
THE LYNX ERA, NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN

THE LYNX ERA, NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN

As characterised by Admiral Borsboom, the Commandant Zeestrijdkrachten (Commander of the Royal Netherlands Navy) the Lynx helicopter was of great value during all those years of service. Since 1977 the Lynx operated with the Dutch naval flight or Marine Luchtvaart Dienst (MLD) which unit was in 2008 incorporated in the Defensie Helicopter Commando (DHC) of the Royal Netherlands Air Force. The helicopter almost earned the medal of 36 years faithful service but sadly did not fully complete this period when performing its last flight on 12 September 2012.

FAREWELL IN STYLE

The admiral noted the many good jobs delivered by helicopter and crews and the professionalism you could expect from them at all times. From the main station at NAS 'De Kooy' at Den Helder, from the Royal Netherlands Navy frigates or helicopter amphibian ships or from NAS Hato in the Netherlands Antilles in the West. During 160.000 flying hours many lives were saved, drugs were intercepted, submarines discovered, regulations on sea controlled, ships assisted etc. on many surveillance flights. The admiral took in his memory especially a ditch of a German Lynx in Haiti and the rescue of the crew by a Dutch Lynx at times when he was serving in that area as first officer. Also the landing in 2010 on the captured German Taipan in the Indian Ocean by a Dutch Lynx manned with Special Forces and the saving of the ship's crew out of the hands of pirates came directly in his mind. This caused at that time a direct hit on You Tube. The admiral was assisted by his colleague from the air force Commodore Westerbeek who is today's commander of the DHC. Both speeches also concerned the transition to the new NH-90. Both commanders gave a salute to a flypast of different types of DHC helicopters leaded by one of the last two Lynx helicopters. The admiral whispered to me while making photographs that he had water in his eyes, but this was purely, as he said, because of the wind and smiled to me with an expression on his face saying; you know what I mean!

TASK AND SKILLS

Jos, the pilot doing the last flight is looking back to a good career of the Lynx. In the first years of service the helicopter was mainly performing SAR, reconnaissance and surveillance above the water and anti submarine warfare, the latter mainly from frigates. Later the focus shifted more and more to anti-drugs operations (also in Caribbean waters), blockade enforcing during international operations and counter piracy missions without losing the tasks of the first hour. Off course the range of operational possibilities grew by the acquisition of two helicopter amphibian ships. The Lynx was loved by the flying crews and characterised by Jos as the Porsche amongst the helicopters based on its fine flying characteristics. The Lynx is a very agile helicopter while the NH-90 as its successor expresses a much more moderate flying character, thanks to almost the doubled weight. When starting the last flight Jos recalled his mood at the point of beginning. He was not influenced by nerves, therefore he is much to experienced, but more or less a feeling of 'Well this is it' was bothering him, like it could not be that it was reality. But when landing for the last time at the ramp of De Kooy and by closing the door for the last time an era came to an end. Good design, he mentioned, years ahead, but mechanically to its end of life. Especially for this occasion the last two Lynx helicopters were rigged with double checkered flag and a picture of the figures of all 'The

Lynx Flight Units' of all these years. (helicopter, flying crew and technical staff). At the tail the names of the last crews and ground staff were stated. A cartoon on the fuselage was saying; 'folks, this is it'.

ACTIVE BY THE COAST OF SOMALIA

With this farewell, it's a good moment to look back at the last on board operations. Until August of this year the Lynx has been active in the Gulf of Aden operating from a frigate. James as a pilot brings in a report which well reflects the importance of a helicopter on these missions. The Lynx has behaved very well. In March the 'HMS Amstel' departed within the framework of the EU mission 'Atalanta' direction in this area with a Lynx (273) on board. James flew the missions and later on he switched to 'HMS Evertsen' with another Lynx (283) who participated in NATO's Operation Ocean Shield ", a journey of five months in total in two comparative missions. Pirates operate with true contempt for authorities and absolutely have no respect for the controlling forces in the Gulf of Oman, the Gulf of Aden and Northwest Indian Ocean. Several tactics were needed to protect the ships. The Rules Of Engagement (ROE) were broadened and shifted today to more pro-active operations. There are also operations involving intelligence collected above the coastal area's, also including above land operations. Intelligence operations provide information, also by means of actions along the coast to make a picture. Who lives where? How many pirate-boats are active and of what type? The mapping of this is called 'pattern of life' and this enables to distinguish the innocent population of persons involved in piracy.

