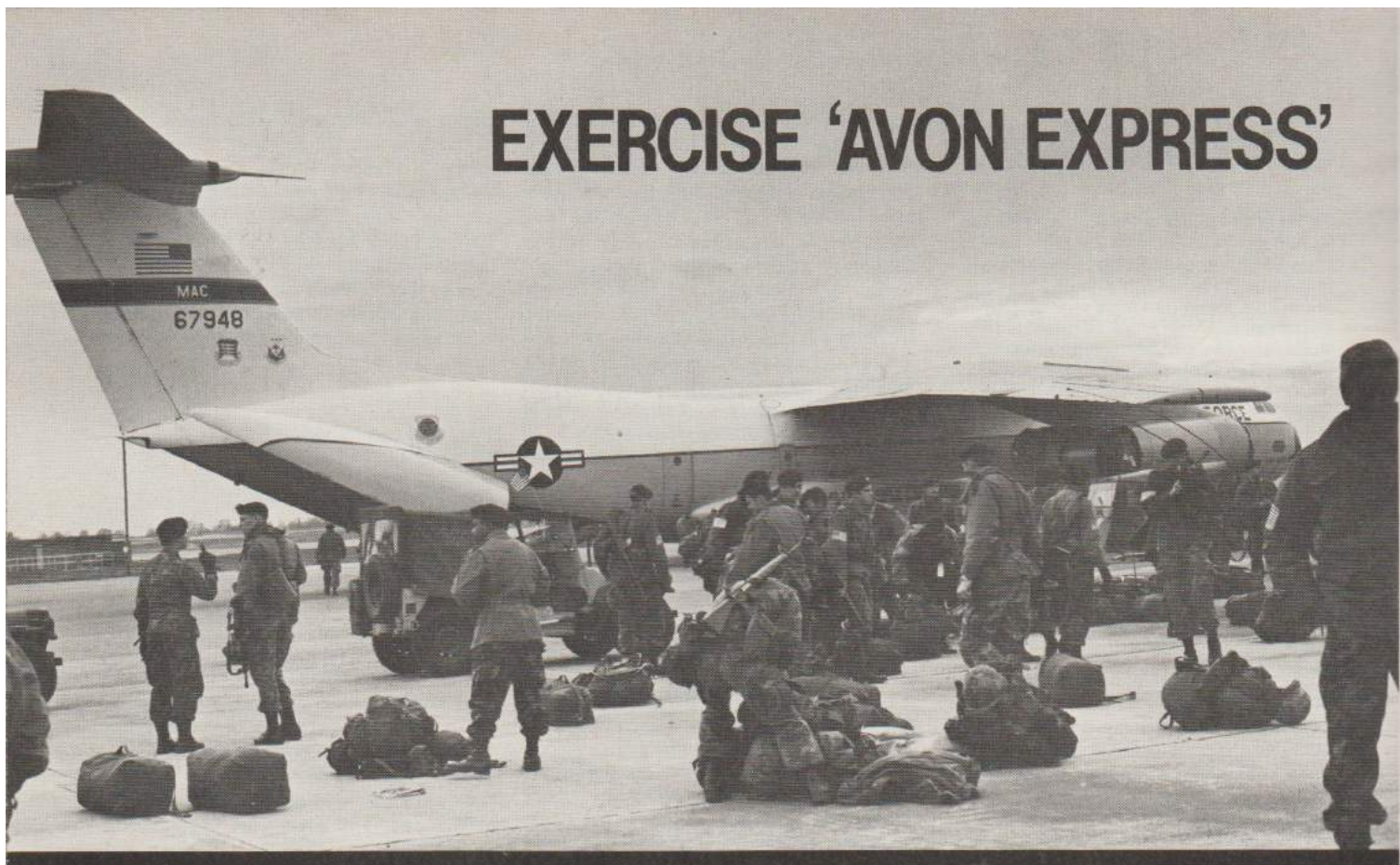


EXERCISE 'AVON EXPRESS'



