



# Military English

CEFR A2 / ADFELPS 4  
and above

Lesson: Combined Air Force Exercises – Exercise Pitch Black  
[listening]

**TEACHER'S COPY**

## Overview:

This lesson presents vocabulary related to combined air force training.

## In this lesson, you will:

- ✓ practise listening for gist and specific information
- ✓ learn and practise new vocabulary and expressions about combined air force training.

Teacher's notes are indicated by this: **TN →**

**TN →** Play [this](#) 40sec video to set the context (you can also scan the QR code →).

Ask students (Ss) 'Which countries are the air forces from in the video?' (answer, in the order in which they appear: United Kingdom – RAF (Royal Air Force), Japan (Air Self-Defense), Thailand (Royal Thai Air Force), Australia (Royal Australian Air Force, or RAAF), Indonesia (Indonesian Air Force).



## Prepare for Listening

1) In pairs, discuss:

- What do you see in the pictures? **TN →** All images from Pitch Black 2024. See answers (ans) below
- What was the best training event you have ever been on?
- Have you ever travelled anywhere for training? How did it make you feel?
- How can training with people from different countries help people learn?

**TN →** Ask Ss to work in pairs and discuss the questions. Give them a time limit e.g. 2min. Monitor and note good ans. For feedback (FB), those Ss who gave good ans to share them with the class.



**TN →** A Republic of Singapore Air Force Pilot conducts a Brief.



**TN →** RAAF and USAF aircraft conduct an elephant walk i.e. a formation of aircraft taxiing in close succession, designed to demonstrate an air force's ability to rapidly mobilize, launch, and project airpower.



**TN →** Members from participating countries walk and chat along the flight line at RAAF Base Darwin.

2) In the box there are some words we need for today's listening. Match them with the pictures.  
**TN →** Read the instructions together. Have Ss work and guess. With weaker Ss, have them work in pairs. Monitor and support Ss. Encourage guessing. Ss probably won't know all the words. If you see Ss have one wrong, point it out to them, but let them try to work out what is right and wrong for themselves. Have Ss compare their ans. You don't need to check ans as a class. Use the recording in task 3 for Ss to listen and check.

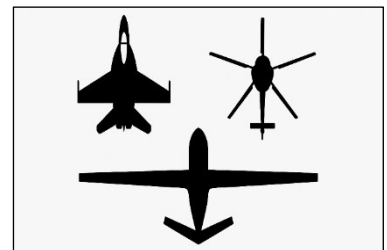
a hostage // aircraft // a region // a square kilometre // parking // an airbase //  
 a landslide // a PAC-750 light transport // a recruitment tent



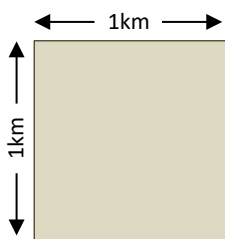
a. a hostage



b. a PAC-750 light transport **TN →** this is the model of the aircraft in the picture



c. aircraft



d. a square kilometre



e. a region



f. parking



g. a landslide



h. a recruitment tent



i. an airbase

3) Listen and check your answers. **TN →** Use the recording to have Ss listen and check. Answer any questions Ss have about the vocabulary. Ss can refer back to this activity as a mini-dictionary if they get stuck.

4) Discuss these questions with your partner to practice the new words. **TN →** Tell Ss they'll practise using the words from task 2 in discussions. Give Ss a time limit e.g. 5min for Ss to discuss the questions. For FB, ask a few random Ss for the ans to a few of the questions below.

- Are there ever **landslides** in your country? Do the armed forces help when there is a **landslide**?
- Have you ever seen a **recruitment tent** for your armed forces? Where was it?
- Does your country have a **PAC750**? What do you think these planes are used for?
- Can you name 5 countries in your **region**?
- Would you like to do training to help **hostages**? What do you think you'd would learn?
- How many **airbases** are there in your country?

5) Look at some pictures from *Exercise Pitch Black*. What can you see in the pictures? Where is *Exercise Pitch Black*? What happens at *Exercise Pitch Black*? What do you want to know about *Exercise Pitch Black*?

**TN →** Give Ss a time limit e.g. 5min for Ss to discuss the questions. This will help to further set the context for the listening. Ss will learn more detailed information on these questions in the listening. Possible ans for the above questions. What can you see in the pictures? (see below); Where is *Exercise Pitch Black*? (in the north of Australia); What happens at *Exercise Pitch Black*? (training for air force personnel); What do you want to know about *Exercise Pitch Black*? (ans will vary. Elicit from a few random Ss).

