

COLD BLADE 2016 BOOSTS NORTHERN GRIFFIN.

To fly above the extensive outback in the north of Finland is quite a different experience. Trees and snow and a mountainous landscape are the only landmarks and besides that there is almost nothing. It may take some challenge to coordinate but the possibilities to train in the cold environment are excellent. The Finnish army is used to this but during the exercise in last February/march 2016 Germany joined as they did before but this year for the first time under European Defence Agency (EDA Brussels) umbrella.

UNDER EDA SUPERVISION

Actually Finland organized an exercise period with three separate entities acting simultaneously. The army exercise 'Eno 2016' was only a national engagement as winter training to enhance skills of conscripts and salaried personnel in winter conditions involving MD-500 helicopters and army vehicles in NorthWest Lapland. On the other side of Lapland at Ivalo air base, not far from the Russian border another helicopter exercise was conducted with an international character called Cold Blade 2016 (CB16) and linked to this a special forces training under the name of 'Northern Griffin'. Major organizer is the Utti Jaeger regiment (Finnish: Jääkärirykmentti, UtJR) which is the Finnish Army training and development centre for special forces and helicopter operations. Both UtJR and exercises like Northern Griffin are no new issues in Lapland but to EDA it was the first experience in arctic environment after organizing eight successful previous exercises elsewhere in Europe. EDA could lean on UtJR routines and in the same time participants could practice EDA working Lines.

GERMAN –FINNISH COOPERATION

One of EDA's major goals is training interoperability which is always underlined by Andy Gray, inspirator of EDA. Becoming more or less an EDA icon, his visit to Ivalo is also of symbolic importance. He was accompanied by two core planning team members for exercise monitoring. Compared with previous 'blade' exercises you may say the 'Nordic variant' is quite modest with the participation of six NH-90's from the Utti Jaeger Regiment and two CH-53GA (German Advanced) heavy helicopters from Bundeswehr helicopter wing 64 (LTGrp HSG 64) from Holzdorf with 180 Finnish and 65 German personnel. Not many countries are attached to arctic operations and some countries which are, do coop with other routines such as the U.K. with 'Clockwork' and the Dutch with their 'cold blaze' both in Norway. However with one step into the arctic EDA could hope for more interest in future.

NAVIGATION AND NIGHT MISSIONS

EDA is providing its Helicopter Exercise Programme (HEP) in CB16 under combined supervision of Andy Gray and the host nation and in its concept it meets the flying and tactical needs of the participants. This year it was focussed on navigation flights, formation flights (up till four-ship combination) and another topic was night operations in the specific desolate landscape which challenge crews different. In a landscape with minor markings to trigger your awareness such as a dull snowy surface in cloudy grey atmosphere it takes a hard job on your skills and this is even worse during the night. The night flying is a special training and requires a high mental and physical input from crews. Both NH-90 and CH-53GA do have the most appropriate instruments for this job with Forward Looking infrared (FLIR) capability as an inevitability. To enhance the skills of the crews on this matter there were a lot of NVG flights, for

Germany, almost onethird of the missions, including many night landings. Practicing 'white out' in snowy landings was on the normal schedule in both day and night time and the incorporation in exercise Northern Griffin provided infiltration and exfiltration scenario's for Finnish SOF in remote area's. On their schedule was survival training which was also offered to the German crews who could not administer the offer due to busy flying ops. Finnish and some Italian air crews practiced orienteering, building an emergency accomodation and surviving with limited food an water supply in the wilderness with the Jaeger Brigade in Sodankylä.

IMPROVING TACTICS IN THE ARCTIC

Finland is learning from EDA but mainly on subjects like mission planning, not specifically on flying methods having knowledge on higher level in arctic conditions. Germany's main focus was to improve their own tactics in arctic conditions. Thereby Germany flew succesful missions. There were no crew swaps but soldiers of both countries were given the chance to fly on both systems. Some of the Finnish soldiers had the special opportunity to sit on the open ramp of the CH-53GA during low level flights. That brings a smile on any face! Enhancing the skills of Helicopter crews to use EDA's Standard Operating Procedures in the conduct of flight planning and operations is suiting typically in the EDA philosophy and common mission planning resulting in combined (mixed) formations flights was very appreciated. Both participants also evaluated each others Tactical Techniques and Procedures (TTP's). Within the two weeks of flying activities their was also a live firing exercise conducted above the Rovajärvi shooting range were both Finnish and German helicopters used door guns. This was also trained in night operations.

SATISFIED BY NH-90

The delivery of NH-90's for the Finnish Army was only completed in 2015 of which 19 examples weres assembled with Patria in Halli,Finland. It was for Finland, due to retrofit acivities hard to achieve a high servicability rate, but the goal to reach this year an operational status of 50% has been achieved and that is satisfying. For budget reasons it wouldn't even be possible to fly more than that. The NH-90 operates well in cold area and that is vital for an aircraft which is used in Finland. The NH-90 has a very good anti-ice system. For example in this exercise all the maintenance was done outside on the field without any hangars. The Utti Jaeger Regiment practiced with FARP utilities to enhance range capability. The Germans did not but didn't have the need since the CH-53GA has an extended range by more internal fuel capacity. The NH-90 is expected to fly easily untill 2040 and the CH-53GA untill 2030. Both countries will continue the common exercise in future and Finland will benefit from EDA but only depending on their own needs and training schedule.

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