NATO tests deployment of the ACE Mobile Force in Southern England

Photo report by
Inter-Air Press

Between 9 November-1 December last year there was a major increase in NATO air activity over Southern England associated with a full field exercise staged by the Allied Command Europe (ACE) Mobile Force on Salisbury Plain. The exercise, code-named 'Avon Express', tested the ability of the multinational AMF to deploy rapidly to a designated area on a combat ready basis. The significance of the AMF as a deterrent force lies in its capability to mount such operations as may be required by NATO to demonstrate the Alliance's defensive resolve throughout the NATO area. Particularly relevant to the AMF's task are NATO's northern and southern flanks at either end of the line between West and East Europe, and it is to these extremities of the NATO area — Northern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean — that the AMF should be capable of being airlifted at short notice.

Participating in 'Avon Express' were AMF units which would be deployed in





an actual crisis to NATO's southern flank; ideally the exercise would have been held in Southern Europe but political, logistical and economic factors among the nations involved prevented this — hence the NATO acceptance of the UK's offer to stage the exercise in the south of England.

The 'airhead' for the AMF deployment was RAF Fairford, Glos, to which 4,000 troops, 700 vehicles, 250 trailers and two helicopters were airlifted in by RAF, USAF, BAF, GAF and Italian AF transport aircraft in 300 sorties.

Seen on these pages and page 94 is some of the Allied air transport activity which took place at RAF Fairford in late-November.

Facing page, top: Troops and vehicles of the US 509th Infantry Battalion inbound from Aviano, Italy, having just 'de-planed' from a C-141 Starlifter of the 438th MAW.

Centre and bottom: C-5A Galaxy, 00467, of the 436th MAW was used during the initial stages of the airlift to transport heavy equipment into the exercise area.

This page, top: The quick turnaround of aircraft on their arrival at Fairford is evident here with vehicles being unloaded 'at the double' from a C-141.

Centre: During the operational turnarounds, the C-141 were kept with engines running and thrust reverser buckets out (also seen in above photo).

Left: GAF Transall 51 + 15 of LTG61 taxis past a Belgian Hercules on its way to the runway.





Top: Belgian Air Force C-130H Hercules, CH-07, of No 15 Wing unloading at Fairford. Typical C-130 loads on the sorties from Brussels were 30 troops and three vehicles.

Centre left: Closer view of some of the equipment brought in by the BAF, in this case towed artillery leaving C-130H CH-10. The vehicles were driven off the apron to a holding area before proceeding in convoy to the exercise location.

Centre right. All-black finished UH-1H, 73-22079, which flew in Maj-Gen Alexander M. Weyand US Army — the Commander AMF (Land).

Left: Scout AH1 helicopter carrying 'neutral' white cross on an overall black cabin area was used by the Exercise Director, Lt-Gen Sir Peter Hudson, Depy C-in-C, UK Land Forces.



**Photos this page by
Peter R. March &
Austin J. Brown**

Photos on this page illustrate some of the ancillary air power which took part on the AMF ('friendly') and opposition ('enemy') sides of Exercise 'Avon Express'.

Top: F-4D Phantoms of the 81st TFW provided air support for the AMF: this example, 66-735 from the 91st TFS, is seen at Lyneham complete with ECM pod, 'smart bomb' (port inner pylon) and TV-guided Mk 84 HOBOS round (starboard inner pylon). *Peter R. March*

Above left: Reworked fin on Canberra PR9 of 39 Squadron which participated on the 'enemy' side; the aircraft features a new tailcone, fin-mounted radar, a revised navigation system and IRLS (infra-red linescan). *Peter R. March*

Above right: Supporting the AMF were RAF Harriers, shown here is a GR3 of No 233 OCU, (Photo: *Peter R. March*) and ...

Centre: ... Italian AF RF-104Gs of 28 Gruppo, seen on the flight line at Yeovilton. *Austin J. Brown*

Bottom: Also at Yeovilton, but part of the opposition, were OV-10 Broncos of USAFE's 601st TCW from Sembach AB, Germany. *Austin J. Brown*