

ZIPPER

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Introduction

Hello all,

This issue of this magazine is dedicated to a trip towards and through Italy around the official celebration of 100 years Italian Air Force held at the large air force base near Rome, Pratica di Mare.

We hope you enjoy this ZIPPER!!!!

Kind regards
Harry Prins (chairman)

Italy Tour 2023

It is 2023, a year in which a lot has happened and will certainly happen. Also the year that the Italian Air Force celebrates its centenary!

The latter is exactly what brought up warm feelings in others, but also in me. Indeed, Italy planned to celebrate this extensively, at the Pratica di Mare airbase, near Rome. Thinking back to the event at Pratica di Mare in 2004, at the farewell of the F-104, this should again be a beautiful spectacle.

As soon as the Italian Air Force announced the dates of the event (June 16, 17 and 18), Air Force Headquarters was immediately emailed to request the necessary access for the press day.

Unfortunately, this did not go entirely smoothly. It was first indicated that this had to be done through our own embassy (in Rome), but a month before the event it became clear that it still had to be requested directly via the Air Force HQ in Rome. The invitation finally arrived at the last minute a week before!!

In the meantime, Michiel Vogelpoel and me had drawn up a plan to extend the visit to the event with a short holiday during which we would visit many Starfighters in the Rome and Milan area. However, we wanted the "Pratica green light" from Rome HQ first!

On Wednesday 14th, I drove with my car to Milan where I should meet Michiel Vogelpoel who had arrived from Berlin. The trip went smooth until reaching Milan area around midnight. A large cloudburst had turned roads around Milan into rivers and the only provincial road that remained was now blocked by a large tree that had fallen down a slope in a mudslide. Via dangerous back roads I finally managed to reach the hotel at 4 o'clock in the night. It gave a positive feeling that I managed to reach it but of course I was very tired...

After a short night and a good breakfast we packed my car on Thursday morning and headed for Rome, another 500+ Kilometers to the South.

Again a heavy rain shower tried to take away our fun but we were brave. Many Italians were not used to it and anxiously parked their car next to the highway.

Finally we arrived at our rented apartment where we found a locked door. Phone calls went unanswered and it was getting late. Later a young man came out and indicated that the owner would be coming soon and drove off in a big new Jaguar. Eventually the also young owner came and we got our apartment that could finally be used after some adjustments. During our stay we got the impression that a lot of questionable things took place in the house, but our apartment was fine and we were left alone. In particular, the roof terrace with a view of Rome and Pratica di Mare made up for it!

Friday June 16th, 2023

This day the Italian Air Force had arranged the “Spottersday” and also 50.000 extra visitors (military families) were expected. At the entrance lots of known spotters and press lined up to enter the Air Base and step into the AMI busses heading for the platform. Because again forms needed to be filled in (and again later inside the bus) the procedure showed a lot of problems.

Due to the delay we entered the flightline 1 hour too late and in between we heard a very well-known and also beloved sound, the J79 of the black TF-104G-M N991SF!! The team from Florida was standing aside the Starfighter including Sean Freitag and Rick Svetkof... of course Piercarlo Ciacchi was sitting inside the cockpit preparing for the demonstration. All the people within the team were seen as true heroes and pilot Piercarlo especially as a famous actor!



With a famous howl the F-104 taxied to the runway and after a while it took off low and fast followed by a vertical jump into the blue Italian sky. The audience was completely excited. Older people got back their wonderful memories while younger people suddenly understood why these old people always talked about the F-104 myth.... Indeed this is something really different!!!

The F-104 participated in a fly by formation with an F-35, an Eurofighter Typhoon and an ancient F-86 Sabre and continued with a second fly-by ending with a circuit break off. After that the F-104 did not land but flew away, returned back and treated the audience with a beautiful high speed low pass... Not everyone realized this in time, but it certainly left a crushing impression.

After the landing Piercarlo taxied back to his lot by playing with the throttle amusing the audience with some very nice howling music.



After the plane came to a stop, Piercarlo, standing in the cockpit, thanked the audience with a deep bow. What an amazing show. It was also great to meet Rick Svetkof shortly at the fence.



Sadly soon after the demonstration the aircraft showed some issues which needed to be solved. On the Saturday the aircraft was not able to fly and on Sunday it was able to fly in the morning but had to stay on the ground again in the afternoon. Nevertheless the 104 was the star of the show this weekend in Italy!!!

Besides the operational flying black Starfighter the Italian Air Force also showed two non-operational Starfighters on the big static platform. One of them was F-104G MM6525 with codes 3-01 (left) and 3-30 (starboard).



