



Artiglio 2025: Special Forces of the Italian Air Force and Agile Combat Employment

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The 4th edition of the exercise **“Artiglio 2025”** took place at the Piacenza – San Damiano Air Detachment, planned and conducted by the **17° Stormo Incursori** under the coordination of the 1ª Brigata Aerea Operazioni Speciali (BAOS).

The activity constituted the final phase of the 10th BIAM Course (Brevetto Incursore dell’Aeronautica Militare), one of the most demanding selection and training paths of the Armed Forces, lasting about two years, which leads young trainees to achieve the qualification of AM Incursore.

In a continuously evolving international operational framework, “Artiglio 2025” materialized the NATO concept of **Agile Combat Employment (ACE)**, focusing on mobility, controlled dispersion, and the ability to operate from forward bases with reduced logistical support. The Air Force Special Forces were integrated with 4th and 5th generation platforms and advanced C2

infrastructures, in a high-intensity multi-domain environment.

For the occasion, the Piacenza Detachment was transformed into an austere **advanced operating node**: an advanced airbase in “contested” territory, exposed to multi-domain threats and characterized by limited resources. In this scenario, the Incursori Trainees and an Operational Detachment of the 17° Stormo conducted a wide-spectrum mission, which included intelligence gathering, target engagement, regeneration of air assets, and exfiltration.

The mission structure was inspired by the model of **Global Access Operations (GAO)**, capabilities that the Combat Control Teams (CCT) of the Air Force are developing to enable advanced aerospace projection in support of ACE.

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Conduct of operations and employment of assets

The operational core of “Artiglio 2025” was entrusted to a **Special Operations Task Unit (SOTU)** of the 17° Stormo, tasked with covertly infiltrating to operationalize and secure an “opportunity” landing strip, initially unknown and potentially monitored by the enemy. This activity allowed the rearming and refueling of air assets engaged in generating Counter-A2AD (Anti-Access / Area-Denial) effects against sensitive targets and critical adversary nodes.

Operations began with the infiltration of trainees and operators of the 17° Stormo aboard an HH-101A of the 9° Stormo, using the **FRIES (Fast Rope Insertion Extraction System)** technique. Once on the ground, they conducted **Special Reconnaissance (SR)** missions for high-value information gathering and Direct Action (DA) for the neutralization of assigned targets.

Supporting the forces on the ground were the F-2000A Eurofighters of the 4° Stormo of Grosseto and the 51° Stormo of Istrana, engaged in Close Air Support (CAS) activities. Additionally, a PA-200 Tornado of the 6° Stormo was employed in combined SR – **GAAI (Ground Assisted Air Interdiction)** missions and guided by a second SOTU of the 17° Stormo, tasked with reducing threats from the ground and intercepting High Value Targets.

This integrated device paved the way for the controlled insertion of an **F-35A Lightning II** of the 6° Stormo, essential for sanitizing “contested” operational areas and generating advanced aerospace effects.

At the end of the actions on the targets, the Special Forces were covertly exfiltrated by a C-27J of the 46^a Brigata Aerea, confirming the high level of integration between air assets and surface aerospace components.

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FARP on F-35A and strategic value of the exercise

One of the most innovative aspects of “Artiglio 2025” was the realization, for the first time in a “contested” environment and on an alternate base, of a **Forward Arming and Refuelling Point (FARP)** dedicated to an F-35A of the 6° Stormo “Diavoli Rossi”. Thanks to full interoperability between the aircraft, the FARP Team personnel of the 3° Stormo of Villafranca, and the operators of the AM Special Forces, the F-35A was safely brought to ground on the San Damiano runway, where a **“hot refuelling”** was performed with the engine running and the pilot on board.

This procedure drastically reduced regeneration times, allowing the 5th generation aircraft to return to flight in a matter of minutes. It is a key capability to quickly regenerate air power from a “dispersed” airfield potentially under hostile attack, fully consistent with the principles of **Agile Combat Employment**.

Overall, **“Artiglio 2025”** not only represented the training milestone for the new Incursori but also a further step in building a mature ACE device within the Italian Air Force. The exercise integrated special capabilities, latest-generation platforms, rotary-wing assets, FARP capabilities, and advanced C2 nodes in an increasingly realistic and challenging multi-domain environment.

The Incursori of the **17° Stormo** confirm themselves as fundamental enablers of national aerospace projection, capable of ensuring access, opening, and protection of advanced bases in hostile territories. The results obtained strengthen the resilience, readiness, and response capability of the Armed Forces in modern operational scenarios, characterized by high

complexity and continuous evolution.

News link: <https://www.aeronautica.difesa.it/news/artiglio-2025-forze-speciali-proiezione-avanzata-e-agile-combat-employment-nel-cuore-della-pianura-padana/>