

One of the youngest Hellenic Air Force squadrons, the **383 Special Operations & Air Fire Fighting Squadron** celebrated its 10th anniversary, on 24th of May 2013. We were there and give you the details...

by Tasos Keltemlidis

383 Sqn was formed on May 16th, 2003, as a result of the splitting of the 355 Tactical Transport Squadron (TTS), which still operates with the older Canadair type, CL-215. In 2006, after a Supreme Air Force Council decision, the squadron is based to the 113 Combat Wing in Thessaloniki. The squadron's main role is the aerial firefighting, a very demanding task, especially during the filling-up of the water tanks from sea and during airdrops, taking into account that an airdrop takes place from an altitude of aprox. 100 ft. In addition, the crews are in a continuous 15 minute alert.

Apart from the aerial firefighting, readiness and SAR missions are carried out from the squadron. For the SAR missions two rescue personnel are added to the crew and the airplane is equipped with a liferaft for picking up survivors. 383 Squadron had 10 CL-415 in its inventory, two of them though have been lost in accidents. The delivery started in January 1999 to the 355 TTS, at Elefsis air base (112 CW). Till splitting, both CL-215 & CL-415 belonged and flew under the 355 Sqn commands.

Despite the only 10 years of its existence, 383 Sqn has flew many fire fighting flight hours all over Greece, but also it has to show many great moments of supporting foreign countries which were hit from disastrous fires. Bright "landmark" examples of this support are operations in France (2003), in Portugal (2004) and in Israel (2010). Also we can't forget the early CL-415 years, before 383 Sqn establishment, while crews and squadron's airplanes contributed to fire fighting in Turkey (TURPAS refinery after the earthquake of 1999) and in Cyprus (2001 – 2002), when they served in the 355 TTS.



A few words for the CL-415

Canadair CL-415 is based to the older Canadair type, the CL-215, having though major modernized differences. These differences of the CL-415 with its predecessor CL-215, are substantial although only visible in close range, and include:

- Modern, new generation cockpit, with liquid crystals displays (LCD), as in most modern commercial planes.
- Turboprop engines, combined with modern airfoil propellers, resulting in spectacular increase of performance, maneuverability and flight safety in the demanding environment of Aerial Fire fighting
- Modern navigation and communication devices.
- Aerodynamic aids that optimize the plane's efficiency, especially in low altitude.
- Hydraulic assisted control yokes.
- Larger lifting capacity, which, combined with the increased speed and climb rate, allow for more water drops per unit of time.
- New, electronically controlled water release system, with 4 doors, which can be released all at once or sequentiall,y ensuring the best ground coverage depending the circumstances

- Improved mixing system for fire retarding agent.

Its amphibious character, allows the use of nearby bodies of water for refilling the water tanks without the need to return to an airport. The load is enriched with a quantity of foam, multiplying the efficiency of the water drop 2-3 times. The advanced water release system with 4 doors, gives more choices to the crew, depending on the situation.

The 383 Sqn fleet consists of 8 CL-415 airplanes, one of which has Multi-Purpose (MP)

configuration adapted for search and rescue missions. The CL-415 MP airplanes are equipped with advanced electronic tracking systems (FLIR, Radar, SLAR) and also a navigator, a flight mechanic and rescue personnel are added to the crew.



A few words for the ceremony

Friday morning, 24th of May 2013, was a great day for the 383 Sqn. Under the bright Greek sun, Squadron staff with their families had a great time celebrating squadron's B-day. All former Squadron Leaders, were there. It was a great opportunity for new and older squadron staff to meet once again remembering great memories and discussing for the squadron's future.

The ceremony started at 10.00 o'clock sharp, with an orthodox Holy Unction, blessing the Squadron staff, to be strong and protected while they are on duty. After that, 113 Wing Commander, Colonel Ioannis Papadopoulos gave a short speech welcoming all to the Air Base, on this great day. Then, 383 Squadron Leader, Lt. Colonel Iakobos Tsaltaferidis, took the stand to present Squadron's history during the past 10 years. Videos showed major facts and Squadron operations that took place inside and outside of Greece, describing the important role of CL-415 and the 383 Sqn.

After this, it was the time of honouring the former 383 Sqn Leaders for their service. Among them, the families of the two fallen pilots (23/07/2007, s/n 2055), Captain Dimitrios Stoilids and 1st Lieutenant Ioannis Xatzoudis. A really moving moment was, when the widow of Cpt. D.Stoilidis took the stand with her 2 young sons, thanking the Squadron pilots for not forgetting her husband and their colleague all these years.

The ceremony closed with the classic family picture, of all Squadron members, old and new, in frond of a CL-415 (s/n 2052), giving the promise to be all again at the same place, few years from now to the next Squadron B-Day. After that, all people headed to the Squadron's garden to enjoy the buffet and the rest of the day…!

HAPPY B-DAY 383…!!!



Anniversary souvenirs

During the ceremony, an anniversary squadron book was given to all 383 present friends for free, after 383 Squadron Leader's orders! We thank Lt. Colonel Tsaltaferidis, for his kindness! Also, 383 Squadron has ordered a 10th anniversary patch, for its staff, which was available for buying!

Photos by Stamatis Als & Tasos Keltemlidis

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