

The NAVY means to know what you are doing

Part 2 – Dutch Navy

The NAVY means to know what you are doing

During 24 hours we were the guests on the Hr. Ms. Rotterdam preparing itself and its crew for the big exercise joint caribbean Lion later this year in and around Curacao with participators the Koninklijke Marine (navy), Luchtmacht (air force), Landmacht (army) and Marechaussee (military police). During this visit the ship was situated somewhere on the sea in the neighbourhood of Den Helder. The Navy was busy to qualify crews and personnel on the ship for dual spot landings that day. As many crews as possible took the chance to gain experience with simultaneously use of the landing spots. Flights were scheduled from NAS de Kooy to the ship with a maximum of 7 crews a day.

Amphibious assault

The Netherlands is one of the key players in the world with amphibious capabilities. Together with The United Kingdom the Netherlands are organised in the UK/NL amphibian task group. This forming with the U.S. and Spain/Italy the big three. Previously the UK delivered the ship and equipment and the Dutch partly the marines. Today the Netherlands plays their own major role with one and in future two advanced amphibious transport/assault ships. The Hr. Ms. Johan de Wit will have an enhanced staff capacity and will be able to operate as a command & control platform to lead an amphibious task force. At this moment the first batch generals and admirals are almost finishing their course for this task. When politicians decides to make a move they can order one or two ships with Dutch or English marines to join NATO or UN operations. To show up for the coast of a crisis area is quite intimidating and called 'showing flag'. If necessary an amphibious unit can disembark from an big internal dock. The Hr. Ms. Rotterdam provided this service for UNMEE for the coast of Somalia and Ethiopia/Eritrea and shipped English soldiers to Iraq. Supplies and marines were shipped from Italia to Albania for UN operations and the Hr. Ms. Rotterdam joined the UK to Senegal in transporting soldiers and equipment.

Expeditionary force

When I am interviewing the Commander Amphibian Operations (AO) he shows me the possibilities to put the ship in operation. He wants to influence the situation on the land and depending the rules of engagement the task can be from peace enforcement to war conditions, this provided anywhere in the world and as part of a quick reaction force. This operations can be joint operations with mixed options of army or navy elements and with interoperability character transporting or supporting allied soldiers. The ship is just like a box for plugs and what plug do you put in? You can use the ship in several ways but anyway the ship is plug and play and the military command decides which units and what equipment are serving the mission in the best way. When a first step is needed in a conflict and it is necessary to occupy and consolidate a beachhead or a harbour this is called the 'initial entry'. Usual this kind

of manoeuvres are undertaken from a task force with back up from ships and planes for the landing force. It is considered a big advantage that the force is mobile and you can choose at the latest moment your target while enemy forces are mainly not able to guard or defend a complete cost line. The Hr. Ms. Rotterdam embarks a normal crew of 123 man and can host a battalion of 611 marines with supplies for 10 days in transit and another 30 days for coastal actions. When a landing area is stabilized landing crafts with equipment and soldiers will leave the big internal docking area which is called 'het stalen strand' (the iron beach). The docking area is inside filled with water till 2.70 meter and normally operates 2 landing crafts of LCU type (Landing Craft Utility) and two of the slightly larger LCVP type (Landing Craft Vehicle & personnel). The rolling equipment is secured on a special deck in front of the dock and enters the landing craft with the nose in front. Operations in the dock are supervised by docking controllers visually or by screens in a special docking control area. On the beach a special path for heavy equipment is put on the beach by the CASE tractor and rolling equipment which is run aground in the water can be recovered with the BARV (Beach Armoured Recovery Vehicle). Next to the initial entry operations can be limited to setting a 'footprint' which indicates operations with a small force to the land and the majority of logistical support staying on the ship. Other tasks can be with humanitarian character like accommodating refugees or wounded in case of humanitarian disasters and to conduct and support exit strategies. The Hr. Ms. Rotterdam can function as a PCRS (Primary Casualty Receiving Ship) with a large sickbay, two operation rooms and a laboratory.

Helicopter missions

Depending the mission the helicopter can perform several tasks. Sometimes there are up to 6 lynx helicopters for major ASW operations and performing transport tasks. During landing operations submarines and mine hunters will have cleared the path first. An aircraft carrier will provide air supremacy and frigates will guard and defend the fleet. Special forces will be put on land by helicopters like commando's or forward air controllers. The lynx helicopter performs also surveillance and submarine tracking till 100 nautical miles from the ship. A submarine is easily found with a dipping sonar and after discovering they usually try to escape or they can be pinpointed with sono buoys and attacked with a Mk. 48 torpedo. The lynx can transport a mortar with an under slung.

