

OPEN DAYS DUTCH AIR FORCE 2011

Dutch Air Force Days With Focus On Future

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The Air base at Leeuwarden was on 16th and 17th September host of the Royal Netherlands Air Force air show or officially in Dutch language called Luchtmachtdagen 2011. It was particularly interesting because defence cuts forced the Dutch military to organize the next edition not sooner than 2013.

Focus on future

The official slogan was 'de toekomst hangt in de lucht' means the future is in the air. Of course the focus is on future ops and how to show this to the public and to generate interest to new future employee's especially the youth. To comply with defence cost effective requirements new exercises will be as much a possible centralized with the air, sea and land forces. A good example is a joint exercise recently in the Netherlands instead of joining exercises in another country. How forces operate with each other can be good observed in the air power demo with elements of the air force and the Lucht Mobiele Brigade assault force of the army. On the ground the public could meet the Mobile Air Operations Team (MAOT) specialized in delivering or accepting cargo or personnel in a helicopter and also tasked to secure the helicopter while acting in the landing zone.

The focus of the RNLAF on this moment is on Operation Unified Protector above Libya. The RNLAF is asked to extend its actions above Libya while Afghanistan commitment was downsized after years of contribution. Other future aspects are the introduction of the NH-90 helicopter and the replacement of the F-16. The latter is still very much discussed. Momentarily the RNLAF is in good condition with much experience however the helicopter force (DHC) and F-16 –Force were decreased. It is always very inviting to see the actions of the helicopters of the Defence Helicopter Commando and the F-16's of the RNLAF in combination with the KC-10 tanker but this year there were two special items in the spotlight.

Incredible Apache demo

It was the first time that a C-17 Globemaster from the SAC based at Papa, Hungary visited the Dutch air show. Special for this occasion the entire crew was Dutch while crews during missions normally are of mixed nationality. It was also the first time the C-17 of the SAC flew with a crew formed by personnel from one country. Another special demonstration was from a RNLAF Apache. This year there was more ability to display a special Apache demo after previous years of commitment to Afghanistan had prevented too much focus on this.

The Apache is painted in attractive colours and what is more, it displays with several output moments with flares, making it really spectacular to watch. Sometimes the helicopter makes moves which are really outstanding and it requires both crewmembers to focus on controlling the helicopter simultaneously. Major Roland 'Wally' Blankenspoor and Captain Paul 'Wokkel' Webbink are the only Apache display team in the world and the only ones to perform displays besides the official pilots of the company. A special moment is there when the Apache is flying upside down. A really impressive sight when the rotor is positioned downwards.

Spectacle of varied acts

Vintage aircraft contributed their part and a formation flight together with the Apache demo helicopter, the orange RNLAf demo F-16 and a Hawker Hunter in RNLAf markings is not only an unusual sight, it also demands intensive flying skills on all three pilots. Among contributors from NATO partners were a Polish Mig-29, a Finnish F-18, an Italian Typhoon, Belgian F-16's and the Turkish Soluturk F-16 demo team providing enough hours of jet noise. Similarly to the Dutch Apache, there were a lot of flares involved in the demonstrations. One of the most beautiful moments was the performance of the Black Cats, the Lynx stunt team of the RAF with perfect simultaneous or mirror acts. For more impression see photographs.

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