

The NAVY means to know what you are doing

Part 1 – Dutch Navy

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With this words the Koninklijke Marine (Royal Netherlands Navy) profiles itself to the public. But to know what the meaning is of this we need to take a closer look. The magazine Piloot & Vliegtuig was invited to visit Naval Air Station 'de Kooy' home base of the Marine Luchtvaart Dienst (MLD) and a combined visit to the Amphibious transport/assault ship the Hr. Ms. Rotterdam. A report of this visit was made in a 2 part article.

De Kooy has two squadrons

It is a bright day when we arrive at the 7th Squadron (VSQ-7) building on the base with in the front of the building a score-board with the number of rescues up till today. VSQ-7 is a typical Search & Rescue squadron operating the Lynx helicopter above the North-Sea. Here we meet our accompanying officer of the Marines (Korps Mariniers) and Lynx pilot. A brief walk over the platform brings us to another building housing the 860 Squadron (VSQ-860) where our journey to the ship will start. This squadron is the mother squadron of the embarked Lynx helicopters for the frigates. After instruction we get a special suit. This safety suit prevents you from wet and cold in case of forced landing in the water. Additional equipment is a swimsuit and a package with a little inflatable boat at the back and a helmet with a head set for communication. Not used to this it gives you pretty much the feeling of an astronaut on the moon.

Flexibility means to improvise

Once you are inside the Lynx and connected with the intercom you can communicate with all the others. While listening to the engine and rotor the pilot is checking the helicopter. One check gives an unsatisfying result and both pilots and flight engineer decides to stay on the ground. A mechanic has to look at it first. Then we receive the message from the Hr. Ms. Rotterdam that some fire –exercises is interfering and no clearance for the deck is given until the evening. The flight is cancelled and demonstrating the principle of flexibility we will approach the ship with a RHIB (Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat) from Den Helder harbour. After shielding our photo equipment from water by large plastic bags we leave full speed heading for the Hr. Ms. Rotterdam which is positioning in the adjacent water in front of Den Helder called 'Marsdiep' near the isle of Texel. Climbing a rope-ladder against the big surface of the ship gives you an adventurous feeling. Once we are on board we are welcomed as 'opstappers' (people picked up from a boat) and we introduce ourselves.

Hr. Ms. Rotterdam

When the national defence plan was presented at the "prince day" in 2003 it occurred in the interest of our country to increase the activity in the amphibious field, also

outside European territory. Politicians decided to do so with the condition everywhere in the world and they focussed on a big amphibious ship. Today, a few decennia after withdrawal of the aircraft carrier 'Karel Doorman' the Dutch navy proudly employs a big ship again by the Hr. Ms. Rotterdam (LPD-1 / Landing Platform Dock) with 12.750 tons. However restricted to helicopter flights only the ship is capable of supporting many flights. The ship can host several Lynx helicopters inside the hangar and has two landing spots. It is possible to let the Seaking or Merlin helicopter land on the deck but in case of dual landing one of the helicopters will be positioned with the rear rotor section outside the deck. Momentarily a second Amphibious ship is under construction. This ship which will carry the name Hr. Ms. Johan de Wit (LPD-2) is considered to join the Hr. Ms. Rotterdam in 2007. Experiences with the Rotterdam today can influence further construction of the Johan the Wit. The new ship will be fitted with a more heavy deck making it possible to deploy the Chinook helicopter on the ship.

The Lynx helicopter

Totally 24 lynx helicopters were acquired by the Dutch Navy in A,B and C versions, entered service in 1977 and can operate a few different missions like anti submarine warfare, surveillance above the sea and in special configuration search & rescue missions. Sitting in right position is the pilot and in the left chair the second pilot or tactical coordinator or so called 'tacco'. The tacco is responsible for tactical leadership in a tactical missions but is not a pilot. Only one pilot is represent in such missions. In SAR call outs there are standard two pilots in the crew. In case of anti submarine actions the lynx is configured with a dipping sonar and a sonar operator in the back. In that case there is no space for a hoist and consequently the helicopter cannot be used for saving lives, however in a few hours the configuration can be changed. Momentarily some 21 lynx helicopters are in use, all being upgraded to SH-14D with 2 more powerful engines of 1200 hp per engine.

