

SEA KINGS IN THE NORTH

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Guarding de North of Germany both coastal and land area is a characteristic job for the marineflieger Sea King Mk.41. The helicopter is in the world widely used for Search and Rescue (SAR) work but most of the times this is above the sea and the coasts. In Schleswig Holstein, the northern German province with shores in both North and East Sea the helicopters operation range also covers far inwards in the province. Because the Sea King is quite a big helicopter with a considerable range (950 km.), the whole area can be in reach from one station at Kiel, Holtenau.

MFG-5

The Sea Kings are organised within the Marineflieger geschwader 5 or MFG-5, responsible for SAR, medevac missions but also for troop transport missions in military operations. This includes also commando operations and therefore the helicopters are armed and have self- protection provisions. The helicopter can transport up to 27 people and is because of that very suitable for evacuation tasks whether this is above the sea or land or whatever condition, marking the duty of rescuers. In the area there can occur heavy rain, storm, floods or snow conditions, but all of this the Sea king will meet with great effort. When the order was placed with Westland in the United Kingdom the company came to Germany to meet the exact criteria resulting in the Sea King Mk. 41 of which only 23 were built. On 20th March 1974 the first of this batch (22) was delivered and the type was fully operational in 1975. After ten years of heavy rescue work, at that time still in the cold war era, review began at MFG-5's Sea Kings in order to verify the Sea King abilities to be used in the offensive role. The helicopter should be able to attack light surface forces and serve as surveillance platform for friendly naval ships. Modernisation was needed and this was established from 1987 until 1992 when all 22 Sea Kings were brought to new standards by MBB at Speyer. This included the incorporation of a sophisticated Sea Spray Mk.3 radar, a radio-jammer, an AN/ALR 68 Radar Warning Receiver, M-130 Chaff/Flare dispensers and up to four Sea Skua anti shipping missiles along with their technical equipment.

Watching over your safety

Still the main task is SAR and when operating in this role there is a crew of two pilots, one engineer and a hoist operator while no armament is fitted. The Sea King has the ability of a 75 m. winch, enabling the helicopter to take a maximum of 300 kg load. For the community safety there is a 24 hours alert to ensure support when and wherever needed. The commitment is to be airborne within 15 minutes after alarm and during night hours within 60 minutes but practically in most cases this will be in 10 and 25 minutes. To meet the direct needs at sea there is also a Sea King permanent located at Warnemunde and Helgoland and there is a temporarily location at Borkum. One Sea King was lost above the North Sea in 1998 nearby Helgoland. Personnel is skilled and trained for their tasks which starts at the 2nd german Air

Force Training Squadron at NAS Pensacola, Florida for the tactical coordinators before going to MFG-5. When the Sea King arrived in 1974 replacing the obsolete Sikorsky H-34G Seabat it was a big step forwards, but not always was MFG-5 dedicated to the SAR task only. In the pre- Sea King Period MFG-5 was operating the Pembroke, the Dornier Do 27, the HU-16 Albatross, the Piaggio P.149D, the SARO Skeeter Mk.51, the Bristol Sycamore and the Fouga Magister and the already mentioned H-34G. The Dornier Do-28D-2 OU was operating for pollution control alongside the Sea King for a while before the type was transferred to MFG-3, while its predecessor the Dornier Do-28 Skyversant served for years together with the Sea Kings.

Changed assignments

In 2000 after 25 years of service in the German Navy, mainly as a SAR helicopter the Sea King Mk.41 was assigned to new roles as an onboard helicopter with international commitments as a support helicopter to forward logistic sites and for evacuation of people in critical situation during UN missions. Involvement in NATO operations outside its territory is possible under NATO command subordinating UN missions. In fact The Bundeswehr was for the first time involved in overseas actions after the Gulf War in 1991 when three Sea Kings were stationed in Bahrain and were tasked with clearing Iraqi mines. Since this experience the Sea Kings were participating in more multinational operations like for example Enduring Freedom. Since 2002 Marineflieger Sea Kings are operating from out Djibouti to control the sea surface around 'the horn of Africa' on suspect traffic together with German frigates on the sea. Other operations were the human relief operation 'Sumatra Assist' in February 2005 after the tsunami disaster of Christmas 2004 when German Sea Kings were helping from the ship FGS Berlin and the Unifil participation with a Sea King aboard a German frigate for the coast of Lebanon.

Waiting for the NH-90

The Sea King is soldiering on until 2012 and will be replaced by the NH-90 helicopter. This helicopter will both take the tasks from MFG-5 Sea Kings and MFG-3 Lynx helicopters. Totally 38 marine helicopters (MH) or NATO Frigate Helicopter (NFH) are ordered but it seems that deliveries will be later as planned and some suggest to give the Sea Kings an end of live update to meet new STANAG standards. The helicopters should be fitted with improved IFF, a new rescue system called Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) while the old Doppler navigation should be replaced for a GPS navigation suite and the helicopters need new wiring and new waterproof floors. Finally, the Sea King will be succeeded by a new potent helicopter serving in many NATO countries but before that will happen the Sea King will have to go some fine years with MFG-5.