

HELIDAX HELICOPTER TRAINING

HELIDAX PROVIDES FRENCH MILITARY HELICOPTER TRAINING

The French army aviation helicopter school must have thought to reach out its interest to civilian companies when talking about costs efficiency in realizing modernisation of its training helicopter fleet. Somehow it is a proven concept to hand over activities such as pilot training to specialised organisations instead of incorporated in the military. The Gazelles of the the Ecole d'Application de l'Aviation Légère de l'Armée de Terre (EA-ALAT) reached the level of outdated when looking at the needs for training cadets for modern advanced helicopters in the French military. Replacement would have required a huge budget and so the choice was made for outsourcing.

IDEAL AGREEMENT

The search for a partner brought the ALAT to HeliDax which was awarded with an agreement. HeliDax was formed out of a partnership between Défense Conseil International (DCI) and Proteus Helicopters (later renamed INAER-France). The French Defense Procurement Agency (DGA) signed the Public-Private Finance initiative of HeliDax comprising 22.000 flying hours in a period of 20 years in a final agreement on 23-10-2009 which was shortly followed by first training activities. Totally 36 Eurocopter EC-120B Colibries are replacing the activities of approximately 40 Sa-341 & Sa-342 Gazelles (out of a batch of 54) on the air base in Dax in Southwest France which are retiring after some 30 years of service. Helidax will perform its activities with 80 instructors forming with its 36 EC-120 the biggest helicopter school in Europe. Deliveries of the Colibries were between 2008 and 2010. The transition process reached an active level in the mid of 2010 after receiving the second batch of Colibries. The first trainees at HeliDax will go on to serve as instructors while the fully training activities for students were planned for February 2011. On 10 October 2010 the 36th and last example was delivered in the presence of Joseph Saporiti the Executive Vice President Commercial Helicopters, and Jean-Louis Rotrubin, President & Chief Executive Manager of DCI and HeliDax.

MODIFICATIONS

Before the Colibrie could be fully qualified for its job with HeliDax some modification had to be done in the Eurocopter factory of Marigane. The standard NHE version (Nouvelle Helicopter Ecole) was configured on specific military requirements initiated by INAER and called the militarised version of the NHE. One of the outer characteristics is the cutter on the cockpit to save the helicopter from lethal collision with electricity wiring when acting in low level activities which feature is very standard on military helicopters. More changes however are to be found in the avionics and cockpit lay-out. A military standard is the dual radio with capabilities to receive and emit on both civilian and military frequencies and also an advanced GPS system is installed and is prepared with ability to receive communication on the Galileo System. The EC-120B of Helidax has a red-white colour scheme representing the town

colours of Dax. HeliDax not only financing the helicopters but also implements the operations and performs maintenance on the Colibries while the training will continue to be delivered by military instructors. Some 50 civilian technicians are necessary for the maintenance activities, which is far less compared with the 200 military engineers who used to work on the Gazelles. To minimize the ground personnel will cutback costs substantially.

VERY CAPABLE

The militarised NHE version is equipped with latest technology to work under safe conditions and is crashworthy certified with special seats and cabin construction. An ergonomic glass cockpit with fully on-board instruments is equipped with latest avionics such as digital flat-screen Sextant Avionique/SFIM Vehicle and Engine Multifunction Display (VEMD). It also features dual controls, a twist-grip throttle and rotor brake. A sophisticated autopilot and night vision goggles enables specific missions. The pilots are warned by the VEMD when reaching limits in torque, engine RPM and temperature which is very comfortable for pilots in an instructional helicopter. The EC-120B has a slightly less powerful engine than its predecessor the Gazelle but is capable to perform a wide range of missions including instrument flying, navigational flights, autorotation flights. Low-level observation, initiation to Mountain flights in nearby Pyrenean Mountains and night flying thanks to the NVG-capabilities. The operational availability is much better than of the older Gazelle and operation costs are reduced with some 30 percent. This because of more extended maintenance intervals and therefore reduced maintenance needs and an improved profile of fuel consumption. The helicopter produces thanks to its modern Turbomeca Arrius 2 F turboshaft engine a lower noise footprint. The flight characteristics and ease of handling makes the EC-120B Colibrie much popular with students while the economical operation pleases the military authorities. The French Army says the programme contributes to its objectives of sustainable development and cost control in training and maintenance.

TOTAL CONCEPT

Students are prepared to serve on sophisticated helicopter types such as NH-90, Tigre and Caracal with state-of-the-art avionics. Training on the Colibrie enables the students to transform to a pilot in the operational squadrons more smoothly. The NH-90 and Caracal serves also with French Navy and Air Force. Thanks to intervention of DCI the training courses are now combined for Army, Navy and Air force students and for the Gendarmerie pilots. The courses do also have a modest international character with the training of a few Belgian students. The concept of HeliDax seems to be a success and might be useful in reaching cost reduce in other countries.

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