEAD

The F-16 remains central to Romania's fighter force as preparations continue for the transition to fifth-generation fighter aircraft, the F-35. New aircraft and systems will bring new demands, but the transition will rely on the practices developed over the past decade. The first ten years laid the foundation. The next ten years will test how well that foundation can be sustained and developed, and how effectively its knowledge and practices can be passed on.

EDITORIAL TEAM

#STRONGERTOGETHER

ROMANIAN FALCONS

Ten Years on NATO's Eastern Flank

For ten years, Romanian F-16 Fighting Falcons have been present on NATO's Eastern Flank, contributing to the Alliance's collective defense and standing alongside Allied air forces when and where they were needed. Through Air Policing missions, multinational exercises, and deployments beyond Romania's borders, the Romanian F-16 community has learned to operate as part of a larger team, under common procedures and shared standards. Over the past decade, Romanian F-16s have become part of daily Allied operations, a visible expression of Romania's commitment to NATO and to the security of its Eastern Flank.

#STRONGERTOGETHER

#WEARENATO



"YOU BEGAN THE JOURNEY. YOU MADE IT REAL"

Ten years have passed since the first F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft arrived in Romania. Looking back, ten years later, that moment may appear to have been the beginning of a story about an aircraft. For those of you who were part of it, it was the beginning of a story about people – about a team that had the courage to learn, adapt and build together.

Before the first F-16s landed at Borcea, the first Romanian pilots, engineers and technicians were preparing in Portugal to transition to the new aircraft, alongside instructors and specialists from the Portuguese Air Force. That was where the foundations were laid for a new way of operating, from pilot conversion and technical personnel training to mastering F-16 procedures and standards. Returning home then meant transferring that experience to our own structures, developing infrastructure, maintenance and logistics, and, gradually, building new generations of pilots and specialists. It was the beginning of a process that would change not only what the Romanian Air Force could do in the air, but also the way its people trained, worked and approached the mission.

It was not an easy road. Infrastructure had to be developed, procedures adapted, logistics systems built and, perhaps most importantly, people trained. There were times when solutions were not always readily available, and periods when patience and perseverance were just as important as professional training. Yet every stage left us with experience, confidence, and lessons that made us better.

The F-16 was not simply another aircraft added to the flight line. It is a multirole platform that changed the way we looked at flying, training and everything surrounding a mission. With it came a change in mindset: greater rigor, greater individual responsibility, a closer link between training and the mission, and a different understanding of teamwork. We had to learn not only how to operate a modern aircraft, but also how we needed to think and work around it.

Over these ten years, the F-16 has become part of the Romanian Air Force's operational life. It has flown international exercises alongside Allied aircraft and carried the Romanian tricolor on NATO Air Policing missions, including in the Baltic States.

There, far from home, you had the opportunity to demonstrate what you had learned here: that professionalism, discipline and trust in a team know no borders. Every exercise, every mission and every deployment has added to our collective experience and strengthened the trust between us and our Allies.

Over these years, much more than a fleet of aircraft has been built around the F-16. Experience, infrastructure, maintenance, training and partnerships have grown alongside it. The European F-16 Training Centre in Fetești is one of the clearest expressions of this journey: a place where the experience gained in Romania is carried forward and shared with Allies and partners.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons of these ten years is precisely this: the F-16 changed not only what we had available in the air, but also how we worked on the ground and in flight.

Performance does not belong to a single category of personnel. It is built together, through respect for each other's work, through discipline, through trust, and through the understanding that every detail matters. A multirole fighter may be capable of performing a wide range of missions, but its true strength lies in the team that prepares, maintains, flies and supports it.

Over these ten years, different generations of military personnel have passed through the same F-16 school. Some of you were there from the beginning and built this capability from the ground up. Others joined along the way and helped carry the capability forward. The youngest are only now beginning their own journey. Yet something remains unchanged across all these generations: the feeling that you are part of the same team and that, when a mission begins, each of you depends on the person beside you.

That continuity is one of the most important achievements of the first decade of the F-16 Fighting Falcon in Romania. What was learned did not remain in cockpits, hangars or manuals. It was passed on. And part of what you received from those who began this journey will be carried forward by those who will fly and work on the aircraft that come after us.

The F-16 is an important step in the Romanian Air Force's journey from the MiG-21 era to the next generation of fighter aviation represented by the fifth-generation fighter, the F-35. But regardless of the aircraft we will operate in the years ahead, what you have built around the F-16 will remain with us: the experience, discipline, camaraderie and trust you have learned to place in one another.

That is why, ten years after that first flight home to Romania, I want to thank every one of you.

The person who prepared the aircraft before takeoff. The one who checked a system one more time. The one who worked in the hangar, on the flight line, in the tower or in the mission planning room. The one who instructed, the one who learned, the one who deployed on mission, and the one who stayed home so that the mission could be accomplished.