**TN →** personnel from different countries during a forum (= a type of training event where people discuss their opinions on a set topic).



**TN →** an open day (when the military invites the public into a base to see equipment and talk to military personnel)




**TN →** both images ↓ and ↑ show foreign air force aircraft. Above is a Royal Malaysian Air Force F/A-18D Hornet and below are Indonesian Air Force F16 Fighting Falcon aircraft.

**TN →** a fly-by, where aircraft fly close to people so people can watch them.



## Listening

- 6)  Look at the main ideas below. What order do you **think** you will hear them in? Listen, and number the main ideas 1-6. The first one has been done as an example.

**TN →** Ask Ss to read the blue text box (this tip is especially useful in tests like ADFELPS and IELTS), then to read the headings below and, in pairs, guess which order they will appear in the listening. Then play the recording and ask Ss to listen and check. Ask them to check with a partner, then ask the whole class for the ans.

5 How ordinary people can enjoy *Exercise Pitch Black*

2 The size of *Exercise Pitch Black*

6 See you next time?

1 Training missions at *Exercise Pitch Black*


4 International visitors

3 Why *Exercise Pitch Black* takes place

### Listening Tip! – guessing skills

When you guess answers to questions, it helps you:

- get ready to listen
- understand all the questions.

- 7)  Listen for detail. Answer the questions with a number and no more than two words that you hear.

**TN →** Ask Ss to try and answer the questions before you play the recording a second time. Then play the recording and ask Ss to check with a partner. Play a second time if needed.

- How many hostages are in the training scenario? 20 hostages
- How big is the training area? 214,000 square kilometres
- How long has the event been taking place? 43 years
- How long does it take to get to Darwin from RAAF Base Amberley? 3 hours
- How many missions were conducted during *Exercise Pitch Black* 2024? 1700 missions
- How many countries joined in in 2024? 20 nations
- How many people joined in in 2024? 4500 personnel

## Learning Military Vocabulary

8) The words listed in bold below are important vocabulary and expressions that you should learn to use.

Match the vocabulary on the left with their definitions on the right. Look at the example.

**TN →** Ask Ss to look at the example. Explain: 1. match the words in bold on the left with the definition on the right; 2. the tables are separate so the ans for table 1 are only in table 1; 3. elicit what the letter at the beginning of each definition (right column) is: (the word class). Knowing the word class will help them find the correct ans. Give Ss 10 mins. Ask weaker Ss to work in pairs. It's important to monitor. Go around the class and randomly check Ss' ans. If they're incorrect, just say they're incorrect and let them work out the mistake. Give Ss more time if necessary.

Table 1









need to <b>extract</b> them	e	a. (n) military personnel who are fighting on land; not in the air or on the sea 
support <b>ground troops</b> like soldiers	a	b. (n) a planned practice event where military from different countries work together to improve their skills
go through <b>training scenarios</b>	d	c. (n) people who are taking part in an activity or event
the biggest <b>combined training exercise</b> in the region	b	d. (n) practice situations that help military personnel learn and improve their skills for real events
<b>participants</b> get put into teams	c	e. (v) to quickly and safely remove someone or something from a dangerous place 
This ability to work well together develops <b>interoperability</b>	f	f. (n) the ability of different military groups or countries to work together easily and share information

Table 2

<p>to <b>build relationships</b> with regional partners</p>	<p>j</p>	<p>g. (n) countries in the same part of the world that work together</p>	
<p>to build relationships with <b>regional partners</b></p>	<p>g</p>	<p>h. (n) when one or more aircraft fly low over a place during a special event</p>	
<p>up to 100 aircraft on a <b>mission</b></p>	<p>i</p>	<p>i. (n) help given to people after a very bad event like a flood, earthquake or tsunami</p>	
<p>a <b>disaster relief</b> mission</p>	<p>i</p>	<p>j. (vp) to create good connections and understanding between people or groups, often by working together</p>	
<p>'fly past' is held on Mindil Beach</p>	<p>h</p>	<p>k. (n) practice activities that pilots do in the sky with their aircraft to improve their skills</p>	
<p>this includes <b>aerial drills</b></p>	<p>k</p>	<p>l. (n) an important job or task that a military group is given to do</p>	

