



Ex MAPLE FLAG

Testing interoperability at Cold Lake Air Weapons Range

Exercise MAPLE FLAG, which takes place this year from May 15 to June 24, allows Canadian Air Force crews to test their interoperability with American and Allied fighter crews over what is arguably the most unrestricted airspace in the world—the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range. Lieutenant Sonia Dumouchel-Connock takes an inside look at the range and what it has to offer.

4 WING COLD LAKE — Described by Canadian and allied fighter pilots as “the world’s largest Hollywood set”, the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range (CLAWR) is the place to go to conduct air combat training.

Covering more than 1 million hectares (11 600 km²), the CLAWR covers a good portion of northwestern Saskatchewan and northeastern Alberta—and is part of the larger 4 Wing Low Level Flying Area that spans from British Columbia to Manitoba.

Vast, unrestricted airspace with no civilian air traffic and more than 640 targets make it an attractive training area for Canadian and allied air forces. As many as 6 000 military personnel travel to 4 Wing Cold Lake every year to participate in Exercise MAPLE FLAG, an international air combat exercise in which daily missions take place in the airspace above the range.

“One of the reasons that 4 Wing is a great venue for this large coalition air combat exercise is that we have the range,” says Captain Brehn Eichel, MAPLE FLAG exercise director and operations officer. “The range is large, unrestricted,

there are no supersonic restrictions and no altitude restrictions.”

The weapons range is the only tactical bombing range in Canada. Its airspace is divided into multiple Air Combat Manoeuvring (ACM) areas, which allow crews to perform multiple air combat operations at one time.

During MAPLE FLAG, the flow of aircraft traffic is carefully co-ordinated and laid out in an airspace control plan. Friendly forces—called Blue Air—fly various westward routes or traffic corridors while Red Air, the enemy forces, fly in an easterly direction. The two meet and fight, with Blue Air trying to win the air engagement so they can continue west and fulfill their mission objectives.

During a MAPLE FLAG mission, up to 10 targets located in the range are attacked with inert weapons (practice bombs with no explosive charge) or through a simulated weapons drop. More than 640 targets, making up nearly 100 target complexes, are strategically placed throughout the weapons range. The realism and abundance of targets has earned the range the label of “world’s largest Hollywood set”.

Tanks, missile launchers, radar sites, communication towers, command and control centres, and various types of vehicles and aircraft are interspersed throughout the range. The range also boasts nine mock airfield target complexes that simulate complete aerodromes, and include runways, ramps, taxiways and dispersal areas. Buildings and three-quarter scale airframes and vehicles are also present, thus adding to the realism and training effectiveness of these mock aerodromes. There are challenges to the exercise, especially since industry has the rights to oil and gas extraction in the range.

“To mix an active oil industry and an active weapons range where weapons are dropped takes a lot of imagination sometimes to ensure that the needs of both are met,” says Dick Brakele, range activities officer.

Both parties work hard to maintain a positive, mutually beneficial relationship. When the oil industry wishes to drill in a particular area of the range that inhibits the military from using a target located in that area, EnCana (an oil and gas company that owns extraction rights on the range) agrees to build a new target in another area.

Though it is located in the inhospitable wilds of northern Alberta and Saskatchewan, the range is nevertheless a prime piece of real estate. With its vast and unrestricted airspace and its more than 640 targets, it is the site of critically important air combat training and it attracts thousands of Canadian and allied fighter pilots every year during Ex MAPLE FLAG.

Lt Dumouchel-Connock is the Ex MAPLE FLAG PAO.



PHOTOS: DND/MDN

The new target complex at Cold Lake features two sets of oil tanks (right), a road with a convoy of heavy trucks (centre), and a military post consisting of a headquarters building, barrack buildings, a military police post, a church and a hospital (left), will challenge pilots to hit military targets such as the headquarters building without causing collateral damage to the church or hospital.

Le nouveau complexe d'objectifs de Cold Lake, qui comporte deux ensembles de réservoirs d'huile (à droite), une route avec un convoi de camions lourds (au centre) et un poste militaire formé d'un quartier général, de bâtiments de casernement, d'un poste de police militaire, d'une église et d'un hôpital (à gauche), permettra aux pilotes de s'exercer à bombarder des cibles militaires comme le quartier général sans endommager l'église ou l'hôpital.



Primrose Lake Evaluation Range engineers work with CH-146 Griffon helicopter crews from 417 Combat Support Squadron at 4 Wing Cold Lake to un-sling one of 60 targets built, repaired, and transported to the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range (CLAWR) this winter during the annual CLAWR build-up period.

Des ingénieurs du Polygone d'évaluation de Primrose Lake travaillent avec des équipages d'hélicoptères CH-146 Griffon du 417^e Escadron de soutien au combat à la 4^e Escadre Cold Lake pour décharger un des 60 objectifs construits, réparés et transportés au polygone de tir aérien de Cold Lake cet hiver pendant la période annuelle de montée en puissance du polygone.