HISTORY ORGANISATION AND ROLES OF THE NIGERIAN AIR FORCE

INTRODUCTION

1. The armed forces of a nation constitute an effective instrument of national power. The Nigerian Air Force, being a Service in the Nigerian Armed Forces, is one of the instruments by which the nation can apply that power. The Nigerian Air Force has the primary responsibility of defending the Nigerian airspace by the use of air power and ensuring that other sister Services enjoy favourable air situations in their respective areas of operation. What then is air power? Air power is ‘The ability to project military force through the air medium’. A working definition, however, is that given by Marshal of the British Royal Air Force Hugh Trenchard who said and I quote, “Air power is the ability to use the airspace for offensive, defensive and supply services, and at the same time deny its use by an enemy” unquote. As a matter of fact, the attributes of high speed, long-range, surprise, inherent flexibility and devastating firepower, distinguish air power from sea and land powers.

2. We cannot easily forget the decisive impact of air power on the outcome of the Second World War and the Arab/Israeli wars. Also, air power was the determining factor in the Falklands and Gulf Wars, as well as the allied missions in Kosovo, Afghanistan and recently Libya. Again, the impact of air power in the Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring
Group’s operations was very significant in the overall success of the operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone. It is pertinent to state that the Nigerian Air Force played a significant role in those operations. Notwithstanding the significance of air power in military operations, its application must be synchronized with sea and land powers in order to achieve a synergy of military power.

3. The size, structure and composition of the air force of any nation would depend on a careful analysis of the anticipated threat. Other factors include the political and economic disposition of the nation. Since its inception, the Nigerian Air Force had undergone several restructuring and transformation making it better placed to fulfil its constitutional roles. Notwithstanding the convergence of the traditional areas of responsibility of the Services, each has different roles and different operational and tactical applications and requires specific skills and expertise. It is, therefore, the responsibility of members of the armed forces to improve on inter-Service knowledge to ensure operational harmony in joint operations.

**SCOPE**

4. The brief will cover the following:
   a. Historical Background of the NAF.
   b. Structure and Organization of the NAF.
   c. NAF Order of Battle.
D. Roles and Capabilities of the NAF.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

5. The need to establish an air force for Nigeria was not envisaged until the early 1960s. After attaining independence in 1960, Nigeria became vigorously involved in sub-regional and other international commitments like the United Nations peacekeeping operations. As part of the desire to fulfil these commitments, the idea of setting up an air force was mooted. This idea was further favoured when seen against the background of difficulties faced in previous operations without own air force. For instance, in campaigns such as those of Tanganyika (now Tanzania) in 1959 and Congo in the early 60s, Nigerian troops had to be airlifted by foreign air forces to and fro the theatres of operations.

6. Recruitment into the Nigeria Air Force began in 1962. However, it was not until 1964 that the Legislative Act on the establishment of the Nigerian Air Force was passed into law. The Act states as follows and I quote, ‘There shall be established and maintained in and for the Federal Republic of Nigeria, an air force to be known as the Nigerian Air Force’ unquote. The Act also states that the Nigerian Air Force shall be charged with the defence of the Federal Republic of Nigeria by air.
7. Additionally, the Armed Forces Act 105 further charged the Nigerian Air Force with the following duties as shown on the screen:

a. Enforcing and assisting in co-ordinating the enforcement of international laws, conventions, practices and customs ascribed or acceded to by Nigeria relating to aerial or space activities in the Nigerian air space.

b. Co-ordinating and enforcing of National and international air laws acceded or ascribed to by Nigeria.

c. Delineating, demarcating and co-ordinating of all aerial surveys and security zones of the Nigerian air space.

d. Other duties as the National Assembly may, from time to time, prescribe or direct.

8. In operational terms, these provisions are translated into the objectives shown on the screen:

a. To achieve a full complement to the military defence system of the Federal Republic of Nigeria both in the air, sea and on land.

b. To ensure fast and versatile mobility of the Nigerian Armed Forces.
c. To ensure the territorial integrity of a united Nigeria.