9)  Listen and check. **TN →** Once Ss have finished and compared with their partner, use the recording to listen and check. **TN →** This stage can also act like concept checking questions (CCQs) but is a little more fun. Put Ss into small groups and get each group to make their own buzzer sound. This could be clapping or hitting the table or stamping their feet. Tell Ss to make a team name with their group and write these on the board. Tell Ss that you are going to give them a clue, and the first team to use their “buzzer”, hear their name called, and answer correctly gets a point. If you have internet in class, you could also change this stage into a quiz game like Kahoot!. 1. The Special Forces are planning a mission to remove four military personnel from a dangerous area. The Special Forces are going to \_\_\_\_\_ them

(extract); 2. This noun means when militaries of different countries understand each other and can work well together (interoperability); 3. What's the name of the training pilots do in the air, with aircraft? (aerial drill); 4. The army is sending soldiers to fight in the jungle. What can we call these soldiers? (ground troops); 5. Countries which are close to each other and are friends (regional partners); 6. The help the military gives to people after a natural disaster like a tsunami (disaster relief); 7. What is the word for when aircraft fly close to people during an event? (fly past); 8. The people who take part in a competition are the \_\_\_\_? (participants); 9. What do we call it when militaries from different countries train together? (combined (training) exercise).

10)  Now, let's practise saying the words. Listen and repeat. Look at where the stress is underlined.

**TN →** Tell Ss the underlined bits in the words on the left column of exercise eight show the stress. Sometimes the stress is a syllable and sometimes it's the stressed word in multi word items (e.g. ground troops). Use the recording to drill the vocabulary. Start by drilling the whole class, then play the recording again and this time ask individual Ss to repeat. Correct those who misplace the stressed syllable.

11) Complete the questions below with a word from the box. There are two words you do not need. Then, ask and answer the questions with your partner about you.

~~combined training exercise~~ // build relationships // interoperability // fly past // regional partners // training scenarios // participant // ~~mission~~

**TN →** This stage gives Ss another chance to check their understanding of new words. Read the instructions together as a class. Allow Ss 5 mins to complete the activity. Tell Ss to pay attention to the grammar e.g. the article 'a' on item b tells them they need a countable singular noun. For FB, ask Ss to compare with ans a partner, then check ans together as a class.

- a. What things help different armed forces have better interoperability?
- b. Why do civilians like to go and watch a fly past? Have you ever seen one?
- c. Who are some of your country's regional partners?
- d. How do you build relationships at work?
- e. What training scenarios help air force personnel prepare for real situations?
- f. Would you like to be a participant in the next *Exercise Pitch Black*? Why/not?

## Practice

12) Speaking. You and your colleagues are planning an open day for your base. The open day will let civilians know what life is like working on your base. Maybe some will want to join! Work in groups of 2-3. Discuss what activities you will put on. What will visitors be able to see and do? Share some ideas with the class.

**TN →** This, and task 13 will give Ss the opportunity to practise the new vocab. Ask Ss if anyone has been to an open day of their country's military. Ask them to think about what they saw there – or what they think they'd see in one – and discuss what they would include in their base's open day. Remind them to use the new vocab from today's lesson. Set a time limit e.g. 4min. If there is time, ask Ss to talk to another group and compare their ideas. Who has the best ideas of the two groups? Then move on to the next task.



13) Speaking. You are working at the recruitment tent. Someone wants to know what it is like to work for the armed forces in your unit. Take it in turns with your group asking and answering questions. Use the questions below to help you think of other questions.

**TN →** Ask Ss to work in the same groups from task 12. They will take it in turns asking and answering questions. Tell them they each will ask two questions (if working in pairs, they ask three questions each). They can use the questions below, but will have to think of at least one question of their own. They can't ask the same questions below as their partners. First, ask them to discuss what they see in the picture below (ans: a person asking questions about a career in the Air Force). Now give them 2-3min to think of the questions they're going to ask, then tell them to start the question and answer part. Ask ICQs: 1. Can you and your partners ask the same questions? (n); 2. Are you just going to answer questions? (n, they must ask and answer); 3. Are you going to try and use some of the new words from this lesson? (y!). Monitor the activity, and provide help as needed. For FB, ask 2-3 random Ss what questions they were asked, and what they answered.

What's the best thing about your job?

Tell me about some of the training you do.

How many hours do you work a day?

Do you have to work with foreign personnel?



