

ARMY AVIATION VITERBO - ITALY

Helicopterview: Army Aviation Training and 'Antares' Aviation Regiment

AATB

Within the Army Aviation Services In Italy the old town Viterbo – situated northern of Rome – is more or less the hub, the spider in the web. It is said that there is nobody in town, not having any relatives in the army. Next to the General Headquarters there are two major facilities to be found here: the Army Aviation Training Brigade (AATB) and the 1^{ste} Army Aviation Regiment "Antares". The Army Aviation Training Brigade provides the 2nd line trainingtask for helicopterpilots being the major part of the flying personell. In the Air Force on the Italian Air Force Flying School (Scuola di Volo Elicotteri) in Frosinone with the NH-500E helicopter, the initial helicoptertraining for base-techniques (fase-1) is educated. After that Fort Rucker in Alabama USA is visited where together with all kind of other nationalities such as the adspirant helicopterpilots of the Dutch Royal Air Force more experience is gained. Next to classical technical parts and simulator excercises the TH-67 'Creek' (AB-206) is used for practising as well as UH-1 (AB-205) or CH-47 , and that way the grade of Army Observer Pilot is reached. Back in Italy again the cadet follows a more advanced course in tactical way with combat and weapontraining on the AATB. After that finally the licence of helicopterpilot is gained. Ofcourse here are new possibilities for repeating basecourse on the AB-206, or refreshmentcourses for the already graduated pilots. But the main task is to learn the tactical finesses. Other educationforms are qualifications for nightflying with "Night Vision Goggles"(NVG's) and also training for non-flying personell such as technical officers, traffic-controllers, firefighters and also non-commissioned officers (NCO)

SIMULATOR

Important part in this matter are the simulators. Not without any pride we are told that the simulator for the AB205/212 is the most advanced simulator in the world, even more advanced than the type the USA have in use ! Though this is not very strange, looking at the fact that Italia next to the USA is a large Bell operator, for that matter mainly of by Agusta license built examples. We are offered to take our seats in the simulator. There are 3 AB205/212 consoles at AATB/Viterbo with a central computer-unit from which missions can be initialised and guided. It is also possible to co-fly as instructor in the simulator and in between through a sort of 'semi-remote control' to create more heavy duty's in the flightsituations for the course-member, or change the mission in other aspects. ILS (Instrument Landing System) en NVG-operations can be practiced in a comprehensive way. Every Italian airbase, mountain environment, flights over sea, city, any scenario is to be created, even under all kinds of weatherconditions. The projection – remarquable better than the Americans have – is three dimensional seen on the cockpit windows which gives a real-live 'awareness' to the pilot, while the Americans have to settle with a monitor-experience. The computer analyses the flight-data very accurate and it can happen that where the instructor gives a 'yes' the computer answers with a 'no'!

Other Nato countries amongst others also the USA can make reservations for 'simulator-hours'. As concerning the training for battlehelicopter techniques the AATB is quite unique ! Two highly advanced A-129 cockpit simulators (the only ones in the world) give pilot and WSO (Weapon System Officer) even more possibilities than the AB205/212 simulator. Both consoles can be linked which means combat missions become even more interesting. Both helicoptercrews can – separate from eachother – influence the conditions while flying in group-formation which creates an even larger interactive training experience. Information is sent to and processed by the computer through the integrated helmet display. Ofcourse many attention is paid to target-searching, practicing with aiming-systems and firing weapons. In the Italian situation it is usual that pilot and weapon system officer are to be exchanged so they can both get the same training. Mostly it is organised in a way that the crew exists of a very experienced member, and a less trained member. That way many 'pre-flights' are flown in a variety of many different scenery's. Not until the 'skills' of the pilot/WSO have been judged as very good there will be real actual shooting practicing at Sardinia. Ofcourse this real practicing cost a lot of money, so it is only allowed if the percentage of hitting the targets is very high. If the A-129 is sold to other countries the simulator can be delivered as well. Striking detail is that giving answers to questions on this subject if this is actual the case were emphaticly avoided.

FIXED WINGS

The 'Aviazione Dell' Esercito' as the Italian Army-aviation is called officially also has transportplanes in service, and ofcourse they need pilots to fly them. Simultaneous on the helicopter training there is a "course" for fixed wing planes which starts in Pensacola Florida on the US. Navy Flying School with in the 2nd fase on the AATB transition training to the Do-228 or P-180AM. Though the army historically seen is known with planes like the former Piper L-18C Cub and the SM-1019E (Italian O-1E Bird dog) in the "Army Observation Role" , todays role and contribution of these planes (and their pilots ofcourse) is modest.