9. In order to set-up such a highly technical Service to meet these objectives, it was necessary to seek foreign assistance. Therefore, the German Air Force was tasked to establish, equip and run the NAF, with a view to eventually handing over to Nigerians. Consequently, some officer cadets and airmen were sent to Germany for flying and technical training.

10. The Germans started by opening a base in Kaduna in 1963. Unfortunately, their contract was prematurely terminated in 1966, following the political crisis and the subsequent Nigerian Civil War. Thus, the young inexperienced Nigerian Air Force had to contend with the near impossible task of fulfilling its assigned role of defending the Federal Republic of Nigeria by air. Ground attack and medium transport aircraft were hurriedly introduced into the Service. In addition to the then only NAF unit in Kaduna, more units were established in Kano, Makurdi, Enugu, Calabar, Port Harcourt, Benin and Ikeja.

11. Despite the numerous challenges, the NAF played a very significant role in the successful execution of the Civil War. After the war, the NAF was then faced with the problem of re-organization. The force structure adopted was modelled after those of the Royal Air Force and the United States Air Force. The NAF has since then been undergoing periodic re-organisation.
12. The organizational structure of the NAF is based on a functional concept. HQ NAF is responsible for establishing long and short-term mission objectives and articulating policies, plans and procedures for the attainment of these objectives. In addition, HQ NAF liaises with other Services on joint operational policies and plans. At the apex of the HQ is the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) who is vested with the command and control of the NAF. He exercises his command through 7 staff branches. The branches are Policy and Plans Branch, Training and Operations Branch, Aircraft Engineering Branch, Logistics and Communications Branch, Administration Branch, Standards and Evaluation Branch and the Office of the Air Secretary. Each Branch is headed by a principal staff officer of Air Rank. Hence, we have the Chief of Policy and Plans (COPP), Chief of Training and Operations (CTOP), Chief of Aircraft Engineering (CAcE), Chief of Logistics and Communications (CLOG & COMMS), Chief of Administration (COA) and Chief of Standards and Evaluation (COSE). These branch chiefs and the Air Secretary report directly to the CAS and advise him on policy matters affecting their respective areas of specialization.

13. There are some offices that also report directly to the CAS due to the peculiar nature of their duties. They are: Directorate of Finance and Accounts, Office of the Coordinator Project Implementation and Monitoring Team (PIMT), Directorate of Public Relations and Information and the Secretariat Procurement Planning Committee.
FUNCTIONS OF THE STAFF BRANCHES

14. Now to the functions of the branches, starting with the Policy and Plans Branch.

15. **Policy and Plans Branch.** The Policy and Plans Branch is responsible for formulating policies that provide guidance for the Nigerian Air Force in terms of its operations, administration and all other matters relating to the aerial defence of Nigeria. The directorates under the Policy and Plans Branch are: Plans, Policy, Budget, Museum and Archives as well as the Directorate of Transformation. The Policy and Plans Branch came into existence in December 2008. Until then it was a directorate under the office of the Chief of the Air Staff.

16. **Training and Operations Branch.** The Training and Operations Branch is responsible for formulating policies and issuing directives on air defence, employment of offensive weapons, intelligence and training of NAF personnel. The Branch comprises 5 directorates. These are the Directorates of Operations, Training, Air Traffic Services, Air Intelligence and Regiment.

17. **Aircraft Engineering Branch.** The Aircraft Engineering Branch is responsible for the formulation of policies, coordination and monitoring of activities related to aircraft and weapons acquisition, production and

18. **Logistics and Communications Branch.** The Logistics and Communications Branch is responsible for the formulation of policies and guidelines in consonance with its activities to drive logistics support to enhance air operations. The Logistics and Communications Branch consists of 5 directorates, namely: the Directorates of Logistics, Works, Communications, Information Technology and Space Technology.

19. **Administration Branch.** The Administration Branch makes policies and issues directives on administrative and welfare matters. It is also made up of 5 directorates. These are the Directorates of Administration, Medical Services, Education, Air Provost and Legal Services.

