

Double Dutch (Army and Airforce exercise together)

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Regularly the Dutch military forces are testing the cooperation in joint forces. Sometimes this is demonstrated to the press or public. This year on the army exercise ground in Havelte combined military elements exercised to find out what they are worth in accomplishing a mission involving several air and ground operating units. The target in this exercise was to take a well defended bridge to secure an entry for army forces waiting some distance beyond. The area is located near the forest but good visible and reachable from the air. The scenario could be witnessed by the press. Here we zoom in to this kind of operations combined between Army and Airforce.

Air Mobile Brigade

The bridge is hold by enemy forces. The Tactical Helicopter Group (THG) will deploy soldiers on the ground of the 11th AMB (Air Mobile Brigade). After reconnaissance of the area the expected counterforce will be calculated and a quick Air Assault will be the projected method to recover the bridge. Different methods can be used to gather information in reconnaissance. This can be either commando's on the ground, AH-64D Apaches or F-16 in the air or even small unmanned flying aircraft depending the situation and availability. Dutch Army herefor uses the 'Sperwer', a UAV with a maimum speed of 235 km/h 4 hrs of flying time and a maximum ceiling of 4000 meters. Reconnaissance is normally valuable and executed 24-48 hours before showtime while most of the time a distance of 5-10 kilometres is obeyed. The commando's on the ground who are the ears and the eyes of the commander will go in the target area later on while reporting on high frequency radio and will engage fighting actions when helicopters have landed. In the meanwhile on the bridge enemy forces control the area supported by a tank

Landing zone

A helicopter with soldiers of the 11th AMB is circling nearby and once the reconnaissance mission gives the overview of the situation the helicopter is first securing a landing area. On the forest edge are well camouflaged commando's almost invisible located and moving freely in that area. This commando's asked for a team of red barets which they consider necessary. The first group will be a Helicopter Handling Team and a Forward Air Controller (FAC) of the 11th Infanterie Bataljon. The Chinook is approaching suddenly a few metres above the trees alarming the surrounding by its noise and while he lands a whirlwind of sand from the ground makes the helicopter very low visible. Immediately fully equipped Red Barets are running out from the backdoor while shooting and forming a closed circle around the helicopter while occupying the surrounding of the helicopter. When the last soldier and equipment has left the Chinook speeds back in the air and vanishes over the top of the trees. Enemy fire from the ground can be answered by the Chinook's machineguns and SAM's fired from the shoulder can be countered by chaff or flares.

If needed mortars or even light vehicles can be dropped in this way in the landing zone by the Chinook.

Forward Air Controller leads attack plane

The Forward Air Controller secures communication with the command & control centre and informs about the actual situation. In the meanwhile the commando's are positioning and deploy light weapons. The tank is moving in the direction of the landing zone where the helicopter dropped the soldiers but will have no chance. Suddenly a ghost like appearance of a F-16 a few metres above the trees results in a direct hit. The fighting Falcon disappear as suddenly as it showed itself. Then an armoured personnel car (APC) moves quickly to the area of the destroyed tank and the forward air controller immediately directs the F-16 again to the target area. It is just like a replay. With a high speed manoeuvre the F-16 hits the APC. As a result of the noise and quick destroy of both tank and APC confusion is caused with the enemy troops defending the bridge. In the meanwhile commando forces are approaching the bridge in two groups. One group is positioning and lay's constantly fire on the target while the other group is moving in to the bridge. Then suddenly they switch roles and the second group has the chance to move forwards too. Over and over again in an alternately way they not only distance is reduced but also confusion increases by the enemy to answer fire from different spots. Over the area are constantly rains of bullets from different directions.

Reinforcements bringing balance in the attack

A second Chinook is approaching a spot where the first group left a marker indicating precisely where to land. The Chinook carries a canon under the fuselage. Chinooks are capable to lift 12000 kilo's and 3 external loads can be carried like a jeep or an small armoured car or a medium rang anti tank weapon. After the landing troops moves from inside to the surrounding of the helicopter to give assistance to the first group. Enemy fire is decreasing partly by casualties and partly by the knowledge that the bridge cannot be held. When the bridge is captured reinforcements will be flown in to occupy and secure the areas behind the bridge. Resistance is declining and a few soldiers comes to surrender with the weapons above there heads. The men are captured weapons removed and blindfolded and taken away. After the actions are finished two F-16's makes an reconnaissance pass to calculate the situation. Wounded soldiers receive medical help on stretchers.

Hercules movement

Depending the circumstances heavier equipment could be deployed. Actions with more soldiers and equipment could ask for heavy transport through the air. The Dutch troops could ask for more support through the air by C-130H-30 transport aircraft or tactical transport of soldiers by the cougar helicopter. If possible the C-130 Hercules can land on a very short landing strip using steep landing to avoid enemy anti aircraft armament as much as possible. If this is the case and the surrounding of the landing area is not completely cleared a Hercules can defend itself with flares. After landing the loadmaster directs the troops or equipment out while the engines are still running. Commando's are running outside the rear of the transport airplane.

The surrounding of the airplane is guarded while equipment like jeeps or fast and light personnel carrying vehicles are rolling out quickly. Wounded persons can be taken away by the Hercules. The transport plane is able to move backwards considerable quickly and doesn't need to turn for a take off. Within a few hundred metres the Hercules is going in the air demonstrating its Short Take-Off and Landing (STOL) capacities. For all this actions are carried out there must be a complete clearance off the surrounding area for snipers because even when a stinger is fired from the shoulder while the plane is on the ground it can be lethal. The captured enemy soldiers are prisoners of war and will be treated conform the Geneva convention. They could be transported outside the area by helicopters or by the Hercules. Reinforcements of troops can also be flown to the area by the Cougar, the medium transport helicopter of the Dutch Air Force.

Apache in the air

The F-16's are still in the neighbourhood first of all to show threat to the enemy but also to support the own troops. They can call in the F-16 for Close Air Support with the possibility of attack with precision guided munitions. If enemy tanks or other vehicles are still in the surrounding they can be eliminated if necessary. The same threat can be laid upon enemy forces by the Apache attack helicopter. The pilots can guard the airspace and look with Night Vision Goggles (NVG) into the area. Every moving target can be seen identified and attacked within seconds. The Apache can communicate with other Apache's, AWACS, ground units or Command & Control unit with Data-link. In this way information of the situation is directly shared. When the bridge is secured and the way to the bridge is cleared by commando's and watched from the air by the apache the armed ground forces waiting at some distances can move to the bridge and go on with their mission. Probably the key players in this scenario could be changed by other flying equipment. For example when fighter aircraft are not possible to enter the airspace the task of the Close Air Support can be carried out by the Apache which also can destroy tanks with hellfire rockets. In the same way when no Chinook is available the Cougar can bring in soldiers. A Hercules has to use a landing strip which is not always in the area of attack. This task of bringing in several equipment/troops can also be carried out by several Chinook helicopters. The flying units and the army units has to train together and to know each other when the politics orders them to this work in real battle conditions.

Wim Das & Kees Otten
