

Personnel Recovery Week at 36° Stormo Caccia: Two Weeks of Training with NATO Units

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The **Personnel Recovery Week 26-01** exercise concluded on Friday, **23 October 2026**, at the **36° Stormo Caccia** in Gioia del Colle (BA). The activity involved personnel and assets of the Aeronautica Militare alongside allied NATO units.

The exercise unfolded over **two weeks**, with a progressively more challenging training program. Its aim was to refine techniques, tactics, and procedures for recovering and protecting isolated personnel in hostile environments.

The scenarios required planning, coordination, and analysis activities. The objective was to assess interoperability among different platforms and the effectiveness of procedures adopted in high-risk situations.

Italian aircraft and Romanian helicopters

The **Eurofighters** of the 36° Stormo Caccia in Gioia del Colle and the **HH-101As** of the 9° Stormo in Grazzanise (CE) were deployed. MQ-9s from the 32° Stormo in Amendola (FG) and the 41° Stormo in Sigonella (CT) also took part, supported by P-72As.

Romania provided **SA 330 Puma** helicopters. According to the Aeronautica Militare, Romanian participation contributed to cooperation among NATO countries and coordination between different capabilities and systems.

The activities also involved Extraction Forces, tasked with locating, securing, and extracting isolated personnel. The 36° Stormo Caccia and the co-located **84° Centro SAR** provided personnel employed in the ISOP, or Isolated Person, role.

The ISOP represented a military or civilian individual who had become isolated, separated from friendly forces, or unable to rejoin them following accidents, hostilities, or operational events.

Also present were personnel from **STOS**, Supporto Tattico alle Operazioni Speciali, and JTACs from the 16° Stormo “Protezione delle Forze” in Martina Franca (TA). On the ground, Joint Terminal Attack Controllers authorized and directed close air support for friendly forces, in accordance with the rules of engagement.

Simulated threats during recoveries

The missions replicated recoveries conducted in the presence of ground and air threats. The Red Forces, or simulated opposing forces, and simulated air defenses were tasked with hindering the Blue Forces responsible for recovering the Isolated Person.

The **Reparto Mobile di Comando e Controllo** in Bari Palese, deployed to Gioia del Colle Airport, supported the scenarios. Activities included the simulated ejection of a pilot, the separation of a special forces team, and the recovery of civilians missing in a hostile environment.

The drills were intended to assess the operational readiness, decision-making ability, and resilience of the crews. The **Eurofighter Typhoons** escorted the helicopters during recovery operations and contributed to locating and authenticating isolated personnel.

Forward Refueling with Engines Running

A further contribution came from the qualified FARP personnel of the **3° Stormo** in Villafranca (VR). This capability, unique to the unit within the Aeronautica Militare, made it possible to activate a forward refueling site.

The Forward Arming and Refuelling Point enables aircraft to be rapidly refueled on the ground through highly deployable logistics assets. The aim is to reduce time spent at the airfield and facilitate a return to mission.

The FARP team conducted **hot refuelling** operations with the engines running. The activity supported the rapid regeneration of deployed assets and the continuity of Personnel Recovery missions.

News link: https://www.aeronautica.difesa.it/news/personnel-recovery-week-si-e-svolta-presso-il-36-stormo-caccia-lesercitazione-dedicata-al-recupero-di-personale-isolato/