



# Serbia's New Tigers

**THE SERBIAN Air Force (Vazduhoplovstvo i protvazduhoplovna odbrana – ViPVO)** is set to receive fully trained pilots for its dedicated fighter-bomber, the Soko J-22 Orao (Eagle) – the first in more than a decade.

Five experienced pilots, ranked captain or major, were selected from ‘several dozen’ pilots of 241 Fighter Bomber Squadron ‘Tigers’ (lovačko bombarderska avijacijska eskadrila ‘Tigrovi’) and 98 Aviation Brigade (vazduhoplovna brigade – vbr).

For a number of reasons – most notably fuel shortages and a lack of serviceable NJ-22 two-seat aircraft – new pilots have been restricted to flying the G-4 Super Galeb advanced trainer for the last few years. The Lađevci-based 98 vbr is the only ViPVO unit flying Oraos and its deputy commander, Lt Col Dejan Vasiljevic, said “the goal was to find the best of the best and train them to the highest possible level.”

The first two pilots to convert to the J-22 – Major Aleksandar Gajic and Captain Igor Đorđević started their flight training after completing a theory course in late February. Flight instructors comprised the country’s most senior Orao pilots, including the 98 vbr deputy commander, Lt Col Miodrag ‘Rica’ Ristić, renowned for his Orao displays throughout the eastern European airshow circuit.

After fewer than ten flying hours with instructors in NJ-22 two seaters, the first two pilots soloed on the J-22 on April 4. An examination flight week followed and one of the new Orao pilots had the Serbian Air Force commander-in-chief, Maj Gen Ranko Zivak, in the back seat as the examiner for the occasion. Following the basic flying stage, the pilots undergo navigation, night flying and combat training totalling about 28 flight hours – after which they can be considered fully capable on the type. IGOR SALINGER



**Top: NJ-22 Orao 25528 lands at Lađevci after a sortie. Above: Maj Gajic posing in front of a J-22 Orao following his first solo flight in the type. All images by the author Below: J-22 Oraos on the flightline at Lađevci Air Base.**

