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Ressort: Special interest

Cameri, from airfield to "nest" of F35 (The Lightning nest

Cameri (IT), 06.03.2021 [ENA]

The airport where the Lockheed F35s destined for European countries are born.

FACO Cameri, the place where the Italian high-tech industry meets the American professionalism for the production of one of the best 5th generation fighters in the world.

We are at the beginning of the 1900s and in Cameri in Piedmont (Italy) along the Ticino River between the cottages and farmhouses of the Novara countryside, in the middle of the canals and ditches that unfold in the countryside dedicated to the famous rice fields to bring them the necessary water, in an area that in future will become the transport crossroads for three important Italian industrial areas and neighboring Switzerland, it is planned to build an airfield with school to create the new pilots of the new world of aviation that is developing in Europe. Thus it was that in 1909 work began on the construction of the new airfield which with his school gave the patent to many pioneers of Italian aviation.

After a troubled phase between the first and second world wars and the delivery of thousands of flight patents, including that to Gabriele D'Annunzio, the famous Italian writer, poet and military pilot, after the great war and the destruction carried out by the Nazis fleeing from Italy, Cameri airport sees reconstruction and a new life.

Cameri thus becomes a military air base that will be the host of various Italian aeronautical departments and also home to one of the first Italian aerobatic teams: I Lanceri Neri (Black Lancers).

Among the various departments, the presence of the 3° G.E.V. stands out, the 3° "Aircraft Efficiency Group", made up of five overhaul teams with specialists who dealt with aircraft overhauls with a propensity to reduce aircraft downtime as much as possible. With the advent of the Panavia Tornado this department was transformed into 1° CMP, 1° "Main Maintenance Center", which then became in November 1985 the current 1° RMV, 1° "Aircraft Maintenance Department", which became to this day he is in charge of the maintenance of the Panavia Tornados and the Eurofighter Typhoons.

During these evolutions of the departments within Cameri, the military destination of the base also changed, becoming an Airport Command with the task of coordinating and controlling the flight activity carried out on the airport and logistical and administrative support to the Autonomous Corps Command of 1° "Aircraft Maintenance Department". An important presence in Cameri was the 53° Stormo Caccia with its

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"Asso di Spade" (Ace of Spade) as a symbol, reconstituted in 1967 right in the Piedmontese military airport, it watched over the north-italian skies until 1999, first with Lockheed F104G, then with the Tornado ADV and the Aeritalia F104ASA up to the Eurofighters before ceasing its operation and being downgraded to Airport Command.

The Cameri military airport to date offers to the sight of enthusiasts and the local population, often and willingly, all the best of Italian and recently also European aviation. MB339 or Tornado and Eurofighter visits for maintenance or test flights are frequent at the airport. The current configuration of the airport and the birth within it of an important aeronautical pole, position it at European level as an important center of the aeronautical industry, the result of Italian excellence. In fact, with the presence inside the Alenia-Aermacchi plant of the Leonardo Company, an ever-growing aeronautical industrial sector has been created.

Leonardo carries out many operations within the airport grounds, it is used as a base for testing Agusta helicopters and the production of a jewel of the world aeronautics has long since begun within the walls of its warehouses.

In the last decade Cameri has become the headquarters of FACO - Final Assembly and Check Out, the department created by the Leonardo Company for the final assembly of Lockheed's next generation fighter, the F-35 Lightning II.

Italy, being a partner of the JSF-Joint Strike Fighter program for the construction of a 5th generation fighter with the choice fell on the Lockheed F-35 project, has in Leonardo its strong point of collaboration with this program. The Italian Air Force and the Navy are involved in the purchase of the new multi-role fighter and therefore Cameri proved to be fundamental as an air base for the construction of the new aircraft for Italy.

The Cameri air base has therefore seen a good investment in its facilities for the creation of the pole that sees it as the protagonist for this important program.

FACO in Cameri deals with the assembly and final testing of the F-35 in all its versions: F-35A (CTOL) and F-35B and C (Vertical Landing and STOVL-Short Take Off) for the Italian Air Forces and Dutch Air Force. Another important role acquired by Leonardo in Cameri was the choice by the US Department of Defense as the main center for Europe of all MRO & U activities - Heavy Airframe Maintenance Repair, Overhaul and Upgrade of the F-35s, another important step of the history of this over one hundred year old Italian air base.

Since the end of the first assembly in the not too distant March 2015 with the exit from the production line of the first Italian F-35 Lightning II designated: AL-1 and the subsequent Roll-out, the Cameri plants have

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become the only plant for the production of the fifth generation fighter-bomber outside the USA. Since then, the Alenia-Aermacchi plants have collaborated with Lockheed employing more than 700 people for the construction of aircraft mainly for Italy and Holland, but the Cameri Aircraft Division also produces complete wings for aircraft assembled in the USA, using composite materials and metal structures produced in the Leonardo plants in Foggia and Nola (Aerostructures Division) and Venegono (Aircraft Division).

In May 2017, the first F-35 Lightning II version B, variant with short take-off and vertical landing, built in Europe, was also released from the Cameri workshops.

The F-35 Lightning II is a multirole fighter, equipped with Pratt & Whitney F135-PW-100 engine with afterburner and 191 kN thrust, which combines advanced stealth characteristics with speed and agility typical of a fighter, possesses advanced mission systems and thanks to new sensors accumulates much more information that increases combat and defense capabilities, a new concept of missions even against ground targets, the result of intense research and the new challenges they pose new technologies.

As a multi-role it can be used as close air support, tactical bombing and air supremacy missions, but in the military field it is also defined as omni-role, given its special ability to play simultaneously, without the need to return to its base to modify the set-up, different combat operations. In recent years it has also acquired the "Initial Operation Capability" in various air forces and is already used in "Operational Missions" for air defense and in some war environments.

The Cameri Air Base with its facilities is contributing to the development and production of this new concept of air combat and of this new generation of combat aircraft. It is now common for this splendid aircraft to appear in the Novara skies where FACO carries out the test-flights of its aircraft.

The Italian industrial and military excellence is shown to the world from the airport grounds of the Piedmontese countryside above the rice fields and the not far and precious vineyards that stand out on the horizon, the future of the aeronautical industry darting in the Italian skies under the watchful eyes of Italian engineering and the supervision of American professionalism.

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