20. **Standards and Evaluation Branch.** The Standards and Evaluation Branch is responsible for inspections and evaluation of NAF operational readiness. It also ensures adherence to operational and safety standards. The Branch comprises 5 directorates. These are Directorates of Inspections, Safety, Research and Development, Evaluation and Manuals.

21. **Office of the Air Secretary.** The Office of the Air Secretary is responsible for the formulation of policies for manpower development including recruitments, postings, promotions, retirements and resettlement.
The Office of the Air Secretary comprises 2 directorates namely the Directorate of Personnel Management and Directorate of Recruitment, Reserve and Resettlement.

THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDS

22. At the field level, the NAF has 4 operational commands as shown on the screen. These commands, which are functionally grouped, are the Tactical Air Command, Mobility Command, Training Command and Logistics Command.

23. The commands are headed by Air Officers Commanding (AOCs), each being assisted by a Senior Air Staff Officer (SASO). The SASO answers for the AOC in his absence. The commands are further organized into groups/depots headed by commanders. The groups/depots are organized into wings/centres headed by commanding officers. The wings/centres are further broken down into squadrons, which are commanded by officers commanding while the squadrons are made up of flights headed by flight commanders. All units that are co-located are supported by either a Base Services Group or a Base Services Wing, depending on the size or number of the units at the location.

24. Before I take a look at each of the commands, let me refresh your memory on the nomenclature of formations in the NAF. NAF units’ equivalent to those of the Army and their nomenclatures are as follows:
a. A command is equivalent to a division.
b. A group is equivalent to a brigade.
c. A wing is equivalent to a battalion.
d. A squadron is equivalent to a company.
e. A flight is equivalent to a platoon.
f. A section is equivalent to a section.

Now, let us consider the commands one after the other, beginning with Tactical Air Command (TAC).

**TACTICAL AIR COMMAND**

25. The Tactical Air Command is responsible for interpreting, implementing and controlling NAF operational plans. At the peak is Headquarters Tactical Air Command with 10 units under command. These are 64 Air Defence Group, 75 Strike Group Yola, 79 Composite Gp Maiduguri, 81 Air Maritime Group, Benin and 97 Special Operations Group, Port Harcourt. Others include 99 Air Combat Training Group, Kainji, 33 Logistics Group, 35 Base Services Group, and 45 NAF Hospital in Makurdi. It is through these various units that the Tactical Air Command projects and executes NAF operational plans.
MOBILITY COMMAND

26. The Mobility Command, formerly known as Military Airlift Command (MAC), was established in June 1988 with headquarters at Ibadan. However, following the rationalization exercise of NAF units in 1990, the MAC was deactivated until recently when it was again reactivated and renamed Mobility Command in February 2011.

27. The Mobility Command was established with the aim of enhancing the Nigerian Air Force constitutional role of ensuring fast and versatile mobility of the Nigerian Armed Forces. The new command, with headquarters in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, is tasked with the responsibility of performing the airpower roles of tactical and strategic airlift in support of military operations and in direct support of the government. To be able to discharge these responsibilities, the Command is organized into 7 units. The units are 201 Heavy Airlift Group (201 HAG) Ikeja, 203 Medium Airlift Group (203 MAG) Ilorin and 205 Rotary Group (205 RG) Ikeja. Others are 207 Special Mobility Group (207 SMG) Calabar, 209 Executive Airlift Group (209 EAG) Abuja, 235 Base Services Group Yenagoa and 61 NAF Detachment Warri.

TRAINING COMMAND

28. An important requirement of any air force is the availability of highly skilled and competent personnel. In other words, the availability of well-trained personnel is a major pre-requisite for operational effectiveness. The
NAF, therefore, places much emphasis on training to ensure operational readiness at all times. The Training Command, with its HQ in Kaduna, is chiefly responsible for implementing NAF training policies. It is to the credit of the NAF that, at present, she conducts most of her training locally. This is achieved by using all available training facilities in the country and at the same time expanding her existing schools to cope with the extra intakes from sister African countries.

