



Italian Air Force, impressive exercise of the 17th Raiders Wing at Furbara: simulated hostage rescue operation behind enemy lines

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At the Furbara base, in the province of Rome, home of the First Air Brigade Special Operations of the Italian Air Force, a complex operational exercise took place featuring the raiders of the **17th Wing**, supported by combat aircraft, helicopters, and remotely piloted assets.

The demonstration simulated a **hostage rescue mission in hostile territory**, with a complex deployment of special forces and close air support, showcasing the integration capabilities between ground and air components in modern special operations.

The Raiders of the Italian Air Force

The **17th Raiders Wing** represents one of the elite units of the Italian Air Force. The operators are the direct heirs of the **Arditi Distruttori of the Royal Air Force**, units created during

World War II to carry out special actions against enemy infrastructure and strategic targets.

Today, the unit is tasked with **selecting, training, and equipping personnel for special operations**, operating in high-risk contexts both nationally and in international operational theaters.

The main missions include:

- special reconnaissance
- direct action
- military assistance to allied forces
- hostage rescue
- battlefield information gathering.

These activities require highly specialized operators capable of operating **behind enemy lines or in non-permissive environments**.

One of the toughest trainings in the world

The path to becoming an **Italian Air Force Raider** is among the most selective in the Italian Armed Forces and lasts approximately **two years**.

The process begins with a phase of physical selection and internship, at the end of which only a portion of the candidates is deemed suitable to continue. This is followed by the **Basic Combat Course AM (COBAM)**, lasting about **21 weeks**, during which many participants are further selected.

Only those who pass this phase access the **Raider Badge Course AM (BIAM)**, a path of about **54 weeks** dedicated to advanced operational training.

The success rate is extremely low. The course started in 2024 and concluded in March of this year, for example, saw **only three operators graduate out of forty initial candidates**.

During training, the raiders acquire advanced skills in numerous operational areas:

- infiltration and exfiltration in hostile territory
- operational parachuting

- use of complex weapon systems
- coordination of air support
- close combat (CQB) and breaching
- operations in extreme environments.

The operators are trained to operate in **sea, mountains, desert, jungle, arctic environment, and urban context**, developing survival and combat skills in extremely challenging operational conditions.

Combat Controller: a unique capability in Europe

One of the peculiarities of the 17th Wing is the presence of qualified **Combat Controller** operators, specialists capable of:

- activating and managing improvised runways and landing zones
- controlling air traffic in non-permissive scenarios
- coordinating close air support missions.

This capability, in the NATO and European panorama, is shared only with the operators of the **U.S. Air Force**, making the Italian unit a key element in the integration between special forces and air power.

The raiders of the 17th Wing operate not only as traditional special forces units – similarly to units like the **9th Col Moschin Regiment**, the **Operational Raiders Group** of the Navy, or the **Special Intervention Group** of the Carabinieri – but also as **multipliers of air power**, according to the NATO concept of **Special Operations Air to Land Integration**.

Among the most characteristic missions of the unit are also:

- **CSAR (Combat Search and Rescue)** operations
- laser designation of targets using GLTD and JTAC systems
- actions against enemy aeronautical infrastructure
- restoration and security of airports in hostile territory
- installation of communication and air navigation systems
- information gathering behind enemy lines.

The operational simulation at Furbara

During the visit to Furbara, on the occasion of the ceremony for the delivery of the beret to new raiders, the unit's operators conducted a particularly complex tactical demonstration.

The scenario simulated the **rescue of a hostage held in territory controlled by hostile forces**.

The operation began with a phase of **aerial reconnaissance conducted via remotely piloted aircraft**, followed by the intervention of two **Eurofighter Typhoon** fighters, employed to ensure coverage and close air support.

Subsequently, **two HH-101A helicopters from the 9th Wing** came into action, on board of which was the raider team tasked with conducting the assault.

Once on the ground, the operators:

- established a **forward command and control post**,
- neutralized the hostile forces present in the area,
- recovered the hostage,
- executed the **rapid exfiltration** of the team.

The demonstration highlighted the ability of the Italian Air Force raiders to operate in full integration with advanced air assets, demonstrating how modern special operations are increasingly based on the **synergy between ground forces, aviation, and command and control systems**.

An operational model that today represents one of the pillars of NATO's military capabilities in high-risk missions.

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