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## **PILOTS HELP TO SAVE LIVES**

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### **INTERNATIONAL EXERCISE**

In the world of aviation medical emergency aid is an interesting aspect. Concerning a plane-crash, a dike-break, flooding by storm, medical aid can be crucial, actually everywhere where victims appear. A major part of this task is the responsibility of Defence forces. They not only have national obligations in this matter, but also outside the own borders where troops may be active on duty or stationed to maintain order and/or peace. This means often invent scenarios in which the medical personnel can apply its expertise. This article describes such an exercise in cooperation with Belgian and Dutch military medevac personnel, at Woensdrecht AFB in the Netherlands. It was a cozy-case between the Belgians and the Dutch , which - in wartime or disaster - is very serious business.

In fact the JMM (Joint Medical Modules) is a military multi national exercise, with a modest participation of 70 people on the spot though, but with an important mission. The exercise was set up as joint operation including units from different organizational areas working together. Observations may lead to improvement when everything is not going smoothly. The fact that this is not always easy and obvious becomes clear if every now and then police and ambulance personnel reach for the headlines where communication was not exactly optimal.

This indicates that behind the scenes much more happens, and so pilots and crews are not just only involved in evacuation flights and medical personnel just for immediate "care" for victims, but what to think of organizing locally infrastructure and air traffic control, etc.

### **LOCATION WOENSDRECHT**

The exercise was held in June at the airbase Woensdrecht and therefore the funds and means were also largely delivered by the Belgian and Netherlands air forces. In the field a special Casualty Staging Unit (CSU) was designed for treatment of patients in preparation for departure from the simulated operation area. From the 'battle' side, a Royal Netherlands Air Force Chinook and A-109 helicopters of the Belgian Air Component flew in 'casualties' direct from a so called mission field. Those who still remember the M\*A\*S\*H\* TV- series will have a good picture by this. Victims are stabilised as much as possible already in the helicopters, and airborne there is already communication about the medical problems with personnel in the medical compound in the field. There will be a triage immediately after landing to investigate if it concerns a seriously injured emergency patient, or perhaps a 'medium care case'.

### **EVACUATION FLIGHT**

If necessary, direct assistance in the CSU unit can lead to the fact that severe injured patients will have to be stabilized for transport on an aeromedical flight to another

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location with the availability of extended medical facilities. In this JMM exercise a Belgian Embraer ERJ-135LR was used for an evacuation flight. Reality may much more complicated than one would have in mind.

Many on board operations have to be performed by a medical team that operates according CCATT principle, (Critical Care Air Transport Team) This implicates that a team of three experts have to be able to setup a flying intensive care unit and keep it operational during every evacuation flight, independent the type of plane.

This also means that respiration, surgical operations, anesthesia and extensive treatment with medication should be possible. Simple blood tests should be performed and the possibility of blood transfusion should be made available. Trauma, shock, respiratory failure, multi-organ failure, it sounds heavy, but still it is reality. The starting point is to stabilize as much as possible until intensive care can be given by a hospital on the ground. Many patients on the spot means several CCATT teams have to act. Efforts should be made under conditions that are usually stable, but specific atmospheric disturbances may cause that working in the cabin is more difficult.

Fetching victims on a forward operations base (FOB, read Airport) close to enemy territory also asks the necessary controls to pilots, flight paths and possible special specific communications with Air Traffic Control. Some decisions are taken with the CCAT team depending on the medical care needed and available within a certain distance flight.

## **COOPERATION IS VITAL**

It's fantastic work of doctors in an army uniform, an oriented choice of those who are concerned. The images need little comment and speak for themselves. Also this kind of exercises show us how we feel as NATO partners are working together and understanding each other's routines and practices even though it feels like a get-together with Belgium, professionalism has to be guaranteed, and JMM showed this was the case !

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