The other was F-104S MM6750 with fake serial “MM6804” and code 51-07. On Friday the latter F-104S was being rebuilt after arrival and late in the evening they mounted the tail wing and moved it to the ancient military aviation exposition area (grass).



On Sunday also the F-104S cockpit section was available inside one of the halls, which came from Cameri. Sadly the real identity of this cockpit is still unknown.

Sadly the options we had did not allow us to walk through guarded fences in order to make pictures of the preserved Starfighters F-104S/ASA MM6827 “black 50” and F-104G MM6527 code RS-03, both mounted on a pole.

Back in 2004, during the F-104 farewell event at Pratica di Mare, we had a lot more options and were more free to move around all spots on the Air Base and to sit along the taxiway near the runway, often receiving new bottles of water from military personnel.

Nevertheless this 100yrs anniversary event was great and also one we will never forget, especially thanks to the F-104 team!!

Saturday June 17th, 2023

This 2nd day of the big 100 years AMI event was open for all public and with the wonderful weather they Air Force expected over 250.000 spectators. Because we already could photograph all aircraft the day before and most of the day the sun was shining opposite the spectator area, we decided to drive to the South landing area outside the Airbase. After we struggled through the enormous traffic jams around Pratica we finally arrived at the spot and we were not alone!! Many spotters could be found along the sunny hot sand road. We were late but at the end the F-104 did not fly so we spent our time talking with many other people and making pictures of all other flying aircraft that day. It was a long, warm intensive day without spotting any Starfighter. The wonderful diner at the restaurant was used to compensate this a bit.

Sunday June 18th, 2023

This day we had already planned as a “wrecks & relics & museum” day and we left Pratica for all the Italian spectators. Good to hear afterwards that at least in

the morning the Starfighter was able to give a wonderful show for the audience and also for the live television recording.

So instead we drove to Velletri, near Rome. There we visited and photographed the preserved F-104S-ASA/M MM6925 wearing the RSV CMX611 "ASA-M" code RS-06 colors. It is located at street Quatiere Zona 167. In the morning sun you will be able to make pictures from the starboard side, in the later afternoon the other side can be photographed from the street. Checking the c/n plates of both front wheel doors these also showed the confirming c/n "1225" (MM6925).



After this F-104 we headed for the wonderful army museum at Borgo Faiti, named Museo Storico Piana Delle Orme. In addition to the fantastic collection of army vehicles, planes and other attributes, our main interest was of course for the exhibited F-104S/ASA-M MM6939 code 5-31. In the past the museum made the Starfighter movable by a turning disc and a hydraulic joint which lifted the aircraft into a taking off position. It looks however that this system is no longer working because the whole afternoon it was a dead sitting object.

In sunny conditions it is advised to visit the aircraft in the morning for the best light conditions from its starboard side.



We also had planned to visit the brand new Air Force museum location at Vigna di Valle this day, so we drove to the Bracciano Lake in the afternoon. There we found the so called MUSAM (MUseo Storico Aeronautica Militare).

We were very impressed with this beautiful museum which had just modernized and reopened recently. Many countries can take a good example of this museum quality!

Of course we mainly visited the museum for the Starfighters. First we found inside an F-104S/ASA-M front (cockpit section) of MM6714 code 9-51, which shows a mounted CFE-plate from MM6741. (Again an example of a sad mix up by personnel at Grazzanise Air Base in the mid-2000s, creating many Starfighters for display purposes).



Also we found the famous F-104G MM6501 with code 3-11, that we had last seen at the static show at Pratica di Mare back in May 2004.



Around diner time we left the museum and started a search for an F-104 fuselage which should be found inside a garden somewhere near town Cerveteri. Finally we managed to find it and made contact with the owner. Soon after the owner, a former 21 Gruppo Starfighter pilot with 1000hrs, welcomed us into the garden and we started a wonderful conversation full with memories and old stories. A moment later another guy came out of the house joining us. It was another ex 21 Gruppo Starfighter pilot, and friend of the owner. Both just had watched the Pratica Air Show live on television together that day and which had just ended. What a great moment to visit these ex pilots!



We were allowed to make pictures of the Starfighter fuselage after we took off the cover which protected the canopy glass against the harmful Italian sun. This fuselage was retrieved from Scrap dealer Bentivoglio at Rome around 2012. It is F-104S/ASA MM6792 code 5-21 with its original tail section and the nose radome section came from F-104S/ASA MM6836. In between the owner changed the serial from 5-21 to 53-21 to link it to his old squadron at Cameri Air Base. The wonderful 104 related conversion continued with more great stories. The owner of the house showed us some pictures among which were 21 Gruppo group pictures and pictures taken of the F-104 MM6774 code 53-22 and MM6737 which had survived a midair collision together on April 13th, 1976. The owner flew in one of them and was glad both aircraft managed to land. The friend of the fuselage owner told that he had been to the USA many years ago and saw the ex-Jordanian F-104B at Thunderbird Aviation. After he had shown a lot of interest the owner of the 104 asked him why. And after he told the owner that he had reached 820 flying hours inside Starfighters the owner was amazed and asked : "And you are still alive??"....

