



Italian Air Force: first Fucilieri dell'Aria K9 handler course launched in Grosseto

The program will last ten months and train K9 units for explosive detection in Italy and on overseas missions.

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On October 16, 2026, at the Aeronautica Militare Centro Cinofili in Grosseto, the pairing ceremony for the seven handler-dog teams of the first course for Fucilieri dell'Aria dog handlers was held. The initiative marks a further step in developing specialized force protection capabilities and training canine units for the search and detection of explosives.

The ceremony was attended by Major General Alessandro De Lorenzo, Commander of the Forze di Mobilità e Supporto, Colonel Mario Cito, Commander of the 16° Stormo in Martina Franca, and Lieutenant Colonel Mirko Romani, Commander of the Centro Cinofili.

The training program, which began on October 5 following a careful personnel selection and assessment phase, will last a total of ten months. The bond between each handler and his dog, however, is intended to continue throughout the animal's operational life.

Seven teams for explosive search and detection

The pairing of handlers and dogs is a fundamental stage in canine training. During this process, the dog chooses its handler, establishing a relationship that will be progressively strengthened through living together, daily training, and the development of mutual trust.

The objective is to train seven canine units specialized in explosive detection by integrating the operational skills of the Fucilieri dell'Aria with the animals' scent-detection capabilities.

The training program will enable the teams to acquire EDD (Explosive Detection Dog) capability, required to search for, detect, and alert to the presence of concealed explosive substances.

These units will contribute to the security and protection activities of the Aeronautica Militare, both within Italy and in international operations, including those conducted within the NATO framework.

The course is reserved for personnel already qualified as Fuciliere dell'Aria and is part of the program to strengthen the Armed Force's specialized capabilities, with the aim of fielding autonomous, interoperable, and rapidly deployable assets.

The ceremony included the canine handler's oath and the subsequent blessing of the teams.

Lieutenant Colonel Romani: «We are not simply assigning seven dogs, but forming seven teams»

In his remarks, Lieutenant Colonel Mirko Romani stressed the significance of launching the first course, calling it a historic moment for the Aeronautica Militare.

The Commander of the Centro Cinofili emphasized that pairing handlers and dogs is not simply a matter of assigning animals to operators, but rather the creation of seven teams that will share a long path of training and professional development.

Addressing the prospective operators, Romani emphasized the importance of humility, determination, and a sense of responsibility, qualities essential for building an effective relationship with the dog.

Particular attention was paid to the need to understand and respect the individual characteristics of the animals, learning to interpret their behavior and signals. Mutual trust, an essential element in the operational effectiveness of the handler-dog team, must be built through patience, consistency, and daily work.

16° Stormo strengthens its operational capabilities

Colonel Mario Cito, Commander of 16° Stormo, expressed his appreciation for the project and thanked General De Lorenzo for the trust placed in it, Colonel Davide Dentamaro, Commander of 4° Stormo, which hosts the Centro Cinofili at Grosseto Air Base, and all personnel involved in the training activities.

Addressing the Fucilieri dell'Aria, Cito underscored the professional and human value of the path they have undertaken, highlighting the responsibilities arising from handling a dog assigned to operational duties.

The acquisition of new canine capabilities under 16° Stormo "Protezione delle Forze" will help strengthen the security activities of the Aeronautica Militare and support operations to protect the public.

General De Lorenzo: deployable teams for the protection of air assets

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Generale di Divisione Aerea Alessandro De Lorenzo expressed his appreciation for the activities carried out by the Centro Cinofili in Grosseto and for the contribution this specialty makes to the operational capability of the Aeronautica Militare.

The General described the handler-dog team as an integrated system in which the human and animal components develop complementary, irreplaceable capabilities.

De Lorenzo also emphasized that the integration of canine units with the Fucilieri dell'Aria meets the need for rapidly deployable assets capable of protecting aircraft, personnel, and airfield

infrastructure in a range of operational environments.

This capability is therefore intended for use both in activities across the national territory and on missions abroad, contributing to the security of the Aeronautica Militare's air assets.

The General concluded by thanking the instructor personnel and offering his best wishes to the aspiring operators as they begin their training path.

The Centro Cinofili in Grosseto and the role of 16° Stormo

The Aeronautica Militare's Centro Cinofili, located at Grosseto Air Base, is the service's specialist center of excellence for the selection, education, and training of canine units.

The facility falls under 16° Stormo "Protezione delle Forze" and conducts activities aimed at developing explosive search and detection capabilities, supporting security requirements in Italy and in Operazioni Fuori dai Confini Nazionali.

16° Stormo, a Fucilieri dell'Aria unit, has been based in Martina Franca, in the Province of Taranto, since 2004. Since 2023, it has also operated a Squadron at 46^a Brigata Aerea in Pisa.

Under the authority of the Comando delle Forze di Mobilità e Supporto (C.F.M.S.) and the Comando della Squadra Aerea/1^a Regione Aerea di Milano, the unit provides specialist Force Protection for Air Operations capabilities aimed at protecting Italian Air Force personnel, weapons systems, vehicles, and infrastructure.

During its operational activities, the 16° Stormo has taken part in 42 international missions across 21 different operational theaters, gaining significant experience in force protection in national and multinational contexts.

The unit's War Flag is decorated with a Gold Medal and a Silver Medal for Aeronautical Valor.

The launch of the first course for Fucilieri dell'Aria dog handlers is part of this development path, expanding the unit's capabilities through the employment of specialized dog-handler teams for explosive detection and the protection of Italian Air Force assets.

News link: <https://www.aeronautica.difesa.it/news/16-stormo-al-via-il-1-corso-operatori-cinofili/>