EXPIRIMENTAL

A second important task of the AATB Testing & Research where new integrated systems are evaluated. Some A-129 mangusta's were seen with a new 20mm TM197B quick firing gun mounted in the nose (like the AH-64 Apache) in the so called "combatina" version. It is meant to be that all Mangusta's will be equipped with this gun in near future. During missions under United Nations Flag like participating in extractionforce (EFOR) in Macedonia it was painfully experienced that not having a gun against ground-to-air firing-guns in the mountainous environments like Kosovo is a big lack. With the possibility of using TOW anti-tank rockets it is perfectly well possible to blow away tanks, APC's or trucks but how do you manage to send a rocket to any guerrilla with a mortar ? This new gun is still in the evaluation phase, as well as the new grey-brown colorscheme for the helicopters where we couldn't wittingly get any more supplementary details about. More information was given about the AB-412 , the brand new helicopter with loads of digital avionics and techniques such as fully computerised take-off. In future AATB will be intensively involved in implementation processes

concerning the new NH-90. New modern systems such as fly-by-wire controlled flightmanouvres and HMSD (Helmet Mounted Sight and Display) aiming systems will also cause changes in the traject of simulator training.

ANTARES

Near the AATB is located the 1st Reggimento Dell'aviazione Esercito "Antares" With their own heli-port and traffic controltower. But still there is a intensive and very narrow corporation with AATB. The 1st regiment operates about all helicopter types such as the complete Agusta-Bell family (AB-205, AB-206, AB-212 and AB-412) and their own Agusta A-109 and A-129 which we can find also on the other Army-bases. Next to that the complete CH-47C Chinook fleet and the three Do-228 planes are to be found here.

CHINOOK

The Chinooks are in service for quite some years already, they are the working-horses of the transport of troops. 37 fully armed and equipped soldiers, 15 soldiers and one Jeep, or two Jeeps or one VMG APC (Armed personnel car) can be transported for instance. Chinooks are also capable of dropping paratroopers of which 28 can be transported at one time. Outside the fuselage any kind of cargo can be transported on a cargo-hook, also like a Jeep etc. Mechanically seen the helicopters have been improved with new engines, transmissions and two composit-rotors in stead of the original light-metal versions. The specifications of lifting material were improved from max. 9072 Kg to max. 12.000 Kg ! Most of them, in any case the SAR-versions have a external winch to lift people or objects. The standard crew configuration exists of 2 pilots and 2 crewchiefs, for fire-fighting 2 pilots and 3 specialists and for nightflights a total crew of six persons. The helicopters have already contributed in various UN-missions amongst others in Namibia, Somalia, Mozambique (the only occasion with white painted camo), Turkey, Kurdistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia. In Albanië they worked together with the Royal Netherlands Air Force at Farke and this operation called "Pelican" was executed at the same time as the operation in Mozambique. The Italians were very contempt about the Dutch digitalised Chinooks who are more advanced compared to the Italian ones who still have much analog technology and not yet a automatic pilot. Also concerning the lack of autoprotection and the more simple armament these helicopters are not quite suitable for front-services or CSAR zones, but better to be used for supply tasks from out of the retired positions. At Viterbo we spotted some examples with a new kind of paint almost equal to the US-Army versions, in contradiction to most present and more attractive grey-green camouflage sceme. It'll be effective though, but it's a kind of boring smooth dark brown-green color. Could this be because of the exchange programs with the Americans ? Right now a number of Chinooks operate in the south of Iraq, under protection of Dutch Royal Air Force AH-64 Apaches.

REMAINING HELICOPTERS

As mentioned already different types pf Bell helicopters are in active service next to the A-109 light transporthelicopter and the A-129 Mangusta

battleforce helicopters. The Bell family knows 2 older types, the AB-206-C1 and the AB-205 which are actually used for training activities and light tasks. The one-engined AB-212 and specially the twin-engined AB-412 are much more advanced and competent and therefore much more suitable on the battle-zone, Because of modern Doppler radarsystems, IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) just to mention a few extra's. The A-109 transports six passengers as light supply helicopter and the AB-412 can transport thirteen passengers and that fact prefers the last mentioned, also because of his advanced equipment, for CSAR operations. This can be done in corporation with a battlefield helicopter such as the Mangusta A-129. This one has various autoprotection systems and is capable of firing TOW or Stinger rockets. It's clearly an assault helicopter, but also capable of protecting air-convoys. Different "Packages" can be formed. Ofcourse there is an intensive contact with the other Esercito squadrons 2nd Reggimento "Sirio" in Lamezia Terme, 4th Reggimento "Altair" in Bolzano and gruppo SOATCC in Padova, who operate also a mix of types except the Chinook and the Do-228. Thanks to the many different types "Antares" is a regiment with a variety of possibilities end next to that large trainings capacity to bring pilots to a very high operational level !

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