

### AIR FIRE-FIGHTERS WELL PREPARED

Large forest- dunes- and heath fires can occur suddenly out of nowhere, especially in the summer time. Not only forestfire comes up in Greece and Spain but also in most other countries you have to be prepared. In The Netherlands there were heavy fires to be fought in the past and some major disasters are known in the flatland. Within that framework, some large-scale firefighting exercises were held on the grounds of the artillery shooting exercise range 't Harde' in the middle of The Netherlands on over an acre of heath and grassland which besides the Army firefighters also the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAf) took part with two Cougar helicopters of the DHC (Defence Helicopter Command Gilze-Rijen) mostly also supported by one or more Chinook helicopters depending on possibilities (missions, maintenance ETC.) The support request for fire helicopters joined the Air Force in through the procedures Security Area 'North and East Gelderland' via ' Communications of the DHC' (Defense helicopter Command). Interpretation of it depends on opportunities and gradation of a fire or emergency.

### GRAVITY COMMITMENT

Firefighters and authorities shall determine what support is considered appropriate, in general, the use of two helicopters feasible and sufficient for a reasonably substantial fire. Three Cougars still continued after their official farewell in May 2011 still as extinguishing helicopter operations, (also due to the delay in delivering the NH-90) also including for fire fighting DHC can deliver 'big brother' Chinook. RNLAf decides how many and which helicopters will be used, depending on availability which is determined by being in helicopter maintenance and / or use in foreign missions such as Afghanistan or recently now Mali.

### WATERDROPS

A Cougar (also equipped with inflatable floats) takes 2,500 liters per drop '. A large water bag under the heli (Bambi Bucket) can be filled in most waters, river, channel, whatever in seconds. However, the Chinook carries a small 10,000 liters with it! The Chinook however is less movable compared to the Cougar which can arrange a drop more per unit and move more 'agile' in the scenario. At one extreme so-called "Grip-4 'situation (Coordinated Regional Incident Abatement Procedure, scale 1 to 4) four Chinooks and two Cougars can be used by the Air Force. The higher the (national) press (residential) and risk the greater the effort and thus fighting the fire.

### FIRE FIGHTING HELICOPTER CONTRA THE FIRE

The Commander of the MAOT teams (Mobile Air Operation Team) explains that the MAOT teams are the forward eyes and ears on the ground for the helicopter pilots. This goes for many situations, such as when transporting heavy equipment, measuring ice thickness or if a helicopter can land on ice, or, as here, the sideline as firefighters where the team also operates as Pbot (Pilot Bucket Operation Team). The MAOT have the specific task in the field to determine the strategy for fire fighting in cooperation with the fire and safety regions for the turning of the wind for example, suddenly a whole new scenario can arise with it's specific dangers. For this purpose special laptops are available with animated icons which show the exact positions of the MAOT personell, fire trucks can be specified, and also the firing line can be followed on the map view. The MAOT's are in direct contact with the fire-fighting helicopters and provide information where needed, such as how a 'drop' fell, it can be a 'bad drop' and with information from the ground the pilots can adjust their tactics to a good drop. Note that the pilot does not see the result of the drop behind him. The fire department determines by wind and existing barriers how the fire can be stopped best because often the main goal is not to extinguish the fire but stopping the primary fire line. The removal of heat, oxygen or material can stop expanding a fire, such as example a sandy road. The MAOT translates the ground tactical plan of the fire via radio contact to the pilots flying, so that the helicopters do not end up in the smoke (sight, soot and ash in the engines). New courses are also developed for unexpected scenarios. Thus trained there is a procedure in case completely enclosed by

the fire, MAOT and / or fire brigade personell who got caught in a chanceless situation, should sit down in their vehicles and remain there, so extinguishing helicopters do set up a water defense / security line 'shower curtain' around the vehicle(s). A wall of water this way is successfully placed around the 'detainees' until the fire passed them, a procedure that is exercised and proven.

## **WATERSUPPLY**

To know where the water can be found a nationwide network is mapped ranging from clay pits, ponds, fire pits, reservoirs, ditches, watercourses, rivers, canals, recreation pools etc. The Netherlands are wetlands ! Thus, in the exercise water was extracted from the 'Ijsselmeer' (lake) and the 'Heerder Beach', a recreational lake in the neighbourhood of the firelocation. You don't think of it in the first place, but the Army can even make a well with explosives, although the drug should not be worse than the disease ... Usually getting the water is no problem, although account must be taken of the presence and departure route, specially when it's coming from a recreation environment. When in an emergency, a bucket must be emptied or even disconnected, you can not accept the dangers for tourists bading in the sun on their towels, so they will have to be evacuated temporarily. The evaluation of exercise of this kind mostly show that the different teams work well together and are well prepared. Learning moments - however small perhaps - can only improve the quality again.

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