

RAF Lossiemouth – An Irreplaceable Asset

RAF Lossiemouth is the largest and busiest fast jet base in the Royal Air Force and is the most capable military airbase in northern Europe.

No other domestic or neighbouring bases in northern Europe come close to matching the mixture of aircraft numbers, multiple runways, base infrastructure or training capability at RAF Lossiemouth.

The airbase is the only working facility that has been identified as a potential base for commercial space flight in the United Kingdom.

RAF Lossiemouth, which was recently rated by the Royal Air Force as the most capable home for the next generation of fast jets, is the only UK base in direct flight range from key Nordic bases.

RAF Lossiemouth is currently home to 3 squadrons of Tornado GR4 aircraft and 1 Sea King Helicopter Flight (Search and Rescue).

At over 1100 acres and with over 600 buildings, RAF Lossiemouth is a large air station with tremendous capacity.

The base facilities are the most comprehensive in northern Europe, including:

- 2 fully operational runways with arrestor cables.
- 2 state-of-the-art Tornado GR4 simulators
- Brand new combined Mess being built for Senior NCOs and Junior Ranks - due to open spring 2012.
- Shooting Range
- Bespoke accommodation for Search and Rescue Flight
- Dental Centre
- Rehab Physio Section

84 aircraft can be accommodated in more than 5 hangers in addition to 76 outside aircraft parking slots.

The airbase consists of three wings:

Base Support Wing

Providing comprehensive administrative support, enhancing the Station's provision of combat capability for expeditionary operations worldwide.

Operations Wing

Enhancing deployability and operational effectiveness by providing valuable support in UK and overseas, together with focused training and quality airfield facilities, in order to improve the expeditionary capabilities of everyone at RAF Lossiemouth.

Forward Support Wing

Providing efficient logistics support to expeditionary Operations worldwide

Other units:

No 5 Force Protection Wing Headquarters

Force Protection is the process which aims to conserve the fighting potential of the deployed force by countering the wider threat to all its elements from adversaries, both natural and human hazards, as well as fratricide.

51 Sqn RAF Regiment

51 Squadron RAF Regiment is a field squadron of the RAF Regiment in the Royal Air Force. Its mission is protection of RAF bases from ground attack.

2622 (Highland) Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force

The Squadron's role is to provide a sustainment capability to the regular Royal Air Force Regiment Field Squadrons

Operational Advantages

RAF Lossiemouth has considerable operational advantages over other parts of the UK including:

- the low population levels in surrounding countryside and major weapons ranges in close proximity;
- low civil air traffic levels in typical operational areas;
- excellent weather throughout the year;
- very low incidence of bird strikes, important for all single engine aircraft; and

- excellent control and command facilities including powerful area radar, terrain-free approaches and close to the settlements of Elgin and Forres, but with flight patterns avoiding them completely.

These hugely valuable advantages helped inform an MoD study in 2005 which concluded that Lossiemouth was the best location to base the new generation of fast jets. The MoD at the time emphasized the decision had been taken 'because it [Lossiemouth] provided excellent access to training areas, modern facilities and was "most cost effective."' This conclusion was reached after a detailed study comparing eight RAF bases across the UK.

Proximity to changing northern strategic interests

The strategic challenges in the High North and Arctic are a growing priority for the UK and neighbouring nations such as Norway and Denmark as well as the United States, Canada and the Russian Federation. Defence cooperation with neighbours such as Norway is being pursued by the UK government, including the Joint Combat Aircraft/F35. The closest RAF airbase to Norwegian bases shortlisted for the F35 is RAF Lossiemouth. Defence Secretary Liam Fox recently told a Scandinavian defence Ministers that the UK wants "to deepen bilateral and multilateral relationships with key regional partners" and address the challenges of the High North and Arctic.

Training

RAF Lossiemouth is immediately adjacent to prime training facilities. In particular, military low flying is usually conducted in Visual Meteorological Conditions when pilots are able to maintain a good visual lookout. However, in order to be prepared for any eventuality, it is essential that military pilots train at low level in all weather conditions. In the interest of flight safety, a Restricted Area is established in the Scottish Highlands for this special activity. RAF Lossiemouth is also close to key ranges and live-firing facilities at Garvie Island and Tain ranges, which are the best in the country.

A number of nations take advantage of the world-class low flying that Scotland offers, including Nordic countries and regularly, UK military aircraft (Hawks from RAF Leeming and RAF Valley, Tucanos from RAF Linton-on-Ouse). Without an Air Base in the north of Scotland the ability of these aircraft to make use of the low flying system in Scotland would be significantly reduced, perhaps impossible in the case of Nordic countries, as there would be nowhere to refuel on the ground.

For over 15 years the RAF Air Warfare Centre (AWC) has run bespoke training exercises in Scotland - usually two per annum - by way of the 'Combined Qualified Weapons Instructor Course' and 'Tactical Leadership Training'. Because of the

tactical expertise offered by AWC staff, including the quality of scenarios per mission flown, these exercises are regarded as very high grade by comparison to other NATO exercises.

Search and Rescue

Lossiemouth is adjacent to some of the most challenging training terrain in Europe. The Search and Rescue (SAR) facility based at the RAF base, acts as a critical support function to the numerous volunteer mountain rescue teams operating across the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

The primary role of SAR is the recovery of downed military aviators, but in peacetime its aircraft are available all year round for use in civilian distress incidents.

The RAF operates Sea King rescue helicopters of 202 Squadron from RAF Lossiemouth and can also call upon the services of the RAF Mountain Rescue Team currently based at RAF Kinloss and could be relocated to RAF Lossiemouth.

Weather

Although Scotland can suffer extreme weather conditions from the Atlantic and Polar regions, Lossiemouth has a favourable micro climate which benefits from being to the lee of western mountain ranges. Also, its close proximity to the sea reduces the incidence of heavy snow which may persist only a few miles inland. Lossiemouth does not experience the same amount of morning fog as other bases which can prohibit flying and Lossiemouth experiences more days with greater visibility, an average higher wind and less fog and snow than other bases in the UK but it can be wetter and cooler.

Domestic factors

Quality of life for service personnel, their spouses and dependents in RAF Lossiemouth is excellent, especially with regard to outdoor pursuits. The high quality of public services in the area, particularly schools and hospitals, are of obvious benefit to RAF personnel and their dependents.

Conclusion

RAF Lossiemouth is the most capable military airbase in northern Europe and is an irreplaceable asset beyond compare. Its wide range of facilities and capacity are matched by unrivalled operational advantages including proximity to strategic interests, world-class training, search and rescue cover, weather conditions and domestic factors for service personnel.

