

Two German fighter jets collide in midair during practice flight

Marianne Arens**28 June 2019**

Two German air force fighter planes collided over the Mecklenburg Lake District in east Germany on Monday in an incident that could have had catastrophic consequences. Angry residents of the area are demanding an end to all air force combat practice flights.

The two Eurofighter fighters collided Monday following a dangerous air combat manoeuvre. One pilot was able to save himself by activating his ejector seat and parachute. He landed in a tree with slight injuries. The second pilot, a 27-year-old lieutenant, died in the crash.

The villages of Jabel and Nossentiner Hütte narrowly escaped catastrophe as countless pieces of debris from the two planes rained down from the sky. Parts of the debris hit a sports field and a cemetery situated not far from houses, a beer garden and a day care center. The wreckage of one of the Eurofighters landed on the local playing field and body parts from the dead pilot were recovered in the vicinity.

The mayor of Nossentiner Hütte, Birgit Kurth, explained that the incident was “very bad and it could have been much worse. That is what most people are concerned about.”

The surrounding area is a large nature reserve with many lakes. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and popular holiday centre. Many holidaymakers are currently staying in local villages, vacation homes and campsites. Last year, the region recorded a total of three-and-a-half million overnight stays.

Immediately after the crash, the region was declared a restricted military area. Hundreds of soldiers and federal police, assisted by fire services, blocked all access roads, set up camps, occupied classrooms, and searched the area for rubble with helicopters and drones.

At the scene of the accident, men in protective suits and gas masks carried out controlled explosions and extinguished burning parts of the planes. Toxic smoke billowed upwards. The fire from the crash could easily have caused a forest fire as temperatures soared.

According to the German army (Bundeswehr), the Eurofighters were unarmed, otherwise the consequences of the crash would have been even more serious. Eurofighter jets are state-of-the-art combat machines, whose weapons include short- and medium-range missiles. The planes’ full technical capabilities are top secret.

The German defence minister, Ursula von der Leyen (CDU), immediately travelled to the scene of the accident on Monday in an air force helicopter. In a patriotic and solemn speech, she thanked the emergency forces “who help us in this hour of need.” She emphasised the “calmness of the people accompanying her during this terrible event.”

In fact, the overwhelming emotion of those present was outright shock, which has increasingly turned into anger. The crash clearly demonstrated the long-standing dangers associated with such combat exercises. “We could all be dead,” stated one man whose holiday home is located in the immediate vicinity of the crash site.

The mayors of a number of villages in the region have all demanded a halt to military training flights in the region. The mayor of Malchow, René Putzer, said that aerial war games had increased significantly in the past two years, along with the number of complaints by residents and tourists. “We have the feeling that more flights have taken place. Unfortunately, we have now experienced the potential dangers of these exercises.”

The mayor of Waren an der Müritz, Norbert Möller (SPD), said: “The consequences could have been

catastrophic but instead we got off relatively lightly.” The demand for a ban on aerial combat exercises over inhabited areas was also supported by state politicians such as Heiko Kärger (CDU) and Peter Ritter (Left Party). The Left Party in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern officially proposed a halt to all air force training flights.

This response was roundly criticised by sections of the media such as the *FAZ* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspapers, whose commentators were outraged by such a lack of patriotism.

“An army must practice,” wrote Mike Szymanski in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. The exercises were in the cause of “national defence,” but unfortunately, in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, “some people are not worried, as if we could all continue to live in peace for some time.” Szymanski went on: “Such a reaction is disturbing. ... Where can the Luftwaffe [air force] practice for cases of emergency?”

Under the headline “Emergency case for the Luftwaffe,” Reinhard Müller complained in the *FAZ*: “It is remarkable that quite a few people apparently still regard the Bundeswehr primarily as a nuisance or even a danger.” *Die Zeit* noted: “Such exercises are dangerous, but necessary.”

The *Bild* newspaper responded to the accident by advocating additional billions for the air force. “Flight operations are the Achilles’ heel of the Bundeswehr,” it wrote. Fighter pilots had to put up with the “worst working conditions,” and their jets were chronically unable to fly.

In fact, the Bundeswehr owns 140 Eurofighters, each costing €100 million. The pilots, who belong to the squadron 73 “Steinhoff,” have to complete up to 100 hours of flying per year, each flight costing about €70,000. The squadron also conducts exercises in the Baltic States, where NATO is training for a new military campaign against Russia.

The squadron derives its name from the pilot Johannes Steinhoff, who served in Göring’s Air Force during WWII. After the war, Steinhoff rose to the rank of major general and inspector of the Air Force before taking over as head of the Dornier armaments company. Following crashes by a number of Lockheed Starfighters, he is said to have described the death of fighter pilots as “the price to be paid in blood.”

The government in Berlin, the Bundeswehr and the

main political parties are increasingly returning to imperialist traditions. The expansion of the air force is an important component of Germany’s new aggressive foreign and security policy initiated in October 2013 with the project “New Power. New Responsibility.” The project is supported by all of the parties in the Bundestag and leading German media organisations.

The Left Party is also involved in these preparations for war. Left Party deputy Stefan Liebich participated in the “New Power. New Responsibility” project from the beginning. The party’s latest calls for a halt to military flights over the Mecklenburg Lake District is just a feeble attempt to gloss over the party’s position. The Left Party is not opposed to the Luftwaffe systematically training for the war—officially for “defensive purposes.” It merely wants to relocate the “air space for exercises” outside of Germany.

For his part, Colonel Bernhard Teicke was quite open at a Bundeswehr press conference: “It is ultimately about practicing over topography, practicing over the densely populated areas to which one is dispatched.”

The collision of Eurofighters over the Mecklenburg Lake District has once again confirmed the extent of the preparations for war in Germany—with dire consequences for the entire population if the working class fails to intervene.



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