Thank you for every day in which you did what had to be done, with professionalism, patience and trust in the person beside you. Thank you for the way you have cared for the aircraft, but, above all, for the way you have cared for one another.

And perhaps, after ten years, it is worth returning to an old aviator's creed – and to one that is personal to me as well:

"He who believes in flight is master of the horizon."

You believed in flight. You believed in yourselves. You believed in your team and trusted what you could build together.

And today, you are masters of the horizon.

The first six aircraft opened the way ten years ago.

You gave them wings.

Let us look ahead with confidence.

Clear skies!

Chief of the Romanian Air Force Staff
Lieutenant General Leonard-Gabriel Baraboi

TEN YEARS IN: BETTER EVERY DAY

The F-16 program began long before the 2000s.. Unfortunately, it became reality only in 2013, with the signing of the purchase agreement between the governments of Romania, Portugal and the United States. I personally signed that agreement, and I knew then that we had moved to a new level of capability. I proposed to the Chief of the Air Force Staff the names of the pilots who would be sent for the initial training. They came back with a different perspective, a different level of training and different results. We had made the transition from an Eastern-style training system to a Western one.
The MiG-21 LanceR helped us enormously. It had been our bridge to another generation of fighter aviation. I followed both the pilots and the technicians throughout their training, and after two years I welcomed them home as they brought the first fourth-generation fighters to Fetești. Today, I can say that I am proud to lead a team that represents some of Romania's finest professional talent.
The first ten years of F-16 operations in Romania have been a success. Ten years of demanding missions, including Air Policing duties, without a single accident, can be summed up in three words: Integrity – Dedication – Tenacity.
I believe that, in recent years, we have demonstrated what we are capable of. Engaging unauthorized drones that enter Romania's national airspace is a clear demonstration of our responsibility for the security of the citizens of this country.
I am certain that we all understand that this program, too, represents a transition.



Three F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft from the 32-aircraft batch acquired by Romania from Norway landed at the 86th Air Base on November 29, 2023. The commander of the 86th Air Base occupied the rear cockpit of the aircraft shown

We are preparing for the F-35. Some of today's pilots and technicians will become the pioneers of the fifth-generation fighter program. We must continue to evolve and contribute to maintaining a strong regional security environment.
Last but not least, I would like to emphasize that people are the most important component of any system. The 86th Air Base is a well-established organization, and its people have always driven progress. That is why we make every effort to honor the legacy of those who came before us. It was in this spirit that the 53rd Fighter Squadron was reactivated.
To command the air base where the F-16 entered service in Romania is both an honor and an immense responsibility.
I see myself as a commander whose role is to prepare the next generation of leaders.
I am confident that I will succeed.

Commander, 86th Air Base
Brigadier General (AF) Iulian Paștilea





READY TODAY. READY EVERY DAY.

The transition from the MiG-21 LanceR to the F-16 was not merely a matter of replacing one aircraft with another; it also meant assuming a new level of responsibility and professional standards. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the most demanding aspects of this transition were not related to changes in aircraft handling, the adaptation of our way of thinking, or integration into a new teamwork environment.
The most important and, at the same time, the most demanding challenge has been, and continues to be, the need to maintain a consistently high level of theoretical knowledge and practical proficiency. For an F-16 pilot, training cannot be regarded as an objective achieved at a particular point in time, but rather as a continuous process requiring rigor, discipline, responsibility, and a permanent commitment to professional development.
The level of proficiency required is even higher because, at any given time, an F-16 pilot must be prepared to perform, professionally and effectively, any mission within the aircraft's multirole employment spectrum, whether air-to-air or air-to-ground. This capability must be maintained regardless of weather conditions, by day or by night, including in the most complex and demanding situations, with the full and effective employment of all available onboard sensors, capabilities, and weapon systems.
In conclusion, the real challenge is not simply knowing how to fly and operate a modern combat aircraft, but being continuously prepared to exploit its full operational potential whenever the mission requires it.

ZORRO



THE F-16: A CATALYST FOR TRANSFORMATION

In the evolution and modernization of a military system, which is often characterized by a degree of conservatism in peacetime, there are certain developments that, once introduced, have the potential to fundamentally change both operational capability and the mindset of its people. The F-16 MLU (Mid-Life Upgrade) weapon system was one such development, addressing the Romanian Air Force's need for modernization in a complex international security environment.

