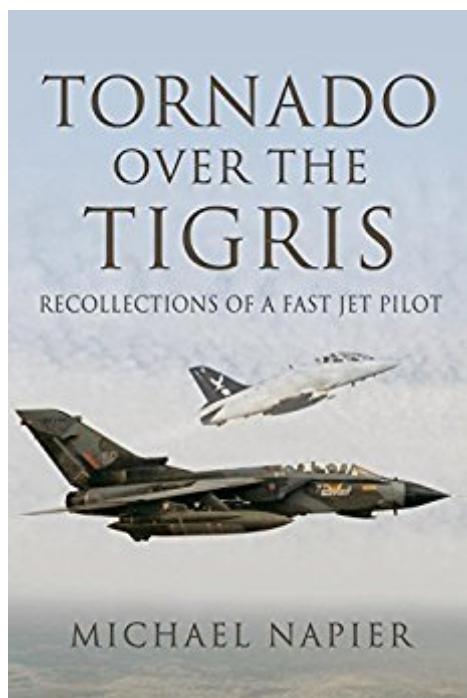


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# Tornado Over The Tigris : Recollections Of A Fast Jet Pilot



## **Synopsis**

Written from the unique perspective of a fast jet cockpit, *Tornado Over the Tigris* captures the essence of what it was really like to fly a Tornado at the front-line of the Cold War in Germany and on operations over Iraq in the aftermath of the Gulf War. After achieving a boyhood ambition to qualify as an RAF pilot, Michael Napier was posted to RAF Bruggen in Germany where he spent five years flying Tornado GR1 strike/attack aircraft at the height of the Cold War. Always exhilarating, sometimes amusing and often dangerous, Michael Napier's Tornado flying ranged from 'routine' low-flying in continental Europe and the UK, to air combat manoeuvring in Sardinia and the ultra-realistic Red Flag exercises in the USA. Progressing from struggling first-tourist to respected four-ship leader, he then became an instructor at the Tactical Weapons Unit at RAF Chivenor. This tour, during which he flew the Hawk, provided yet more exciting and challenging flying. He returned to the Tornado at Bruggen as a Flight Commander shortly after the Gulf War and subsequently flew a number of operational sorties over Iraq, which included leading air-strikes against Iraqi air defence installations as part of major Coalition operations. This is his story, told with ease and great style. It is sure to inspire a fresh generation of fast jet pilots as they strive to make their own marks in this field.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

Fascinating book very well written and lots of interesting detail. I had the pleasure of working with Mike on 31 Squadron at RAF Bruggen, I was part of the ground crew at the same time that Mike was a pilot. I found the book 100% accurate on the events that I was also part of and it was very insightful to read about these events from the pilots perspective. We (the ground crew) would maintain the aircraft and hand them over to the aircrew without really knowing what happened in the time before they returned. All in all a great read and I would highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to know, not just what it was like flying a Tornado bomber during the cold war and gulf war, but also the training an RAF pilot has to go through along with the ups and downs of a proficient pilot.

Used to aviation books written by Americans about American units and conflicts, this rare and excellently written book gets you into the cockpit of a British tornado through the cold war, red flags and some action in the Gulf. Glad I got it.

For everyone who is interested in Cold War military aviation during a time when European airforces were at its best quantity-wise . Michael is a master in telling a story without losing himself in aviation specific jargon.

Awesome informative book

Tornado Over the Tigris is a fantastic book and a wonderfully rewarding piece of writing. Michael Napier skilfully writes about a line of work that is intrinsically technical in a way that makes it accessible to the layperson. Combine this rare talent with a truly remarkable ability to describe some of the sights and sounds of tactical fast jet flying, skyscapes, landscapes, people and anecdotes, and you have the ingredients required to produce fantastic prose that is eminently readable, thoroughly enjoyable, and has you repeatedly coming back for more. The book sheds light on the journey of a young man who dreams of flying with the Royal Air Force and goes on to make that a reality, despite self doubt and the challenges that are inherent in fast jet operations. There's real

