



Bad week for Tomcat . . .

THREE F-14 Tomcats were lost in accidents last month, bringing total losses for the type to four R&D aircraft and 14 operational.

The first went down 48 miles south-east of NAS Oceana, Va, on June 21. *Flight* understands that the automatic fuel-transfer system failed during air-combat training and that the pilot, distracted during manoeuvring, failed to operate the manual back-up. Fuel starvation caused both engines to lose power; the crew abandoned the aircraft and were later recovered from the sea.

On June 28 two F-14s were lost within hours. Both were from NAS Miramar, Calif, but the accidents were related in no other way. The first crashed during a touch-and-go landing. Eyewitnesses claimed that the wings wobbled during a tight turn on the approach, and that something broke away from the F-14.

The crew ejected but one parachute failed to deploy fully and the crewman was slightly injured on landing. The short interval between the alleged structural failure and the ejection suggests that the object could have been the canopy.

The third loss took place 85 miles south-west of San Diego, Calif, when one engine of an F-14 engaged in a mock dogfight exploded, setting fire to the aircraft. Both crew members ejected and were recovered from the sea.

A US Navy analysis of the 18 losses to date shows that one resulted from a technical fault on the aircraft, five were caused by engine faults, and 12 followed human errors by aircrew or ground personnel.

Casa C.212 AN-BSV was delivered to the Nicaraguan Air Force via Prestwick last month. This is believed to be the first of five for the South American country



Defence Marketplace

The first **BAC Canberra** of a substantial overhaul and re-equipment programme for the **Venezuelan Air Force** has been delivered to the base at Maracay. The initial contract for 12 aircraft was placed in 1974 but this has since been extended to more than 20 aircraft and the work will take until 1979 to complete. BAC reports that exports and royalty payments for the Canberra have now reached £131 million and the figure is still rising. Production ceased after 1,376 had been built in Britain and under licence in the USA and Australia, but deliveries of refurbished aircraft continue 28 years after a maiden flight in 1949.

New customers for the **de Havilland Canada DHC-5D Buffalo** include **Kenya**, and, it is believed, **Mauretania**, which have ordered four and two respectively. These orders and those announced at the Paris Air Show, for **Sudan** and the **United Arab Emirates**, are together worth some \$77 million, including spares. Sudan will receive four Buffalos, the UAE two.

Increased interest is being shown by **Turkey** in Finland's **Leko-70 Vinka** primary trainer, marketing of which has the assistance of Hawker Siddeley as a result of Finland's proposed Hawk purchase. The Hawk is a finalist, with the **Aermacchi MB.339**, in a Turkish Air Force competition for an advanced trainer. It is not clear whether Turkey would need Vinkas for roles other than primary military training, but in negotiations some emphasis is being given to agricultural uses.

The **Indonesian Air Force** is to acquire five **Government Aircraft Factories Nomads**, according to unofficial sources, under the military aid programme agreed between the two countries. Indonesia already has three

Short Skyvans and two Casa C.212s; there have also been plans to set up a C.212 production line in the country. In May, Australian Beech distributor Hawker de Havilland signed a \$10 million contract with the air force for 16 **Beechcraft T-34C Turbo Mentors**.

The **Imperial Iranian Air Force** is seeking to buy four **Boeing 747F** freighters and a **707-320C** tanker transport as well as seven **E-3A Awacs**. The first of the 747Fs is due to be delivered late this year. A further purchase of **McDonnell Douglas RF-4Es** is also in the offing.

As briefly reported in our recent World Air Forces issue, the **Indian Navy** has ordered three more **Westland Sea King** anti-submarine helicopters. This takes the total of Sea Kings and Commandos sold by the British company to more than 200, of which at least 108 are for export. The **Norwegian Air Force** is also ordering a single search-and-rescue Sea King to replace one lost in an accident in April.

The reported order for 16 **Northrop F-5E Tiger IIs** by **Tunisia** has not been placed, it is learned. A letter of offer and acceptance was sent to the North African country last year, but no reply has been received.

Latest customer for the **Scottish Aviation Bulldog** is the **Hong Kong Government**, which has ordered two for delivery in October this year. The order, with spares and support, is worth more than £100,000 and takes the total number of Bulldogs sold to 292.

Some 200 **Hughes Tow** anti-tank missiles are included in military sales President Carter is proposing to make to the **Israel Defence Forces**. The missiles are likely to be the infantry version.

. . . but availability improves

AN OPERATIONAL readiness rate of 93.1 per cent has been recorded by a group of six Grumman F-14 Tomcats during the Air Intercept Missile Evaluation (Aimval) trials at Nellis AFB, Nevada. The figure was achieved during May but, as the accompanying table shows, in none of the preceding four months did the USAF's F-15 Eagles turn in a better rate. Even the considerably less complex F-5E showed a better rate than the F-14 during only one month, January.

OPERATIONAL READINESS (PER CENT)

Month	F-14 (6)	F-15 (6)	F-5E (12)
January	80.0	78.3	84.7
February	80.9	62.9	80.7
March	88.0	62.5	84.5
April	84.6	76.5	78.1
May	93.1	70.8	70.7

The figures make particularly interesting reading in the light of recent criticism of US readiness rates in general and that of the F-14 in particular. During the whole of Fiscal Year 76, the Grumman aircraft returned a figure of only 32.9 per cent. By far the largest part of this rate reflects Tomcat's performance when deployed on aircraft carriers, where readiness is nearly always lower than in land-based operations. Nevertheless, while the Aimval trials are carried out at a land base, and better results would therefore be expected for the F-14, Nellis AFB is very much home territory for the F-15s, whose ground crews are hardly likely to have refrained from friendly competition with the USN.