

NO GUTS, NO GLORY: THUNDERBOLT RETURNS TO USA

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MAY/JUNE 2007
Vol 26 • No 3
(DISPLAY UNTIL 7/31/07)

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In the early 1970s, five additional ex-Luftwaffe aircraft were purchased to complement the Air Force's Fouga fleet that trained Belgium as well as Dutch pilots. At the same time, the Belgian Fouga Magisters achieved fame as tri-colored mounts of the official *Rode Duivels/Diables Rouges* display team which performed for several years all over Western Europe as ambassadors of the Belgian Air Force. In 1977, the Red Devils team, previously operating up to nine — on one occasion, 16 — Hawker Hunter F.6 fighters, was disbanded as a direct result of 1973 oil crises-related defense cutbacks.

In the late-1970s, the operational future and even the ultimate survival of the outdated Fouga Magisters was threatened by the introduction of newly-purchased Dornier AlphaJet trainers and F-16A/B Fighting Falcons. Victims of the technical performance gap between the service's old trainers — including T-33s — and the new generation of supersonic Mirage Vs and F-16As, the Fougas were destined to be stored pending (most likely) scrapping. However, there is a possibility that the aircraft will be made available for surplus sale to civilians or museums.

Well-equipped but snug cockpit.

With a burst of smoke, the Magisters start up for the photo flight.



Straight down in
the Magister.



ticipants in various international airshows. Since no "first-tour" pilots were retrained on the Magisters after its replacement by the new AlphaJets, all display aircraft were flown by experienced "middle-aged" pilots who, years before, gained their wings on Magisters. Display pilot rotation was almost exclusively triggered by forced pilot retirement at age 45. For some years now, officially retired pilots are re-integrated as volunteer-reservists. On occasion, these pilots fly SF-260s aircraft at Bevekom for continuation training.

In 2002, Lt. Col. (Reserve) Paul Rorive, a former Mirage V BA and AlphaJet/T-37 instructor pilot, became the Belgian Air Component's final official Fougas Magister display pilot. To pay tribute to the Red Devils display team, the aircraft was painted in a similar striking tri-color scheme using wingtip smoke tanks to good effect. On average, some 20 displays were flown each year in and outside Belgium.

To mark the pending withdrawal of the Fougas, Paul Rorive was contacted

