



GERMAN-DUTCH QUICK REACTION FORCE COOPERATION BETWEEN 'THR-10' AND '11 LUCHT-MOBIEL' SPECIAL FORCES

TWO NATIONALITIES IN ONE INSTRUMENT

German transport helicopter regiment THR-10 specialises itself in helicopter operations flying army soldiers to their battle positions. The regiment is available to special forces as part of a Rapid Reaction Force. This includes also a special unit with a mix of German/Dutch soldiers, the latter drawn from the 11^e luchtmobiele brigade from the Netherlands. Interesting to put a focus on that.

GERMAN-DUTCH COOPERATION

The German-Dutch cooperation is special and an example to others. There is a pretty common understanding in how things should work. Both countries can rely on each other's product. When the unit was created, the leading thought was; 'It is not a problem if you are aware of the differences to fuse different nations to one unit, however it would be a problem when you were not'. 'We are much more alike than we could imagine, but we had to find out' was the primary thought when the unit started running. The idea to start such a cooperation with Germany and the Netherlands as a 'pilot project' is quite obvious and no one would question that. All elements of helicopter assault are involved such as paratroopers, special forces, rapid reaction forces, air transport, transport helicopters, strike helicopters and multinational commitment concerning insertion of troops, extraction of troops and close air support from helicopters to ground units.

NEW RAPID FORCES COMMAND

It all started when the Kommando Spezialkräfte (KSK) saw light in 1996 forming a German special forces unit on brigade level. During a major reorganization in 2014 the KSK was incorporated in a newly formed Division Schnelle Kräfte or Rapid Response Forces Division consisting of 1.100 soldiers including soldiers of the Dutch 11^e Luchtmobiele brigade. Public relations officer Major Graf said 'everybody paratrooping with us had always access to helicopters, however today we come together on the roof of one division, enhancing the capabilities and strengthening our profile to become more efficient'. In his eyes: 'it comes together what belongs together', and we have the obligation already within our unit to overcome multinational cooperation in the way we want. The command of Division Schnelle Kräfte is situated in Stadtallendorf, Hessen and leading in command is the German General-Major Eberhard Zoru. He is assisted by two deputies including the Dutch Brigade-General van Maaswaal. Paratroopers of NATO countries always have been very much alike. The uniqueness they have in common with the same approach and same procedures. Jointness and commonness is a European thought and a good functioning multinational unit formed by two countries is also a 'state of the art' and beneficial to our own country. It is essential to stay 'a state of the art'. Both countries recognize the need to cooperate driven by the thought; 'in the long run we can't do it on our own'. Knowledge about each other's capabilities, equipment and organization has been grown. Detailed cooperation between counterparts shifted the scope from a simple availability of helicopters to a knowing what you can expect in your needs. On the strategic level makes that a better deployment in combat.

EXPERIENCED COUNTERPART

Germany took grateful benefit of the experience from the Dutch Luchtmobiel brigade. In his own words major Graf said 'We learned so much about air assault from the Dutch'. 'Their experience from combat situations they faced in Irak and Afghanistan give us a very good insight in what to do'. In the field we speak English with each other, but older soldiers speak German. The Dutch like to speak German too. Commander of the THR-10 'Lüneburgerheide' Colonel Christian Rütter already became familiar with multinational cooperation in courses in France during his education and had a very precise idea what is possible between nations in the concept of feasibilities and limitations. The aim of integration of Dutch

forces in a German entity was way beyond approaches he had known and in his vision a very ambitious enterprise. This could only be done with people who in general understand each other. The basic challenge was foreseen as the language but this was to overcome quite easily. The Dutch approach of straight ahead acting was recognized as familiar and very much a German-like understanding of matters. This would have been much different when the counterpart would have been a southern European country using quite another approach.

DIFFERENT HELICOPTERS

Typical operations are called 'air assault operations' when moving troops into the combat zone, 'air mobile operations' when it concerns just transport of troops, 'air mechanized operations' involving combat helicopters and operations with paratrooping are called 'airborne operations'. Dutch soldiers of the 11^e luchtmobiele brigade are in the Netherlands working with helicopters of the Defensie Helikopter Commando (DHC) like Cougar, Chinook and Apache and the combination is called 11^e Air Manoeuvre Brigade. In Germany the soldiers work in a similar way with THH-10 but with other type of helicopters. Germany executes heavy lift operations with the CH-53G which were transferred from the Heeresflieger (Army Aviation) to the Luftwaffe (Air Force) some time ago. The general tactical transport helicopter for years is the Bell UH-1D but these are at the end of their service life and will gradually be replaced with the NH-90. Three air regiments are in the future projection with THH-10 in Fassberg and THH-30 in Niederstetten both with the NH-90TTH and one regiment with the Tiger UHT combat helicopters at Fittlar, called the KHR-36 and to be integrated with Division Schnelle Kräfte. The implementation of the new helicopters is a running process. The technology is much more advanced compared with the older UH-1D and Bölkow Bo-105 and time is needed to fit the new types precisely in their tasks. The supplying of the new helicopters also are facing changing of reality, demands and development of combat techniques. New weapon systems have to be well evaluated in operational circumstances. To fulfill operational needs primarily supplies concerned mostly limited operational capability (LOC) versions with only a few full operational capability (FOC) examples but at this moment more FOC versions are streaming in. With the Tiger it is the same story which suffered also from delays and even faced a cut from 67 examples to 40. The NH-90 most likely escapes this fate while German awareness about the need of a substantial and capable helicopter force is growing and the idea of continuous defence cuts is declining.

NEW TACTICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Colonel Christian Rütter eagerly exposes his men and helicopters to live exercises under European flag as was the case in Italian Blade (HB-15) and will be the case in the coming Cold Blaze (HB-16). Both NH-90 and crew and the men of Division Schnelle Kräfte are under observation during these exercises to see how they develop in 'real time' combat environment. Technical and tactical possibilities have been changed to new frontiers and several concepts need more development. His soldiers are no passengers but a 'deadly force' when needed. One of the new concepts is the 'joint fire support team' which is tasked to concentrate all available firepower from out of the air, from land sites and sometimes from ships on the target. They operate quite close behind the first Lines in combat and communicate in the same way as Forward Air Controllers and consist most often of four persons. Another promising concept comes from out of the air and so specific that there is no one to learn from in Europe. This technique is called Forward Air Medevac and implicates that an air ambulance is directly landing in the combat zone including a crew with a doctor and rescuer. Not only this concept has to be developed by Germany itself, they also have to manage full tactical capabilities of the NH-90 and Tiger-UHT, the steady cooperation of two nationalities and to implement new digital features in communication which are developing in high speed. The Division Schnelle Kräfte subordinates to NATO Response Force (NRF) can be fully deployed within a few days.