(Picture beneath by Michiel Vogelpoel)



We left the two ex-pilots (Names not mentioned due to respect of privacy) with a wonderful feeling. This evening visit was really the icing on the cake for this day!!

Monday June 19th, 2023

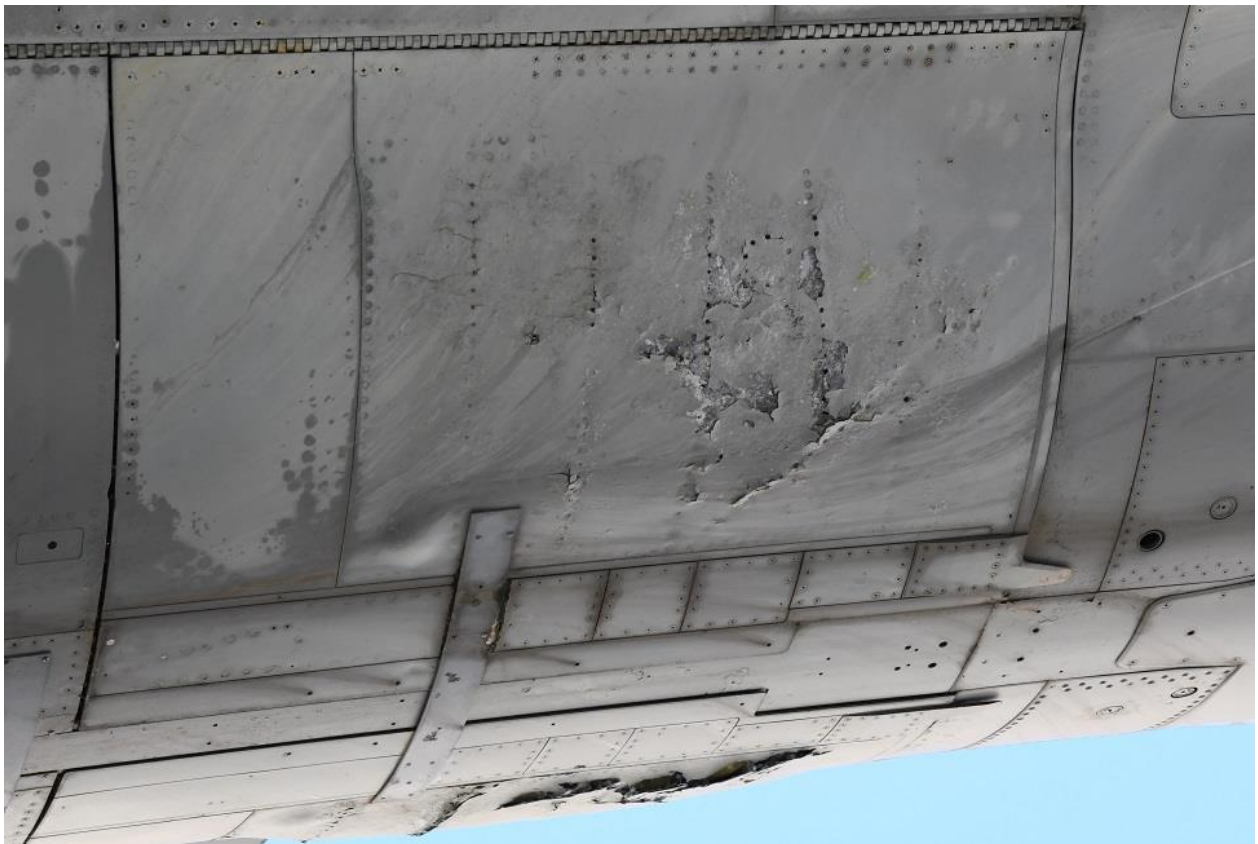
Again a new day. The Pratica event had finished and everything was normal again in the neighborhood of Rome. But not for us, we still had to follow our planned program which included a long drive back North to Milano in the afternoon. Before leaving Rome we first drove to the local Ferrari studio/garage Scuderia Baldini located Via Idrovore Magliano 49. We were welcomed by a salesman who gave us permission to make any pictures we want.

