

## **DUTCH AIRFORCE TRAINING IN THE DARK**

### **Airforce training in the dark**

The Dutch Airforce plays a leading role in Afghanistan. Though a base like Kandahar for instance is relatively safe, also on such a location you can hear the shooting every day. But outside the bases and over the whole country the danger is leereing on every corner, in every house and behind every tree or rock. The Dutch Apaches - which play a major and indispensable role – have to practice very thoroughly to be as sharp as a nife in the situations that ask for such a alertness. Royal Dutch Airforce is training during the wintermonths under night circumstances, amongst others on their homebase environment. This in preparation of the missions in Afghanistan, where more and more is flown under nightly circumstances. The commitment for ISAF-3 in the darkness has already raised to 40% of the total in missions. The AH-64D Apache is extremely suitable for this goal because of the highly developed coordinated sensors for these jobs. Preparations take place from flightbase Gilze Rijen.

### **Identify in another way**

During nightflights infra red-sight is used, by means of the NVG's , the Night Vision Goggles. Pilots have to have this tricks in their fingertips completely already, because once arrived in Afghanistan they have to act right away. For that reason heavy training is done, specially training in identification of the environment where they fly. Recognition of how the ground circumstances look, the buildings, people, even children, and specially how do you interpret distances in a right way ? End of 2008 for this purpose even better night-vision camera's will be mounted on all Apaches. Next to practical exercises about how to fly overnight, and identification friend or foe, civilians or weapons, it's also the matter to find out how you can learn to use the equipment in your own personal way under the extreme and dangerous circumstances. It is a necessity to fly higher than used to be in earlier days. Where low altitude flying was considered as tactics earlier, now the introduction of new tactics and the necessity of flying higher because of small calibre enemy-fire they must fly higher now. These facts ask for a better capability to identify people and objects from longer distance. Circumstances are simulated which look like those in Afghanistan. A common farm may be a looking like a 'Kuala' or Afghan farm, and how can you identify this in a right way ? The Dutch (even as the other countries involved ) try to avoid as much as possible any collateral damage. Also there is practicing with complete pelotons of soldiers, because they are the ones that ask for immediate commitment. Not only fire support, but also for an overview of the terrain and situation in front of them.

### **Hot refuel**

The accent will be on training cooperative with groundforces, because this kind of training is not available in any way overthere. These exercises mainly take plave at 'The Veluwe' in The Netherlands, with many places of woods and trees, but also flat, sandy plain terrains used and owned by the Dutch Army. It conciders guidance of convoys, reconnaissance, and training with FAC's, (Forward Air Controllers) Low altitude flying is mainly done over the 'Maas-Waal' territory because of the suitability, but it takes much transit-time so sometimes the Apaches fly in the south of the Netherlands also. The crew concept is also of major importance. Ti's not to choose 'just some guys' trained for the job. In the contrary, the crew is

highly adjusted to each other, they are more than just colleagues, they were taught to act like a very smooth team, communicating through intercom and speaking by night in 'green tints'. How do you react on your buddy, where do you want to go, what exactly do you mean, these questions actually have to be questions that not have to be asked between the guys. Identification by daylight has a range of about 6 kilometers, at night about 4 Km. Specially the man in the back seat has with his NVG's the best overview, but he must be able to explain in very short words and 'green-tints' to his gunner in front what he sees and means. The frontman has at his disposal a Target Acquisition Designating Sight infrared camera which is connected to the weaponry. Live shooting exercises are held twice a year in Germany and Belgium, while also incidentally now in Germany and Poland during major combined exercises recently. Next to this there also is the groundcrew. These persons are trained very well in receiving the Apaches in completely dark circumstances because this is some safer at all times. They are ready with oil, fuel, and grease where-ever needed. An Apache giving cover to groundtroops or any other mission has to be able to refill very very fast in between. This mostly happens with still turning rotorblades, the so called 'Hot Refuel'. Landings take place in a precise vertical position, not with a landing-circuit as usual with a taxi-traject. The complete process has to be done in a few minutes but the groundcrews have to be sharp, and suitable, something like the pit-stop at formula-1 racing.

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