Future prospective

Everybody is looking forward to the introduction of the NH-90 helicopter which will substantially increase the amphibious capacity by air. After disengage more and more the 'blue water' operations and focussing more on the shallow 'brown water' operations consequently the transport element should fit more in this type of operations near the shore. The need is there to transport more people through the air and enlarge operational capabilities which will be more accurate with the NH-90 helicopter. Due to lack of night vision goggles the lynx is limited in night operations while this is very much needed in the concept. There have been trials with Cougars from the Dutch Air Force (Klu) and most probably they will fill the gap before the first

Dutch NH-90 will enter service in 2007-2008. Cooperation with the Klu comprises not only this aspect but plans are made for a joint command to put all helicopters in the Dutch armed forces under one command called Defensie Helicopter Commando (DHC). There are two versions of the NH-90 on order of which one will serve for all forces, the TTH (Tactical Transport Helicopter) and the other special for naval service called the NFH (Nato Frigate Helicopter) with sonar equipment. Thoughts have been made to change the order for some TTH in a MTTH version (Maritime Tactical Transport Helicopter) indicating a navalised version with more strengthened wheel section and a harpoon to connect with the deck. Another issue which became more evident last years is the anti-terrorist action. However tactics are not to be published some things are known about this operations. These will be conducted by a special force called the BBE (Bijzondere Bijstands Eenheden). Techniques like abseilen or fastropen are frequently trained and several people can be picked up with spy riggen enabling people to secure simultaneously to the rope. Some 6 heavy armed soldiers can be transported by the lynx and usually for special operations in war zones marines of the 'korps Mariniers' are in charge while this organisation has a relationship with the navy for a long time.

Organisation on the deck

The helicopters arrive by support of the air traffic controllers on the ship who have a good overview with radar screens up to 100 nautical miles from the ship. The officer in command for the deck is the Helicopter Direction Officer (HDO) who can oversee the deck by cameras. When the deck is not clear he can put helicopters in a holding. When there is visual contact the helicopter will be awaited by Flight Deck Officers (FDO) on the deck to direct and support the helicopter to the landing spot. This process is supervised by the Flight Deck Supervisor watching the movements from a special cabin looking like a big blister above the hangar. He gives a landing spot to an approaching pilot. Sometimes landings come from starboard, sometimes from backboard, depending the wind there are several possibilities. Two helicopters repeatedly perform landings and starts simultaneously while we are watching. After a landing a little harpoon is ejected in the grid which is there special situated in the landing spot for this function. The lynx although equipped with smart wheels turning to the side is in this way secured on the deck. With bad weather this is essential. The FDO gives the sign that the harpoon can be extracted. Actions of the FDO are an inspiring scenery. Special signs with the arms indicates clear for specific action or directions. The pilot knows what de next sign of the FDO will be, but the FDO has the responsibility to watch if everything is safe and cleared. While we are watching the FDO signs with a wide movement of both arms 'off you go' and the lynx climbs in the air gradually takes a circle around the ship and begins a new approach. When there is little light or in night conditions the FDO uses a light stick both hands. Landings can be done safely till 45 knots wind. With rough weather the FDO will count the waves of the water because when you leaving the deck between two waves you can involuntary come back on deck when the next wave is braking on the ship.

Departure time

Time to fly back to the shore. Wearing our life saving suites again and equipment we

say goodbye to the ship and while the rotor is rotating we are supported inside. Everything around us is marking the professionalism of the people. Then after securing inside the lynx climbs in the air and with a sharp round we are on our way leaving the Hr. Ms. Rotterdam within a few seconds in very small figure down below. We are flying in grey shades of clouds and have limited visual of the water below us. After some minutes the lights of Den Helder airport become visible to us and after a safe landing we take some coffee with the crew in 860 squadron building. Pilots are telling stories over there landings with 50-60 knots wind on installations for the oil industry looking like Christmas trees with their antenna's. This only with radar while visual approach is hardly possible. The pilots are very confident with there equipment because the lynx flies like a razor knife and is considered thanks to its enormous power as a Ferrari amongst the helicopters. One-liners we heard enough on this trip like 'train as you fight', 'professionalism' is the key to success' and 'you never get a second chance to make a first impression'. We observed everything and launched our own oneliner; 'Who does not want to work in this organisation where they know exactly what they want.

SPECIFICATIONS:

Lynx Helicopter

Rotor dimension	12.80 m
Length	11.92 m
Height	3.59 m
Weight	4875 kg
Engines	2 Rolls Royce GEM 42
Range	520 km
Normal speed	220 km/u
Maximum speed	245 km/u
Armament	torpedo's, small machine gun
Sensors	dipping sonar, radar, FLIR
Self defence	chaff, flares, RWR

Hr. Ms. Rotterdam

Crew	123 men/women
Embarking forces	611 marines
Weight	12.750 ton
Length	166 m
Width	27m
Speed	20 knots
Engines	4 Stork Wartsila dieselelectric engines totally 19800 hp 2 Holec engines totally 16320 hp
Armament	2 goalkeeper 30 mm anti aircraft/missile guns 8 Browning .50 machine guns

Wim Das & Kees Otten