Hanging on the ceiling they own the fuselage of F-104S/ASA MM6922 fitted with the tail section from F-104G MM6559 and nose-radome section from F-104S MM6931. It arrived there on March 6th, 2018 and was obtained from the Bentivoglio Scrapdealer in Rome. The salesman told us that the aircraft had been completely wrapped with silver/aluminum paper which gives the impressive shiny appearance. After a while he offered us to try to make pictures also from the canteen window on the 1st floor. Although the window was not 100% clean some pictures could be made anyhow!.

The visit was finished with a cup of cappuccino in the garage bar. What a great location also for the wonderful cars they have for sale!



On our way to Milano we stopped at Modena to visit the pole seated Starfighter at the University (address Via Vignolese 905). In sunny conditions this aircraft can best be photographed from starboard side in the afternoon, just as we did. This Starfighter, the F-104S/ASA-M MM6848, arrived around 2008 and wears the correct CFE-plate. It looks still in good condition although sadly the main landing doors showed heavy corrosion.



Tuesday June 20th, 2023

After a good breakfast at the hotel in Milano we packed our cars and prepared for our trip back home. Together we decided first to visit the Aviation museum Vולandia at Malpenza and check if indeed this museum still owns the German F-104G 20+37 within their collection. Some believed it had been gone and replaced by an F-104S/ASA-M which arrived last year.

Inside we indeed found back the Luftwaffe F-104G 20+37, which had been moved to another exhibition hall. The aircraft is on loan from the German Air Force museum Berlin-Gatow and they had to promise that the aircraft should be kept inside due to the corrosion-sensible shiny aluminum appearance.



Inside the AMI jets hall we also found the recently obtained F-104S/ASA-M MM6737 code 9-51. This aircraft had arrived at the museum in March this year. It had been preserved for many years at Vairano Scalo with ISISS Marconi, and transported back to Grazzanise around 2020. After a few years in storage it was cleaned and brought over to this museum at Malpenza. On the aircraft a CFE-plate has been mounted in 2006 belonging to aircraft MM6879 which makes everything again quite complicated and food for interpretations because it truly has been identified as the real MM6737.



Sadly the exhibition hall has a very poor lighting.. which means you have some challenges to make good pictures!!

After the museum visit we headed for home. In Germany I took a small stop for a drink and some food at a big petrol-station at Lahr. It is located near the pole mounted Starfighter which I had not visited before. So this was a good opportunity. The Starfighter represents a Canadian CF-104 which were stationed at Lahr Airbase in the sixties and seventies.

However the aircraft is an ex Luftwaffe Starfighter once flying around as 24+38. It ended its flying career at Memmingen with JBG34 before it was phased out with LVR1 at Manching in 1987. It became a battle damage repair instructional airframe with TsLw3 at Fassberg from the summer of 1989 and was transported later in 2002 to Buchel for scrapping. It was sold via VEBEG in the summer of 2002 and on August 25th 2003 it was mounted on the pole.

And now, 20 years later, I took some pictures of it. By the way, the tail of the aircraft once belonged to F-104G 24+11.



Currently named Lahr Airport was formerly also known as Black Forest Airport Lahr, a privately owned and operated commercial airport located in Lahr, situated in the Black Forest area . It is used for general aviation and freight transport.

Text and pictures by Harry Prins, except picture of helmet at page 11 thanks to Michiel Vogelpoel

On my way to Italy

Michiel Vogelpoel wrote a trip report about his travel to Milan before he continued his trip to Pratica di Mare in June 2023.

Last year December I heard for the first time that the Italian Air Force was planning to fly an active Starfighter for their “100th Year Anniversary Air Show” at Pratica di Mare Airbase in the summer of 2023. Talking to Harry Prins, we decided to go there together and made the first contact with the ItAF press office in March this year for early access on Friday 16th June. Initially we were informed to contact our Embassy with this request, however later we were told to contact the ItAF directly. Then silence! I was ready to give up, but in the end we got our permission in the afternoon of Wednesday 7th June.

Now it was time to quickly plan for the trip, Harry could only leave on Wednesday the 14th, so we made the plan to meet at a hotel just near Milan, where Harry planned to arrive in the early morning of Thursday.

I left Berlin in the morning of Tuesday the 13th, first dropping my dog of at the Taiwanese dogsitter. Because I was not in a hurry, sometime could be spend visiting Starfighters on the way.

Flugplatz Museum Cottbus – June 13th, 2023

At this museum they have two Starfighters, the first one is c/n 683-8275 and ex. WGAF 25+12, this aircraft was wfu on 27 November 1987 and stored at Manching AB.