humility in the retelling of Napier's years flying Tornados - another quality that endears the book and the author to reader, particularly so in a genre where a lot of fighter pilots-turned-writers are quite happy to paint themselves the way they want to be seen, not the way that they actually were. The book regularly delivers humour, pausing occasionally to describe the impact of mishaps and lost friends, and provides a little insight into the political machinations at squadron and wing level of the RAF's Tornado force in the 1980s and 1990s. There are ample images in the book, mostly well positioned and well captioned. Personally, I was most engrossed by Napier's ability to recreate sorties that occurred 20 years ago with a clarity, eye for detail and immediacy that made it feel like he was flying them right now. I don't doubt that there's some artistic license in use here (he doesn't say whether he kept all of his cockpit tapes, but I have to wonder how exactly he remembers the actual comm and radio transmissions from two decades prior), but as someone with a very small amount of fast jet passenger experience, to include over some of the Red Flag ranges he mentions, I was spellbound. His early descriptions of some of his Red Flag sorties are just mesmerising. Had Napier self published this book, I'd have given it five stars. As it is, he has, in my view, been let down by his publisher. This book needs the gentle but skilled hand of a good aerospace editor to really elevate it to the next level. A small handful of Napier's stories are never completed, leaving the reader wondering what happened and why (one about a wingman experiencing airframe vibration is one such example). The chapters are dense walls of text that lack pacing, making it sometimes a bit of a chore to keep going despite the quality of writing (it would have been so easy to have added some natural breaks and created a more considered chapter structure, so I am at a loss to know why that never happened). And there's a regular switching of tenses that Napier uses as a device to contrast his narrative voice with his 'there I was' story telling voice - it's a good idea, but it's sometimes a bit clumsy and distracting (the publisher could have helped him to finesse it, I am sure). If it sounds like I am singling out the publisher quite a bit here, that's because I am. I am rapidly tiring of seeing publishers do the absolute minimum required of them to get these sort of books to print. It's bad for the author and it's bad for the reader. Bottom line is that this is a great book. Buy it and enjoy it. And if Michael Napier writes another, buy that, too - I know that I will.

I really liked this book. This author's ability to tell the story in an easy, approachable way is but one of the many reasons why. What really comes through in this very personal story is that when I finished reading, I just wanted to call him up and grab a drink like you might with an old friend. *Tornado over the Tigris* tells the story of a seemingly unremarkable boy (of course he *wasn't* he became a fighter pilot!) whose obsessive passion for aircraft as a child

and through his teens led him onto a path as a fast-jet pilot flying the Tornado in the RAF. From his first experiences in the air as a teenager flying gliders to the mechanics of powered flight and onwards through RAF training on the Jet Provost followed by the BAe Hawk, Michael Napier describes his journey in almost playful detail allowing us to almost think we were right there with him or certainly could have been. Much time is spent describing his training on the Hawk and transitioning from honing his basic flying skills in the red and white painted aircraft of RAF Valley to the very serious camouflaged machines at Chivenor where the aircraft was finally employed as a weapon. Through the Tri-nation-Tornado-Training-Establishment, Napier finally completes his childhood dream of a career in a fast-jet cockpit and having come with him for the journey we too are elated with his first posting right on the Cold War's front-line at RAF Bruggen in Germany. Napier's honest account of life on this front-line jumps from the teething issues with a new jet, exciting deployments to the ACM range at Deci, as well as his first of many selections for Red Flag in the US. Napier's posting back to Chivenor as an instructor sees him miss the first Gulf War. On completion of his instructor's tour and on return to Bruggen, he finally flies operational sorties over Iraq and this is where we get a good taste of life on this line " from the stifling foreign conditions of the Gulf countries to the on-again-off-again US led punitive air strikes over Iraq. The obvious politics leaks through here as the unavoidable bureaucratic chains of command begin to micro-dictate all operational matters with the assignment and reassignment of crews proving to be one of the more frustrating aspects. Finally leading a strike into Iraq is almost anti-climactic for him " no doubt due to both the rather docile Iraqi defences as well as the low-level simmering tensions within the allied operation. Fittingly the story finishes at RAF Bruggen where his final flight is almost unnoticed save for the "irate boss" waiting to get to the bar and his crew mate Cookie with whom he shared many good times and flights and who features through the text. This is a fabulous tale of strength through perseverance, of loss of friends and of true purpose and meaning. I really don't mean to make too much of it, but I really finished this one with a quiet sense of almost personal satisfaction at his achievements. Michael's story and the way it is told really makes you feel like you saw it all too. If you haven't read this one yet " do so slowly and enjoy the ride.

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