Beginning in the 1990s, as Romania strategically reoriented toward the Euro-Atlantic partnership, the F-16 remained at the forefront of military planners' thinking as a means of establishing a credible air capability for the medium and long term, consistent with the financial constraints of a country facing significant challenges on its path toward post-communist modernization.
The most ambitious plans envisioned replacing the MiG-21 LanceR fleet by around 2005. However, the first serious discussions did not begin until 2007, when, with U.S. support, visits were made to the Lockheed Martin facility in Fort Worth, Texas, giving Romanian pilots and technical teams their first opportunity to see and experience what a fourth-generation fighter platform represented. At the time, the plan called for the acquisition of 24 F-16 Block 52 aircraft, together with another 24 aircraft released from active USAF inventory. The economic and political crises of the late 2000s, however, brought that effort to a halt. The Romanian Air Force was therefore forced to extend MiG-21 LanceR operations indefinitely.

Despite the aircraft's increasingly evident technical limitations, its available support infrastructure and operational experience allowed the fleet to remain in service in sufficient numbers to independently perform the primary peacetime mission: the Permanent Combat Air Service – Air Policing. The lack of a credible medium-term outlook also led to a reduction in the number of flying hours available to pilots, making the regeneration of the fighter pilot force increasingly difficult.
Signs of a growing political and military crisis in the region were already apparent in 2008, following the NATO Summit in Bucharest and the Russian Federation's aggression against Georgia. In the aftermath of the conflict, Russia embarked on a major program of military restructuring and modernization, focused primarily on establishing air and maritime superiority in the Black Sea region through the development of A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) capabilities, with implications for Romania's vital economic interests.
The next opportunity to modernize the Romanian Air Force came from Portugal, whose surplus aircraft had also drawn significant interest from Bulgaria as early as 2012.
The political circumstances in Bucharest and Sofia, together with the efforts of the Romanian Air Force Staff leadership team and the General Directorate for Armaments, ultimately led to the selection of the Romanian option. In spring 2013, the Romanian Government signed a contract for 12 aircraft from Portugal to equip the country's first multirole fighter squadron. Beginning in 2017, a further five aircraft from the same source were delivered under a follow-on contract.
The benefits of the agreement extended well beyond the aircraft themselves. Compared with other options under consideration, the cost covered not only the acquisition but also the initial logistics support package and the training of aircrew and technical personnel. Viewed against previous fighter acquisition and modernization programs, this represented a significant step forward in Romanian military aviation.
The program began immediately. The first pilots and technical teams started training





in 2014, and the initial cadre progressed through an accelerated training cycle. On September 29, 2016, the first six aircraft landed in Romania at the 86th Air Base, Borcea, entering service with the 53rd Fighter Squadron, reactivated after 72 years.
In retrospect, the challenges were considerable. They affected virtually every subsystem of the Romanian Air Force and had an impact well beyond the operational level, reaching higher headquarters as well. This was the Romanian Air Force's first major modernization program since 1990.
The transformation extended across every functional area: from the logistics chain to critical infrastructure; from national aviation regulations to local regulations and procedures; from aircrew and technical training standards to equipment requirements; from maintenance procedures to the need for a high level of English-language proficiency; and from organizational structures and staffing to the complexity of communications and information systems.
The first ten years of F-16 MLU operations in Romania laid the foundation for the transformation of Romanian military aviation into a capable and coherent force, able to transition from third-generation aircraft to a multirole platform and successfully perform missions to defend Romanian and Allied airspace. That force is now expanding at an accelerated pace through the consolidation of the 53rd Fighter Squadron and the reactivation and bringing into operation of two additional fighter squadrons, the 48th at the 71st Air Base in Câmpia Turzii and 58th at the 57th Air Base Mihail Kogălniceanu, equipped with 32 F-16 MLU aircraft acquired from the surplus inventory of the Royal Norwegian Air Force.
The European F-16 Training Centre at the 86th Air Base supports the training requirements of Romanian aircrew and technical personnel, while also providing training for Romania's Allies and international partners, using 18 additional F-16 MLU aircraft previously operated by the Royal Netherlands Air Force.
These have not been ten easy years. Every day has brought a new challenge, placing considerable demands on both personnel and resources. Yet the contribution of the F-16 MLU to Romania's security architecture has been critical, arriving at a decisive moment.
The people and their flying machines have demonstrated that nothing is impossible when standards and procedures are followed to the letter, when flight and ground safety take precedence, and when individual and collective discipline are consistently applied in maintenance facilities and on the flight line. The operating philosophy and the openness to cooperation with NATO Allies enable us to continuously observe, assess and incorporate updated tactics, techniques and procedures, strengthening both human and technical performance.
Looking to the next ten years, the Romanian Air Force will have three operational F-16 MLU fighter squadrons supporting and sustaining the transition to the fifth-generation fighter. This transition will be guided by a well-established, multi-year plan that will maintain the accelerated pace of modernization and further shape Romania's security architecture in response to the challenges of the international political and military environment.