On 27 June 1989 the airframe was transported to Fassberg AB as ABDR reserve, progressing in the mid-nineties to Jagel AB for ABDR training. In 2010 the aircraft was sold to a private individual and brought over to Neuhardenberg AB for restauration. Finally moving in September 2017 to the Flugplatz Museum.

The second Starfighter at this museum arrived recently. This aircraft is c/n 683-7025 and ex. WGAF 21+56 and was wfu on 15 July 1987 and stored at Manching AB. On 28 September 1992 the aircraft went to the Museum at Köln-Butzweilerhof, however this museum closed in September 1996 and the F-104 went in 1997 to the Luftfahrt und Technik Museum park at Merseburg. Here it stayed to September 2021 (museum closed March 2021), when it was delivered to the Flugplatz Museum. The aircraft is owned by the Luftwaffe museum.



Militär Museum der Bundeswehr Dresden – June 13th, 2023

This Museum has an external coldwar exhibition at the moment, with NATO and Eastern Block Tanks, Helicopters, Aircraft and other military hardware displayed side by side. The F-104 is displayed beside a NVA MIG-21 F aircraft.

The aircraft c/n 683-7309 and ex. WGAF 26+49 was wfu on 15 December 1989 at Manching AB. On 23 September 1992 it moved to Erding AB for further storage. Shortly after, in October 1992, the airframe was allocated to the Verkehr- und Technik Museum in Berlin and stored at Gatow. However the aircraft was never displayed there and became part of the Luftwaffe Museum external display around 1997. In February 2023 it went to Dresden. See picture on next page.



Deutsches Museum Munich – June 14th, 2023

This Museum was heavily renovated and has opened a new aircraft section in 2022. Part of the collection is a F-104F showing a ejection sequence. It is unfortunately that the sign in front of the aircraft carries a large “Witwenmacher” text.

The aircraft c/n 283-5049 and ex. WGAF 29+03 was wfu on 16 April 1971 at Erding AB. On 27 March 1972 it was allocated to the Deutsches Museum in Munich and displayed outside without serial. In May 1978 it was stored at Erding AB, moving to Oberschleißheim in October 1982 for further storage. In 11 January 1990 it went to Erding AB for restauration and from 12 September 1992 was displayed at the Deutsches Museum Oberschleißheim section. In 2022 it went to Munich.



Caproni Museum Trento – June 14th, 2023

Outside this Museum, the c/n 683-6609 and ex. ItAF MM6609 is displayed and in need of some TLC (Tender Loving Care), however it is beautifully displayed with a background of Alpine mountains.



The aircraft was wfu on 25 April 1989 at Villafranca AB. On 31 August 1992 it was allocated to the Caproni Museum and displayed outside with code 3-01.

Cubi Company – Sommacampagna – June 14th, 2023

On display outside this company on a trailer, the c/n 783-1068 and ex. ItAF MM6768 with code 3-28 is displayed.

The aircraft was wfu on 19 January 1994 at Rimini AB. In 2000 it went to Cervia AB for CFE Treatment. In 2004 the remains were bought by the Bentivoglio scrapyard in Rome and “restored” with the nose- and tailsections of other F-104 S’s. From 16 December 2004 it was displayed on the roof of the Cubi Company at Dossobuono. The company moved in 2019 to its current position and the Starfighter was moved with them on 28 May 2019.

The exact location of the company is Via dell'Artigianato, 92, 37066 Caselle. Caselle is a small village near Verona- Dossobuono.

See picture on next page.



Museo Nicolis – Villafranca – June 14th, 2023

On display on the roof of this museum are three aircraft, one of them is a F-104 G. The aircraft is in a terrible state, the special colour scheme deteriorated heavily.



The aircraft, c/n 683-6514 ex. ItAF MM6514 was wfu on 27 February 1992 at

Villafranca AB. In 1994 it received CFE Treatment at this base. In October 1999 2004 the remains were bought by the Museo Nicolis. The aircraft was restored and received the special c/s of the RSV display aircraft MM6827. However the base colour was blue and not black as the original. From January 2001 it was displayed on the roof of the Museum. (This aircraft served during the 1st Gulf war in Erhac AB in Turkey!)



This is how the aircraft looked in September 2002 (photo author)

Military barracks – Villafranca – June 14th, 2023

The 3 Stormo barracks in the center of Villafranca have as a gateguard the F-104 G c/n 683-6547 ex. MM6547 ItAF

The aircraft was wfu on 24 March 1989 at Villafranca AB. In 1995 it became gateguard at the 3 Stormo barracks.

See picture of this aircraft at the back of this ZIPPER magazine.

Text and pictures by Michiel Vogelpoel