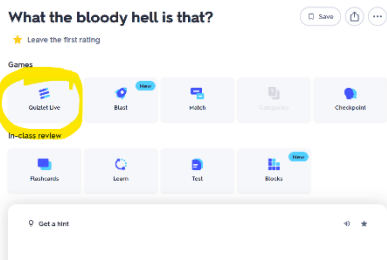
- Watch a video about Pitch Black 2018. Type in YouTube [Exercise Pitch Black 18 Open Day at RAAF Base Darwin](#) or scan the QR code. →



What events can you see? Would you add any other event to this Open Day at RAAF Base Darwin? **TN →** ans: static display, recruitment tents, personnel meeting and greeting the public, eating and drinking.

**TN →** If you have time, do this task in class. Otherwise, set it for homework.

- For more practice with the words you've learned here, scan the QR code for a set of Quizlet flashcards. You can do some more study on the vocab in this lesson on your own with these. →



**TN →** If you have time left over, and your Ss have phones with internet play Quizlet live to consolidate the lesson. You will need to be logged into Quizlet for you to start the game as a teacher. Otherwise, you **cannot** see the icon. Here is a video on how the game works -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q64qTBfK0IE>

**TN →** If you don't want to play Quizlet live (or if you don't have the internet) there are many other games you could play to round off the lesson such as back to the board. Instructions here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7j-2xteKB4> (I know the videos is kids, but it works for all ages, I promise!)

- This lesson links with → Lesson - Combined Air Force Exercises - Exercise Elangaroo [reading]  
Lesson – A Job in the Air Force – Loadmaster [reading]  
Vocabulary Builder – Parts of an Aircraft Movement Area

## TRANSCRIPT

**Bold** – core

**Bold underlined** – core & recycled from Lesson – Combined Air Force Exercises – Exercise Elangaroo  
[reading]

**Highlighted** – vocab presented in task two

Imagine this situation. The enemy has taken 20 **hostages**. We need to **extract** them, but the aircraft is slow and the enemy is trying to stop us. How can we keep the **aircraft** safe for long enough to save the hostages? Or support **ground troops** like soldiers in the dead of night? These are the sorts of questions air force personnel think about as they go through the **training scenarios** at *Pitch Black*.

It is the biggest **combined training exercise** in the **region**. The training area is 214,000 **square kilometres** - about the same size as Laos! Exercise *Pitch Black* happens in Darwin, Australia every 2 years. It is a huge event with a 43-year history. 2024 was so big there wasn't enough **parking** for all the aircraft to stay in the Northern Territory, where the training was held! Many **participants** had to fly 3 hours from RAAF Base Amberley in Queensland every day.

Air forces from all over the world come to join Exercise *Pitch Black*. Every day, all the participants get put into teams giving everyone a chance to work with lots of different people from all over the world. This includes **aerial drills** and support activities on the ground, like managing and operating **airbases** together. This ability to work well together develops **interoperability** between the participating forces. The air forces can also learn from one another. Watching how people from different countries do things is a great way to get new ideas and to **build relationships** with **regional partners**.

Around 1,700 missions are conducted over the 3-week *Pitch Black* period and the air forces learn a lot. The missions get harder and harder. By weeks 2 and 3 there can be up to 100 aircraft on a **mission**.

In 2024 there were more participants from around the world than ever before. The exercise included 140 aircraft from 20 different countries. 2024 was also special because some new countries got involved. For example, it was the first time Italy, Spain, the Philippines and Papua New Guinea participated. Papua New Guinea brought their new **PAC-750 light transport** along to Pitch Black for everyone to see. They are proud of this aircraft. It was used in a **disaster relief** mission after a **landslide**. They helped local people with food and water.

*Pitch Black* is also a way for the Royal Australian Air Force to show off to Australian **civilians** what they do. There are two main events. The *Pitch Black* '**fly past**' is held on Mindil Beach. People can come and sit on the beach and watch aircraft from all around the world. The second event is the Open Day. Civilians can come and see the planes up close. The Royal Australian Air Force also has **a recruitment tent** at the open day. If Australians find the *Pitch Black* events interesting, they might even like to join the air force themselves!

People are already looking forward to *Pitch Black 2026*. And yes. The Royal Australian Air Force has found some more parking at RAAF Base Tindal, which is less than an hour away!

4,500 personnel participated in 2024. Will you be there in 2026?