DODO

HOMEWARD, NOSES POINTED SOUTH



On Thursday morning, September 29, 2016, the first six F-16 aircraft assigned to the 53rd Fighter Squadron 'Warhawks' departed 5th Air Base, Monte Real, Portugal, bound for Romania. The two-seat aircraft, tail number 1610, took off at 0700 UTC, marking the arrival of the new multirole fighter in the Romanian Air Force



As they entered Romanian airspace, the first Romanian F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft were escorted by MiG-21 LanceR fighters



The first six F-16 aircraft bearing Romanian roundels in formation over the 86th Air Base



September 29, 2016, 1529 UTC - the first Romanian F-16, tail number 1610, touches down on the runway at the 86th Air Base, Borcea

September 29, 2016, began very early.
It was still dark when the first two F-16s bearing Romanian roundels taxied out at Monte Real Air Base 5 in Portugal, bound for home. Two more pairs followed. Many of our former colleagues had gathered at Monte Real, arriving well before dawn to see us off. They seemed proud of what they had helped make of us over the previous two years. Some of them would later accompany us to Romania.
We took off and flew with the sun in our eyes until well into the day, all the way to the edge of Spain. The skies were clear, so we did a little geography of our own – mountains and coastlines we had previously seen only in movies. All six of us landed at Aviano, restored the aircraft to full mission capability, and continued toward Borcea. I expected us to encounter technical problems along the way, as we had already become accustomed to, but on September 29 all six aircraft did exactly what they were supposed to do. A technical problem with even one of them would have complicated things considerably.
Once we entered Romanian airspace, we were accompanied for a while by the fighters on alert at Câmpia Turzii, and later by those from Mihail Kogălniceanu.
At Borcea, as we crossed the runway, we formed a six-ship formation – the formation we now see in so many photographs. We all landed safely on Runway 18, taxied clear and shut down, noses pointed south. Flags hung from the canopies, families, children, colleagues, a hot meal and a little champagne.
We were home.
That was when I truly realized that we had lived through an important day in the history of the Romanian Air Force. The F-16 I had seen in magazines as a child had finally arrived in Romania.
That day, the 53rd Fighter Squadron "Warhawks" came home – or perhaps something even greater came home with it: the foundation of what would become Romania's F-16 fleet. Not just aircraft, but people. A small team, but a team. Ten years later, I still remember every one of them, and I am proud of them all.
On September 29, 2016, the project that had begun two years earlier continued at Borcea. It was a project undertaken in a completely different environment, with very different objectives from those in Portugal. In the years that followed, there were setbacks and moments of doubt, but in the end it became reality. It became the first operational F-16 squadron and, later, a Romanian F-16 fleet that now intercepts unauthorized drones and helps secure Romania's airspace on NATO's Eastern Flank.
Ten years on, we are still on that journey – more coherent, more experienced, but facing challenges that are greater and more diverse.
Happy birthday, F-16!

MIKI – the first pilot to land a Romanian F-16 at the 86th Air Base



"I was in the rear cockpit of the first F-16 aircraft to arrive in Romania, with the Romanian tricolor carried in the rear seat. It was a moment I had waited a long time for, not simply because a new type of aircraft was entering Romanian Air Force service, but because I saw it as the beginning of a transformation the Romanian Air Force had been preparing for over many years.
I knew then that we were witnessing more than the arrival of a number of aircraft. We were witnessing the birth of a capability that would fundamentally change the way Romania defended its airspace.
Ten years later, looking at the three operational squadrons, the European F-16 Training Centre at Fetești, and the generations of pilots, mission planners and technicians trained over this period, I can say that the decision to take this path has proven its value.
What was a bold step in 2016 has become an established capability on NATO's Eastern Flank. The Romanian F-16 is no longer a capability under development. It is one that our Allies can rely on and, at the same time, the stepping stone toward our transition to the fifth-generation fighter, the F-35.
I want to thank everyone who made this journey possible – from the first detachment that departed for training in Portugal to those who are carrying this legacy forward today.
Clear skies for the years ahead!"

Lieutenant General (Ret.) Laurian Anastasof
Chief of the Romanian Air Force Staff in 2016

"WE REPRESENT ROMANIA. AND WE REPRESENT IT WELL!"



As part of NATO's collective defense efforts, Romania contributed F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft to the Baltic Air Policing mission in 2023, 2025 and 2026

The Air Policing mission in the Baltic States was no longer new to us. In 2026, it was Romania's third F-16 deployment to the Baltic Air Policing mission, following previous F-16 deployments in 2023 and 2025, so we already had a fairly clear picture of the framework in which we would operate and the missions we were likely to perform.
Baltic airspace offers excellent training opportunities and, of course, there is always the possibility of intercepting Russian military aircraft during Air Policing missions.
For us, missions outside the country are challenging from several perspectives, particularly logistics on the ground and procedures in the air.
Integration with other nations also brings a new element at the beginning of a deployment.
As for defending the airspace of an allied state, it is clearly defined in various documents. It is essential to understand what we can do there, what our mission is, and the limits within which we must operate.
Every interaction we have there represents Romania, and that requires us to perform to the highest standard.
Mission accomplishment is the end state, but before that point we represent Romania from the moment we first make contact with the host nation until we take off for home!
Perceptions are formed in every interaction, from coordination calls to the briefing for combined flights and the debrief after the mission.
The fact is that in everything we do there, we represent Romania. And we represent it well!