29. The Command is made up of 11 units, namely; 301 Flying Training School, Kaduna, 303 Flying Training School Kano and 305 Flying Training School, Enugu. Others include 325 Ground Training Group located in Kaduna, 330 NAF Station, Jos, 333 Logistics Group, 335 Base Services Group (BSG) Kaduna, 337 BSG Enugu and 339 BSG Kano. For the Medical units, we have 345 NAF Hospital Kaduna, 347 NAF Hospital Jos and 349 NAF Hospital Kano. It is important to note that each of these groups mentioned, except the base services groups and NAF hospitals has one or more specialized schools that train personnel in fields relevant to the manpower needs of the NAF.

LOGISTICS COMMAND

30. Gentlemen, without adequate logistics support to the 3 commands already discussed, they would be unable to function effectively; hence, the establishment of the Logistics Command. The Logistics Command has its HQ at Ikeja, Lagos. The task of the Logistics Command is to procure,
maintain and sustain equipment in a state of operational readiness and at a minimum cost, consistent with NAF mission requirements. To enable her perform these functions, the Logistics Command is organised into 6 units, namely; 401 Aircraft Maintenance Depot, 403 Electronics Maintenance Depot, 405 Central Armament Depot, 407 Equipment Supply Depot, 435 Base Services Group, and the 445 NAF Hospital. These units are all located in Lagos, except 405 Central Armament Depot, which is located in Makurdi.

**AUTONOMOUS UNITS**

31. Apart from the 4 operational commands, there are some units which are autonomous and report directly to HQ NAF. These units include Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT) Kaduna, 101 Presidential Air Fleet Abuja (101 PAF), 102 Aeromedical Centre and 103 Pay and Accounting Group (103 PAG). Others are 104 Personnel Management Group (104 PMG), 106 NAF Camp Abuja, 107 NAF Camp Lagos and 108 NAF Hospital Abuja. We also have 109 Special Investigation Group (109 SIG) and National Air Defence Corp both located at Ikeja as well as the NAF Quick Response Force (QRF) Minna.

**NAF ORDER OF BATTLE**

32. Before considering the roles and capabilities of the NAF, I will give an overview of the Nigerian Air Force Order of Battle. An Order of Battle simply means the composition and deployment of a fighting force for battle.
It could be troops, ships or aircraft. Consequently, in the NAF, the composition of the NAF aircraft inventory constitutes the NAF Order of Battle. The NAF Order of Battle consists of the following air platforms:

a. **Alpha Jet.** The NAF Alpha Jet is a German manufactured aircraft utilized in the ground attack and reconnaissance roles. It is also used for fighter training. This aircraft was effectively employed in ECOMOG operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

b. **L-39.** The L-39 Albatross is manufactured in the Czech Republic and is used for conducting basic jet training of NAF pilots. The aircraft has recently been fitted with armaments and weapon systems from the decommissioned MiG 21 by NAF engineers and armament personnel. Firing tests have been successfully conducted therefore the aircraft could be rerolled to carry out ground attack missions.

c. **MB 339.** The MB 339 is of Italian manufacture and is primarily a basic flying trainer like the L-39. However, recent policy has called for an upgrade on the navigation and weapons systems and the incorporation of advanced radar. This will enable the aircraft to be employed in both ground attack and reconnaissance roles. The aircraft fleet is currently undergoing maintenance and systems upgrade in Italy.
d. **C-130 and G-222.** The American made C 130 Hercules is engaged as a long and medium range transport aircraft for airlift of troops and cargo; while the Italian built G-222 medium transport aircraft is also engaged in airlift role.

e. **DO 228.** The German manufactured DO 228 is a light transport aircraft used mainly for light liaison and VIP flights. It is also employed for Paratrooping exercise.

f. **Cessna Citation II.** The Cessna Citation II aircraft was originally in the Presidential Air Fleet and was donated to the NAF by the Presidency to augment its transport aircraft fleet. Like the DO 228, the Citation II is a light transport aircraft and is currently used mainly for VIP flights.