To become a Lynx pilot, common sense is important

The training course starts with 8 months at the Nederlandse Luchtvaartschool (NLS) which is a theoretical course and providing you the Air Traffic Pilot Licence (ATPL). The follow-up course is at Woensdrecht Air base for 180 hours flying on the Pilatus PC-7 of 131 Squadron EMVO (Elementaire Vliegopleidingen = elementary flying school) of the Koninklijke Luchtmacht (Klu). The next phase is flying on the Dornier Do-228 of the Kustwacht (Coast Guard) for 20 hours on NAS de Kooy. First helicopter flying hours are to be made at Hato Air base in Curacao for 35 hours on the Schweizer 330 initially and later on 35 hours on the Ecureuil Twin Star, both from the civil company Heli Holland but with military instructor. Eventually the cadet will be on NAS de Kooy conversed on the Lynx. On the de Kooy is a Full Mission Flight Trainer (FMFT) shared with Danish, Norwegian, German and Portuguese crews. The facility is commonly in use and slight differences in software for the several versions responding at the needs of the different countries is changed ad set regularly and authorised by the Canadian Aviation Electronics company (CAE) being an authority in this field. After 8 months you finish the course and receive your wings after some 350 flying hours and 3 years of training courses.

The training includes techniques to escape when your helicopter has ditched the water circumstances which are simulated in a special dunker facility. After this you are 'drilled'. To be a good navy pilot some special qualities are required to challenge the sometimes difficult circumstances. You have to be more capable than only following the rules while sometimes decisions are to be made by you only, being in the ultimate position for that. This can be necessary under stressful conditions leaving your brain to evaluate while human lives are in danger. The navy calls in 'common sense' and will evaluate you on that quality. Some other qualifications are set for approaching and landing on the deck of a ship, landing in night conditions, hoist operations from the sea or a ship etc. The required flying hours on this will be strictly noted for all crews and if there appears a shortage one has to requalify on this matters with an instructor. The Dutch Navy is accustomed to execute several exercising hours at NAS Culdrose in the UK. This training concerns pre dominantly ASW and ASuW. The career of a Lynx pilot starts with VSQ-7 in Den Helder.

After receiving his wing he will first act as a co-pilot in SAR missions responsible for communication with other helicopters or airplanes in the area and the Coast-Guard facility in Den Helder (communications director). Secondly he is command for navigation and planning of the mission. This includes finding an appropriate hospital concerning the injuries or finding refuelling sites which could be a off-shore facility. The first pilot stays in command for the whole mission while the co-pilot assists also with all other types of support varying from transport till support of special forces. Qualification to first pilot SAR will be possible after a 1,5 year period co-pilot SAR. While being a first pilot an additional training of one month in Canada leads to ship qualification. In the follow up the pilot will join VSQ-860 which deploys Lynx helicopters on frigates. Deployments could be from one month up to seven months ! Next to this is there the possibility to become an instructor for the helicopter or simulator normally comprising 2-3 years. More qualities can be developed depending the wishes of the pilot. Another period on the ships, leaving the Navy after ending of the contract or transition to the Dornier-DO-228 of the Coast Guard could be a possibly next step.

Experienced in the concept

In the evening we face some action on the front of the ship. On the side of the ship hovers a lynx helicopter with a heli-redder (rescuer) dancing in the air connected to the hoist. When he is far enough down the lynx manoeuvres above the deck and drops him. One by one more rescue man called 'kikkers' were dropped the same way. Without using night vision goggles the pilot must concentrate himself with everything in the surrounding turns in black colour and will use his autopilot. On the ship it is strictly prohibited to use flash for photographing avoiding danger for the pilot operating the lynx in front of us. Besides some transparent green lights everything is dark on the deck and some code lights above the radar section warns other ships that flight actions are in progress. With a repeat of the actions the HI line (Heaving In) is used in the so called Norwegian method. The lynx approaches on 30 feet (in night conditions on 50 feet) and will heading on the wind to get extra power. A five kilo sandbag is dropped on the deck connected to the hoist by the cable. After this

the lynx can start to hover alongside the ship and people and brand cards can be transported with an angle while someone on the deck is in charge with cable. When too many poles or antenna's inhibit a direct route the HI line will be the only way.

Part two Dutch navy will follow

Wim Das & Kees Otten