HANNIBAL









F-16 Fighting Falcon

10 YEARS

ROMANIAN FALCONS

2016-2026

#STRONGERTOGETHER

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#STRONGERTOGETHER















#WEARENATO



















BEGINNING MY F-16 JOURNEY

For me, the F-16 is not just an aircraft I dreamed of flying. It represents a responsibility I am only now beginning to discover. I am at the start of my journey on this platform, and perhaps that is why I look with even greater respect at those who, ten years ago, built what we are receiving today.
When you climb into an F-16 cockpit, you do not think only about the aircraft's performance. You think about the people who learned before you, the hours of training, the instructors, the squadron teammates, and everyone who makes it possible for the aircraft to get safely into the air. You understand that you are not starting from zero. You receive experience built by others, and you have a duty to carry it forward.
Every flight is another opportunity to learn. Every mission, every training sortie, and every conversation with a more experienced colleague adds something to the pilot I am becoming. The F-16 requires you to be attentive, disciplined, and curious. It requires you to understand what you are doing, not simply execute it. And it constantly reminds you that behind every flight there is an entire team.
I may not yet have the experience of those who began the F-16 story in Romania. But I have the privilege of continuing what they started. That motivates me. I know that one day it will be my turn to pass on what I have learned.
The first steps as an F-16 pilot mean confidence, hard work, and the desire to become a better pilot every day. And even though I am at the beginning, I already know one thing: this flight does not belong to me alone. I receive it from those who came before me, and I have the responsibility to carry it forward.

ELSA



THE INSTRUCTOR BEYOND THE MANUAL

Procedures and techniques are described in combat employment manuals at a level accessible to any pilot with basic training; the challenge is not "reading" them, but turning them into reflexes that become part of the F-16 pilot's very being.
This transformation can happen only through mindset, itself built on two pillars: innate psychological traits and a willingness to sustain effort under stress, fueled by a passion for a unique profession.

As an instructor, the most difficult task is to create a controlled-stress training environment: to keep pushing the student beyond his or her limits without diminishing the passion. At the same time, you have to show the student "the light at the end of the tunnel" - the moment when the enjoyment of flying overtakes the stress generated by the multitude of tasks in the cockpit, and passion is rewarded by the confidence that any mission can be accomplished safely and effectively.
Students differ from their instructors by generation, and they also differ from one another. That is why the instructor's essential ability is to understand these differences and make the most of each student's strengths, transforming a young enthusiast into a pilot who can master both themselves and the aircraft.

MIȚĂ



YOUNG IN AGE, MATURE IN STANDARDS



The F-16 still demands the same fundamental responsibilities and obligations it required from the beginning. The aircraft is a single-seat, multirole fighter; you are the pilot-in-command - the final authority for operating the aircraft safely; everything depends on you.
Core responsibilities:
- Mission planning and preparation.
- Mission review, intelligence, weather, threats, fuel requirements, maps, and takeoff/landing data; from mission planning through briefing and debriefing, each phase should contribute to continuous development and improved flight performance.
- Aircraft inspection, both on the ground and in flight, continues to be based on checklists.
- Flight operations and maximizing aircraft performance - you continue to execute the full range of F-16 missions: air superiority/ intercept, combat air patrol, close air support, interdiction, SEAD (Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses), FAC(A) (Forward Air Controller, Airborne), and whatever else you and your squadron are tasked to perform; you maintain situational awareness at all times and make sound decisions when procedures do not cover every situation.
- Formation leadership and compliance with FL/WG contracts - as a flight lead, you establish, brief, execute, and debrief the roles and contracts for each member of the formation; the flight lead retains overall responsibility for the formation's actions; you never assign tasks that exceed people's capacity without relinquishing your basic responsibilities; immediately report if you cannot perform your own tasks.
- Training and combat readiness - you maintain Combat Mission Ready status, or equivalent, through continuous training; remain current in all required events, maintain your required currencies, and fly only missions for which you are trained, current, and qualified; lead or supervise the training of other crew members and help maintain the squadron's operational readiness; additional squadron duties often arise, including tactics and weapons, safety, standardization, scheduling, or planning.
- Flight safety - the pilot-in-command is responsible for the aircraft; wear the anti-G suit, comply with altitude and maneuver limits, follow emergency procedures, and use your best judgment when regulations do not provide an answer; mission accomplishment never takes precedence over flight safety.
The enduring reality you pass on: the F-16 is a very high-workload aircraft, and you are alone in the cockpit, managing the fight, systems, radios, and threats simultaneously; physical and mental readiness is non-negotiable (G-tolerance, decision-making under stress, attention to detail); first and foremost, you are a fighter pilot, and only you have the ability to get the aircraft clear of the danger area and bring it home; the aircraft may receive upgrades, new weapons, or new sensors over the next decade, but the fundamental responsibility does not change: plan thoroughly, fly precisely, employ effectively, and stay alive to do it again.
This is the standard. Fly the aircraft the way it was meant to be flown, take care of your formation, and never forget that the final authority - and the final responsibility - rests with you, in that ejection seat.