g. **Super Puma Helicopter.** The Super Puma helicopter is a multi-role helicopter manufactured in France by Eurocopter. It is employed for tactical airlift, assault support, search and rescue, medical and casualty evacuation. The NAF Super Puma helicopters are currently undergoing maintenance and systems upgrade in Romania.

h. **Mi-24/Mi-35 Helicopters.** The Russian-made Mi-24 attack helicopter and its export version; the Mi-35 helicopter are primarily designed as helicopter gunships for air assault and close air support.
They can each land or rappel a section of troops and support it from the air with gunfire, rockets and missiles.

i. **Agusta 109E Light Utility Helicopter (LUH).** The Agusta A109 helicopters are employed for light utility transport and basic pilot training. They are also expected to fulfil search and rescue as well as reconnaissance roles.

j. **ATR 42 MPA.** The NAF has also inducted into its inventory the ATR 42 Maritime Patrol Aircraft. The aircraft can be employed as an airborne command post to coordinate maritime operations such as maritime traffic control, search and rescue, fishing surveillance, anti-pollution, and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance.

k. **F-7Ni.** The NAF F-7Ni is a Chinese-built multirole combat aircraft. This aircraft is an improved version of the Russian made MiG 21 with a mix of Western, Israeli and Chinese avionics, radar and weapons systems respectively. This aircraft is expected to bridge the capability gap created by the decommissioned MiG 21 and Jaguar combat aircraft from Service.

l. **Air Beetle.** Last but not the least in the NAF aircraft inventory is the Air Beetle aircraft. The Air Beetle was built in Nigeria by a joint partnership of Dornier Aviation Nigeria AIEP (DANA) and the Nigerian
Air Force. The aircraft is used as a primary trainer for ab-initio flying training.

**NIgerian Air Force Roles and Capabilities**

33. Gentlemen, now that we know the NAF Order of Battle, we can proceed to discuss the roles of the Nigerian Air Force in the defence of our national air space, vis-à-vis air power and its components. Before I proceed further, please note that the Nigerian Air Force is a tactical air force. A tactical air force is any air force primarily designed to conduct operations within a theatre of war in support of surface forces. It is therefore, limited in reach and capability. It is for this reason that the NAF adopts the concept of operation of ‘ACTIVE DEFENCE, FORWARD ENGAGEMENT’, which in broad terms means, “strategically defensive, but tactically offensive”. To enhance your understanding of the roles of the NAF, I shall discuss them under the following air power components: air defence, close air support, air interdiction and counter air operations. Other components include search and rescue, air transport operations, maritime air operations and air reconnaissance.

**Air Defence**

34. One of the primary roles of the NAF, as defined by the Act of Parliament establishing her, is air defence. The essence of air defence is to prevent the enemy from the effective use of its air power against own
forces. This can be achieved if we detect, intercept and destroy the enemy before his offensive action is brought to bear on own forces.

35. In time of peace or war, any unidentified aircraft that violates the nation’s air space would be intercepted and forced to land or be neutralised if need be. This could be achieved by detecting any intruder on our early warning radars and scrambling our fighters to intercept them. The Surface-to-Air Missiles and the Anti-Aircraft guns would engage any enemy aircraft that evades our fighters. The aircraft and equipment used for this role in the NAF are: F-7Ni aircraft, Radars, Surface to Air Missiles and Anti-Aircraft Guns. It is worthy of note that the on-going project on Total Radar Coverage of Nigeria will complement the air defence role of the NAF.

**CLOSE AIR SUPPORT**

36. The provision of close air support to our surface forces is another role of the NAF. Close air support operations are conducted on request by the army or naval commanders within their theatre of operation. Close air support operations are aerial attacks against targets, which are so close to friendly forces that detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of own surface forces is necessary. Close air support provides quick results and has the additional effect of raising the morale of friendly forces. As modern wars are swift and fluid, extensive support may have to be provided within a short time to ensure a favourable outcome. The Alpha Jet and the Mi-24 and Mi-35 assault helicopter gunships can fulfil this role.
AIR INTERDICTION

37. Air interdiction covers those operations aimed at destroying or neutralizing the enemy’s military potential before it can be brought to bear effectively against friendly forces. Such operations are carried out at such a distance from friendly forces that detailed integration of specific actions with own forces is not required. In this context, the enemy’s military potential includes those forces not engaged in close combat; his supplies and means by which the supplies are moved forward such as assembly areas, roads, railways, bridges, convoys and storage areas. The Alpha Jet is used for this purpose in a secondary role.

