



Air Force Special Forces: Special Operations Air Task Group Certified in Grazzanise

Published on 17/07/2026

The exercise “Tende e Scaglia 2026” concluded at the 9th Wing in Grazzanise, in the province of Caserta, an important training activity dedicated to the integration between the air component and the Special Forces.

Held from June 22 to July 10, 2026, the exercise allowed for the verification and certification of the capabilities of the Special Operations Air Task Group of the Italian Air Force, the SOATG AM, as a tactical command unit responsible for air support to Special Operations.

The “Tende e Scaglia” is planned, organized, and conducted annually by the 1st Special Operations Air Brigade, based in Furbara, and represents one of the main training events of the Italian Air Force to test interoperability between air assets, ground units, and personnel belonging to the Special Operations Sector.

An Air Command for Special Operations

The main objective of the 2026 edition was to verify and consolidate the capabilities of the SOATG, a structure designed to plan, coordinate, and control air support for Special Forces missions.

Within a single operational device, command components, Combat Support, and Combat Service Support were integrated, along with the Special Operations Task Unit and the Special Operations Air Task Unit, referred to respectively by the acronyms SOTU and SOATU.

The SOATG thus represents the tactical command level through which the various air capabilities employed in support of Special Operations are managed, ensuring the coordination of crews, flight assets, logistics, communications, and force protection.

The final certification was necessary to make the device deployable in a real operational context.

The capabilities of the SOATG were evaluated by an Italian team led by the Joint Special Operations Command, the COFS of Rome-Centocelle, under the supervision of foreign observers from the NATO Allied Special Operations Forces Command, based at SHAPE in Belgium.



The Contribution of the Special Operations Sector

The activation of the functions provided by the exercise was guided by the 1st Special Operations Air Brigade through the joint employment of personnel from the same Brigade, the 9th Wing of Grazzanise, and the 17th Raiders Wing of Furbara.

The units of the Special Operations Sector of the Italian Air Force filled the main organic positions of the SOATG and took care of the preparatory activities necessary for the establishment of the device.

The composition of the command structure was also contributed to by units from various departments of the Air Team Command – 1st Air Region and the Logistics Command, identified by the Directorate for the Employment of Military Personnel of the Air Force in its role as Force Provider.

The complexity of the exercise indeed required the participation of highly specialized personnel in different sectors: operational planning, flight activities, intelligence, logistics, communications, force protection, information security, and cyber defense.



A Command Protected Within Bunkered Structures

For “Tende e Scaglia 2026”, the components of the SOATG were deployed within bunkered structures created in the former ammunition depot of the 9th Wing.

The environments underwent significant restructuring and adaptation, with the provision of classified Command and Control connections and systems.

The structure was designed to ensure the functioning of all main operational activities: from mission planning to control of flight operations, logistics, force protection, and cyber defense.

The establishment of the deployment field required the involvement of numerous departments and branches of the Italian Air Force.

The General Security Department of the Air Force General Staff supervised the security aspects, overseeing the establishment of the Peripheral Security Body and the issuance of necessary authorizations for the CIS and COMSEC components.

The 4th Telecommunications and Air Defense Systems Brigade of Borgo Piave instead created the communications device, LAN networks, video surveillance and anti-intrusion systems, satellite antennas, and radio equipment.

Geographic networks, multifone systems, and Voice over IP services were also configured to ensure reliable and secure communications between the various deployed components.



Protected Communications and Cyber Defense

A central role was played by the Command and Control Systems Management and Innovation Department of Pratica di Mare, tasked with activating and managing the CIS device intended for command functions and secure operational communications.

The department also provided a team specialized in the cyber domain, ensuring user assistance and protection of the systems used during the entire training event.

The Automated Information Systems Department of Rome ensured the management of unclassified IT services.

The 3rd Wing of Villafranca contributed from the early stages to the preparation of the field and the logistical support of the activities, while the 41st Wing of Sigonella participated with the P-72A patrol and surveillance aircraft.



Five Air Units Under the Command of the SOATG

During the exercise, the Special Operations Air Task Group exercised Command and Control functions over five dependent SOATUs.

Two of these units were real and consisted of crews, pilots, onboard operators, and personnel from the 9th Wing of Grazzanise. The other three were “notional”, or simulated, to expand and make the operational scenario more complex.

In the NATO organization, the SOATG operates under the command of a Special Operations Component Command, the SOCC, which during the exercise was simulated through a specific Response Cell.

This architecture allowed for the reproduction of a realistic command chain, verifying the personnel's ability to receive orders, plan missions, assign assets, and control air operations intended to support the Special Forces.



Day and Night Missions with Fixed and Rotary Wing Aircraft

The “Tende e Scaglia 2026” allowed for the strengthening of interoperability between formations composed of fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft, engaged in day and night missions.

The coordinated use of helicopters, aircraft, specialized crews, and ground units is a determining factor in modern Special Operations, where speed, precision, secure communications, and adaptability are essential.

The certification obtained in Grazzanise confirms the Italian Air Force's ability to establish an air command dedicated to Special Operations, fully integrated with the COFS and NATO's operational structures.

A result that strengthens the role of the 1st Special Operations Air Brigade, the 9th Wing, and the 17th Raiders Wing in the planning and conduct of the most complex and sensitive missions, both nationally and in the multinational devices of the Atlantic Alliance.

Copyright photo Italian Air Force

News link: <https://www.aeronautica.difesa.it/news/esercitazioni-conclusa-a-grazzanise-la-tende-e-scaglia-2026/>