TWEEK



FROM TEAM TO FAMILY

The squadron brings together highly trained people you can trust. For us, teamwork, a shared vision, and the drive to perform are essential. The squadron brings together professionals from pilots to aircraft technicians, mission planners, and logistics personnel - a team in which everyone knows exactly what their role is, while the constant exchange of experience and high professional standards turn this group into a high-performing team.
In aviation, absolute trust is vital: pilots place their lives in the hands of technicians and teammates. Without this deep bond, missions fail and the team cannot operate safely. This creates a strong bond based on trust, courage, and dedication that turns a military structure into an elite community and, ultimately, a family.

OSTRICH



HARD AT THE START. A FORCE TODAY



I clearly remember the moment when I left for Portugal for training. I was talking with General Anastasof about what transitioning to the F-16 meant, and I told him that, if I were selected, I was ready to go wherever I was needed - as long as I could take my family with me. I was selected and I left. The thought I started with was simple: do everything within my power to ensure Romania emerged stronger from the program, to show that Romanian pilots were on par with their Western counterparts.
The transition to a different flight philosophy was not difficult in itself - the personal standard I set for myself was what kept me pushing. I studied continuously, precisely to prove that we could build experience in a short time and meet the requirements of the training program Portugal had prepared for us.
When I put the wheels down at Borcea, I was proud. I do not get emotional easily, but I truly felt it then. It was a special moment in my career as a pilot, but also for the Romanian Air Force and the Romanian Armed Forces. The entire base personnel was waiting for us, and General Anastasof greeted each of us and told us something I have never forgotten: until now it has been easy, but from this point on we have to show that we are becoming a force within NATO. It was hard at first. But we did not give up - not those from my generation who trained in Portugal, nor those who joined later through training in the United States or directly within the squadron. I believe we achieved the objectives we set for ourselves back then.
Today, our squadron also has pilots from the second F-16 generation - for me, the first was the one formed in Portugal. I see them as committed, conscientious, and determined, perhaps a little more pragmatic than we were at the time; I was ready to fly to the moon if I had been asked. But I am convinced they will take up the handoff and carry forward the level of training in the F-16 squadrons. Starting in 2014, with the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, we all understood that our position within NATO was very important. I would not say that we treated the missions differently from then on, but something changed in how we viewed training - knowing that the way we trained would be put into practice exactly when the country needed us, when our presence truly mattered.
Joint training with NATO partners was essential to this journey. We flew close air support missions alongside Belgian F-16s or French Mirages, and we hosted detachments from the United Kingdom and Türkiye for enhanced Air Policing missions. All of this expanded our knowledge and helped us continuously update our flight techniques and procedures. We proved to ourselves, but also to our partners, that interoperability is not just a phrase - it is a reality put into practice every day.
In 2019, we conducted our first Air Policing mission under national command. It was another turning point: proof that everything we had built since 2016 - training, discipline, and relationships with our allies - was becoming a real capability to defend our airspace.