The operation is abbreviated with ISR which means Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance with missions in daylight and in the dark. The Commander Task Force (CTF) announces the availability of helicopters to patrolling vessels for a sea area or a coastal operation with ISR. The Dutch Lynx is flown in this with the single pilot concept. Several daily patrols of about 2 hours are flown, total usually four to six hours a day. Besides the pilot, a tactical coordinator (tacco '), a sensor operator and a fourth man as helicopter rescue and additional gunner are present. Searching an area of the sea or 'surface surveillance' takes a lot of concentration under conditions sometimes boring, but still it brought a lot of success. A pirate mothership was found by Lynx crews both from the HMS Amstel and the HMS Evertsen while actually positions are often located by a maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) and passed through to a helicopter so it can fly to these locations. Once found, the pirate ships are appalled, and certainly the situation that was found operating from the HMS Evertsen, it appeared to be very complex. You need to move your mind into the situation of the pirates to predict their next step. The pirates in both cases were arrested and then transferred to local authorities. The Seychelles took over the Suspect Pirates of the HMS Amstel, and those of the HMS Evertsen were transferred on sea to an Omani corvette for trial in Oman.

THE LYNX IS RELIABLE

In a period of five months James flew 360 hours with the Lynx on or near the coast of Africa, and he has much appreciation for the maintenance personnel. They are very experienced with the Lynx, seeing things coming on their way and were very anticipating on it. Thus, an availability of > 95% was achieved and that can be classified as a top performance ! This way the helicopter was operational again within 48 hours, thousands of kilometers away from friendly territory. The last Lynx helicopters have had close the 8000 flying hours, and even one of them - after returning from the mission - was put on deck in Den Helder naval base at exactly 8000 hrs ! One of the toughest jobs was a rescue operation over a 'dhow' having engine problems. This boat was drifting for days already and visual contact was made during the nocturnal hours. The rescue happened with wind force 8 and waves of about four meters

high without orientation of a moon and without horizon. Also the landing light didn't work, so the only reference was the ship itself. At that moment you know you're pushing the limits of your ability and that of the machine, that's the moment you know exactly what you are trained for. Eight people were rescued from the ship. Although the helicopter was shot at by pirates in other situations or hydraulic leaks appeared while half an hour for flying back to the frigate whilst flying over field with many pirates James writes the rescue in the dark anyway as the most challenging thing he has ever experienced as a pilot.

A BEAUTIFUL END

The HMS Evertsen was relieved early August by HMS Rotterdam with aboard two Cougar helicopters. The flying away from HMS Evertsen was very memorable to James, he departed from the ship that at that time was sailing south of Plymouth and made a stop in Southend to refuel. From there the flight to Rotterdam followed, where a second Lynx was briefed to join the formation to 'De Kooy' in Den Helder. Along a tracking plane joined, and in formation they flew to Schiphol CTR lead by the tower. Near Egmond a rendezvous was made with two Harvards of the SKHV (Foundation Dutch Royal Airforce Historical Flight) one occupied by James' father and so they flew the last returning board helicopter as leader of a formation of five aircraft to De Kooy. There a low pass was flown over the runway before the Harvards landed, followed by a final pass with both Lynxes and showing the specially created farewell flag for this occasion under the Helicopter. The last flights of James were not to be forgotten. Early September he gave a weekend displays over Rotterdam on the occasion of the World harbour Days 2012, the last major public appearance of the Lynx. On the way back they were allowed to fly over Schiphol Airport, in formation with the NH-90 and also over the North Sea Canal. With the beautiful weather it was really enjoying, a smile on your face and a beautiful memory for later on. Only one performance was left for the Lynx, which was the flyby on September 12th at the official farewell.

AND NOW THE NH-90

Christian followed the arrival of the last helicopter on board from a tracking plane. He himself earlier flew the Lynx, and he also praised this machine. You 'wear the helicopter as if it were a suit' so to speak and you 'fly into the wide world'. It is very direct in the control. Yet an hour of Lynx flying is quoted a high activity among helicopter pilots! Today Christian prepares himself for tasks to be performed with the new NH-90. We enter an increasingly digital world, as Christian says and the NH-90 takes a prominent position in these changes. Basically it is a platform with sensors where flying is the secondary task. The mindset however remains the same and we can act more precisely under difficult conditions by providing excellent digital control. So more operational capabilities with the NH-90, but the flying characteristics of the Lynx remain stored by the pilots, somewhere deep in the heart. And so it is for never to be forgotten.

Kees Otten, Wim Das & Koos Heemskerk