COUNTER AIR OPERATIONS

38. Another role of the NAF is the application of direct pressure on the enemy’s military capability by attacking his vital airpower. This is known as counter air operation. Counter air operations are aimed at seeking and destroying the enemy’s air power as close to its source as possible. Specifically, it involves attack on airfields, command and control posts, communications facilities, fuel and ammunition storage sites, radar sites and enemy air defence systems. Such facilities could, of course, be well defended by the enemy. So, if counter air operations are to be successful, the attacking aircraft must be adequately equipped to cope with en-route and terminal defences, locate the target without unnecessarily exposing itself, and accurately deliver its weapon load on the target.
39. The main aircraft employed for this role in the NAF was the Jaguar ground attack aircraft which has since been decommissioned. However, the F-7NI will now be employed in this role.

**AIR TRANSPORT OPERATIONS**

40. If air power is to be used to maximum effect, men and materiel must be moved more rapidly than can be done by land and sea. This can be achieved through tactical and strategic movement of land forces, delivery of airborne forces into battle areas and evacuation of casualties from the war front. However, air transport aircraft can operate effectively only where a high degree of control of the air exists or in areas where they will be relatively free from enemy interference.

41. The NAF, being a tactical air force, has the capability to carry men and materials within an area of operation in support of tactical operations. These operations include airborne operations, air logistics support, casualty evacuation, airborne command post and special missions. Special missions may involve such psychological operations as leaflet dropping and voice broadcasts. In the NAF, the workhorse for this role is the C 130. The G-222 and DO-228 aircraft are also used for tactical airlift.
MARITIME AIR OPERATIONS

42. The NAF, as part of its roles, conducts maritime air operations over Nigeria’s territorial waters. Nigeria’s coastline is about 450 nautical miles long and, like most independent nations of the world, she has an Exclusive Economic Zone of 200 nautical miles. This makes a total of 90,000 sq nautical miles of water, which needs to be closely patrolled to prevent illegal exploitation. Quite a number of illegal activities go on in Nigeria’s territorial waters. The introduction of the ATR 42 MPA in the maritime arena will go a long way to check these activities.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

43. Another important role of the NAF is search and rescue. Search and rescue operations in the NAF have been of a limited nature, but suffice it to say that all aircraft in NAF inventory can perform search operations. However, only the ATR 42 MP aircraft, Super Puma, Agusta 109 LUH and Mi-24/Mi-35 helicopters can be employed for rescue operations. For example, the ATR 42 MP aircraft has the capability to locate a human being in water, deploy 2 survival rafts capable accommodating between 11-18 persons each with ration to last a few days. It is also capable of deploying an Automatically Deployed/Automatic Fixed Emergency Locator Transmitter (AD/AF ELT) as well as colour cartridges to mark and guide cooperating vessels towards a search and rescue effort.
AIR RECONNAISSANCE

44. The purpose of air reconnaissance is to obtain accurate and timely image intelligence about an enemy or potential enemy. As the famous Chinese war strategist Sun Tzu in the book the Art of War said, and I quote, “What enables the wise sovereign and the good military general to strike and conquer, and achieve things beyond the reach of ordinary of men, is foreknowledge” unquote. Accordingly, the importance of image intelligence will include the following:

   b. Enhances the security of its nation.
   c. The prevention of weapon proliferation.
   d. Aids counter-terrorism operations.

45. The Nigerian Air Force over the years has gradually inclined towards image intelligence gathering methods. The NAF is capable of conducting tactical reconnaissance, which would provide information about military and other targets within defined areas of operation. The platforms used include the Alpha Jet and the ATR 42 Maritime Patrol Aircraft.