TATOO



F-16 LOGISTICS: ANTICIPATION, TRACEABILITY AND TRUST

When we talk about logistics for the MiG-21 LanceR, we are talking about a system built around an aircraft known for decades, with parts, procedures, and supply flows refined through decades of operations. Everything was, in a way, predictable. We knew exactly what we needed, where it came from, and how long it would take to arrive. The F-16 radically changed that picture.
The first major difference was the scale of the system. We were no longer talking about an isolated national logistics system, but one integrated into an international network of suppliers, standards, and NATO procedures. An F-16 spare part does not necessarily come from a warehouse in-country; it may move through a supply chain spanning several states, with technical documentation in English, specific codes, and certified quality requirements at every step. We learned to work with computerized part-tracking systems, medium- and long-term planning, and inventory accuracy that the old system did not require in the same way.
The second change, perhaps more important than the technical one, was in mindset. With the MiG-21, improvisation and local solutions were sometimes part of how we handled an urgent problem. With the F-16, every part, every maintenance procedure, and every logistics decision is directly tied to flight safety and maintaining the manufacturer's warranty. There is no room for "good enough" solutions - everything must be documented, traceable, and compliant with standards.
The hardest adaptation for my team was, I believe, the change in pace. With the F-16, logistics planning can no longer be reactive. We have to anticipate needs months in advance, coordinate parts availability with flight schedules, scheduled maintenance deadlines, and external supplier capacity. We moved from a system in which we solved the problem after it appeared to one in which we prevent the problem before it happens.
The results, however, match the effort. Today we have a functioning logistics system for three squadrons, capable of supporting both Air Policing missions and participation in international exercises without major interruptions to operational capability. We have built strong relationships with partners in Portugal, Norway, and the Netherlands, and our personnel have gained experience we did not have ten years ago.
If I had to sum up what I learned, I would say that F-16 logistics is measured not only in parts delivered on time, but in the confidence we give pilots that the aircraft they fly is prepared exactly as it should be, every time. That is, in the end, the true mission of logistics: to be invisible when everything is working well.

Emilian Manoliu







COOPERATION BEFORE TECHNOLOGY









Coming from MiG-21 LanceR operations, we experienced the F-16 Fighting Falcon as a major technological leap - from the differences between the two platforms to the new maintenance concept.
Preparing the first aircraft for flight was full of challenges, not so much because of the maintenance process itself, but because we needed to find the best ways to cooperate and coordinate with all units and departments involved in the activities required to prepare the aircraft for flight.
The operating process, regardless of platform, has always been carried out with the highest level of responsibility, because you know that the pilot's life and the success of the mission depend on you.

COJI





THE MISSION STARTS BEFORE TAKEOFF

Before an F-16 even taxis onto the runway, every mission is already underway.
In the Mission Planning Office of the 53rd Fighter Squadron, we prepare the flight documentation, routes, and all the elements that must be coordinated before takeoff. We use aircraft-specific software and must always be ready for change. Weather can change, the schedule can change, and the mission must be adapted immediately.
For me, the most rewarding part is seeing the aircraft take off and knowing that, in some way, I contributed to that flight. I am not in the cockpit, but my work gets there. And the moment the aircraft leaves the runway shows you better than anything else that, in a squadron, the mission belongs to an entire team.
My first international mission was one of the experiences that confirmed for me how much preparation matters and how quickly you have to turn what you have learned into practical work.
It was an experience like no other!
What makes this job rewarding? The certainty that every detail matters, and when you see the aircraft taking off, you know your work takes off with it.

Andreea Tănase

THE COMMON LANGUAGE OF MAINTENANCE

Joining the F-16 Technical Coordination Group (F-16 TCG) was the first step toward standardized logistics. Since 2016, Romania has participated in TCG Worldwide Review conferences, where governments, armed forces, and the aerospace industry discuss fleet operation, safety, and modernization.
The group's online platform accelerated knowledge sharing and created professional relationships across cultural and language barriers - colleagues from other countries gradually became a second family.
Fleet management was digitized, and cross-servicing became an everyday reality: aircraft from a Portuguese detachment that landed at Borcea were maintained by Romanian and Portuguese technicians alike at the beginning of the cooperation. The relationships we built then continue today, almost ten years later.
Interoperability also brought a change in language: the international technical vocabulary, based on English, became the common language for maintenance procedures - from Technical Orders (TOs) and FMS (Foreign Military Sales) processes to avionics systems. It is not a matter of preference, but a safety requirement: a mixed team must communicate without ambiguity during critical interventions.
The first shootdown of a drone by a Romanian F-16 was, technically, a validation of maintenance standards, but it was also a moment carrying emotional weight because of the congratulations from our partners.
Logistics moved to life-cycle performance management through FMS and Performance-Based Logistics (PBL).
Ground infrastructure was adapted to support a lean workflow: hangars designed for rapid towing and easy access to mobile power, compressed-air, and hydraulic service stands.
Ten years later, the result is not only about technology: it is a flexible, digitized logistics system, supported by human capital shaped through years of direct cooperation with allies.

Roxana Anton









EXPERIENCE IS LEARNED. THE CRAFT IS PASSED ON

An important aspect of the F-16 program's success is maintaining and sharing the knowledge gained in Portugal, as well as the workflow learned there, which was far more standardized and dynamic than the one we knew up to that point. Logistics and maintenance systems, as well as technical training, are still influenced by the old model that remained in place until the F-16 platform entered service.

We have to be role models in guiding the young military technicians arriving from the Air Force NCO school at Boboc, and eliminate the old mindset that the trade is something you "steal" rather than learn. We follow the principle that experienced personnel must be mentors, open to others, and equipped with the teaching skills needed in their relationship with newcomers.

