
DUTCH 320 & 321 SQUADRONS MLD VALKENBURG DEACTIVATED

320 & 321 Squadron MLD deactivated

In the afternoon of January 7 two P-3C Orion's, the 300 and 307 returned to home base NAS Valkenburg. Listening to call sign NRN340 and NRN320 they made their last operational appearance on the flight back from NAS Hato, Curacao in the Caribbean. Influenced by wind during the flight their was not exactly a formation flight arrival with P-3C 300 a little ahead of 307.

After the landings both aircraft waited to go together with the tender of the airport fire fighters to the flight line. One of the pilots said thanks to the tower about the public who were there to join the arrival of this last operational flight for the Dutch naval flying force (Marine Luchtvaart Dienst = MLD) to home base Valkenburg. When both aircraft were parked on spots 9 & 10 they were traditionally showered by the fire fighters to mark their homecoming.

Official end

The official end of an operational era of Dutch Orion's, the operational group MARPAT (320 & 321 Sq), NAS Valkenburg and by all means one could say the major part of the MLD followed on 14 January 2005. For the guests their were speeches and ceremonials and off course the good and sad stories of both squadrons were memorised. Ending with the Orion but founded during the second world war the two oldest Dutch Squadrons looks back to a long and sometimes heroic period. Although there was a good organised reunion festivity for all the personnel who served with the MLD feelings of sadness were superior.

They must say goodbye to a splendid Naval Air Station and beautiful, just modernised Orion aircraft due to government decisions. Eight of this aircraft modernised under the Capability Upkeep Program (CUP) are going to the German Marineflieger. The sensors are much improved and the crew can operate much more efficient thanks to CUP. The Dutch are tasked in the coming period to convert German crews to the Orion's. Limited flight operations are scheduled in 2005 and 2006 from Valkenburg. In the contract is also the delivery of the simulator to Germany. The other 5 Orion's are going to the Portugal air force after inspection by the OGMA company. As for now the Orions still operate from NAS Valkenburg since the training of the new German crews has not yet been ended. For training them, and to keep up the condition of the Orions they are daily seen still at Valkenburg and along the Dutch coastline.

Wim Das & Kees Otten

Dutch Aviation Support.