Gimi Obaciu

A LEGACY CARRIED FORWARD

It was not the systems or the technical characteristics of the aircraft that were hardest to learn and absorb, but the change the F-16 brought to the way we approached our work. It is a platform that forces you to look differently at the entire activity surrounding the aircraft: preparation for flight, compliance with procedures, maintenance, discipline, responsibility, and, above all, the relationship between the people who make up the team. For us, those who had the chance and the honor to train in Portugal, the experience began there, alongside Portuguese specialists who already had years of F-16 operations behind them. We had a lot to learn from them, not only about the aircraft and maintenance procedures, but about a way of working built through experience and high standards.

Returning home meant taking on another responsibility: carrying forward what we had received. We had to share that experience with colleagues who had not had the opportunity to attend the courses in Portugal and build the same shared professional standards together. It was not always easy. Any change takes time, and a new way of working becomes ingrained through patience, example, and trust.

The F-16 taught us to be more rigorous, more attentive to every detail, and more aware of the responsibility we have toward one another.

For me, perhaps the most rewarding part of these ten years is that what we learned at the beginning did not remain with those of us who went to Portugal. It was passed on, person to person, from one generation to the next. And today, looking back, I believe that is the true measure of an experience: not how much you learned yourself, but how much of what you learned you managed to leave to those who come after you.

Dragoș Vodă (Ret.)



WHEN PRECISION BECOMES RESPONSIBILITY

The turning point did not happen in classrooms, but during the first months of practical training. At the beginning, each of us was focused on absorbing the strict procedures taught by the instructors and trying not to make mistakes. But when we had to prepare the aircraft for flight, load them with different types of munitions day or night, correct our first malfunction, and conduct our first live-fire training, all of these experiences contributed to forming the team we are today: a responsible, determined team capable of completing any mission assigned to us. Working with explosives, missiles, and munitions leaves zero room for error. A careless mistake can cost human lives, which is why teamwork and strict adherence to procedures are vital.

The transition from the MiG-21 LanceR to the F-16 means less brute physical effort, but it certainly brings much greater responsibility when it comes to attention to digital systems and technical details, strict safety protocols, and the operation of an expanded range of smart weapons. Being a weapons loader on the flight line may not be the easiest job because it involves intense physical demands, an unpredictable schedule, and constant pressure. But if you love what you do, that fast-paced environment gives you an adrenaline rush that no desk job can match, making every day spent on the flight line a unique and vibrant experience. Performance is not determined by gender, but by character!

Nicoleta Grama



FROM PROCEDURE TO TRUST

The F-16 brought a completely different maintenance philosophy from what we knew before, and I believe that this is exactly where the most important mindset change took place. Procedures designed on the basis of experience were replaced by a clearly documented system in which every step has a precise logic, even when a malfunction is complex. This change strengthened the conviction I have had since high school: the F-16 is the necessary step toward the F-35, and the maintenance we practice now is preparing us exactly for that.

Adelin Marcel Leahu



TRUST IS BUILT WHEN IT MATTERS

We had the opportunity to take part in NATO exercises in other countries, and every time, cooperation with partners operating the same aircraft proved essential. There were moments when we encountered malfunctions that, because we were still at the beginning of our journey, we could not identify on our own. We worked with allied technicians and managed to resolve every problem that arose. These experiences showed me that, beyond the aircraft itself, there is an extended technical community with common standards and procedures, regardless of which national uniform they wear. Trust is built exactly there, at the moment when you ask for help and receive an answer.

Alexandru Moroșan



NO ONE IS LEFT ALONE WITH A DECISION

I arrived at the 48th Fighter Squadron after two years of school, joining a team that already had experience operating the F-16. The more experienced colleagues never simply told me what not to do; they showed me, even when I made mistakes, and I learned from what I had done. We work in teams of two around the aircraft for safety purposes - I check one part, the other person checks it too, and we cross-check each other's work. From the experienced personnel I received a way of working in which no one is ever left alone with a decision. What do I want to add? The same patience, when my turn comes to show someone younger how it is done.

Răzvan Mihai Nica



YOUR SIGNATURE IS THE GUARANTEE OF A SAFE RETURN

Follow procedures to the letter and never underestimate the details, because with the F-16 there is no such thing as "good enough." Here is what we mean:
- The TO (Technical Order) is your "bible" - no matter how many times you have performed an operation, open the manual; human memory can fail and monotony can set in, but written procedures do not.
- FOD (Foreign Object Damage) culture - a simple foreign object left in the cockpit or dropped near the engine on the departure runway can destroy a multimillion-dollar aircraft and put the pilot's life at risk.
You have entered an elite community of technicians; be proud of it, stay curious, responsible, and well-educated, learn every day from those with greater seniority, and never forget that your signature in the aircraft logbook is the guarantee that the pilot will return safely to the ground.

Nicușor Micu











F-16
Fighting
Falcon