TEN YEARS OF CERTAINTY FOR DEN HELDER AIRPORT

The signatures with which cooperation between Den Helder Airport and Maritime Airbase De Kooy has been officially confirmed have been placed. According to Airport Director Conny van den Hoff, this now means that the jobs of 500 employees at Den Helder Airport and another 5,000 at Defence, offshore companies and suppliers have been secured for at least ten years. The State Secretary for Finance Frans Weekers signed the document on behalf of the national government and Director Conny van den Hoff signed it on behalf of Den Helder Airport. This took place after both had taken a helicopter flight over Den Helder.

Numerous dignitaries, including Minister of Defence Hans Hilzen, witnessed the official signing of the agreement between the National Real Estate and Development Corporation (RVOB) and Den Helder Airport on Monday, 27 August. Before the official signing, various people involved took the floor. The first to set the ball rolling was Den Helder Mayor Koen Schuiling, who talked about the unique combination of airport and seaport and its importance for the Dutch economy. “Along with the Royal Netherlands Navy, the Royal Naval Institute and the marine companies, this forms an entire package, i.e. a pearl we will be developing in the coming years.” In his speech, Alderman Kees Visser indicated the importance of the offshore industry for Den Helder.
“Given our location in respect of the oil and gas fields offshore, Den Helder forms the centre of the North Sea. This provides a lot of quality employment. This can be maintained and even grow further thanks to the unique cooperation with the Defence Department.” The alderman immediately took advantage of the opportunity to point out that the NH90 helicopter simulator, which replaces the recently divested simulator for the Lynx helicopter, would fit right in in Den Helder.

Disaster for the region
The State Secretary for Finance Frans Weekers was very impressed that Den Helder never gave up the struggle for the survival of Maritime Airbase De Kooy, thereby keeping Den Helder Airport open. “There was a lot at stake. The survival of De Kooy was uncertain for a long time. And closing it would have been a disaster for the entire region. By signing the new agreement, that disaster has now been averted and ten years of certainty have been created for De Kooy and Den Helder Airport. North Holland North can develop further.” After this, Airport Director Conny van den Hoff briefly mentioned the unique location of the airport in respect of the continental shelf “Every other location in the Netherlands and abroad means longer flight distances. Longer flight distances, in turn, mean higher costs, but also greater environmental impact. The oil companies can continue to operate from Den Helder Airport. Employment for the 500 employees of the 29 companies active at the airport has also been guaranteed. As well as another 5,000 indirect jobs at Defence, offshore companies and suppliers.” The airport director also reported that the agreement with the National Real Estate and Development Corporation was achieved in a good atmosphere. “We have also had very good cooperation with our valued neighbours from Maritime Airbase De Kooy. We will now look at how we can benefit each other further.”

Setting an example
Defence Minister Hans Hillen said in conclusion that the signing created a win-win situation for all parties. Defence is under increasing pressure from cutbacks. “Therefore, it is important that we increasingly enter into this type of joint ventures with civilian companies, both national and international. We also warmly support this collaboration agreement and I hope that this sets a good example.”

“Given our location in respect of the oil and gas fields offshore, Den Helder forms the centre of the North Sea.”

LATEST NEWS

OFFSHORE ENERGY TRADE FAIR

As in 2011, Den Helder Airport is participating in the Offshore Energy trade fair this year. It will be organised by Nartingo on Tuesday, 23 and Wednesday, 24 October to the RAI in Amsterdam. At the fair, Den Helder Airport has its own stand to the Den Helder Pavilion in Hall 8. Visitors can register online free of charge. You are cordially invited.

RARE BIRD

Once again, a rare bird recently touched down at Den Helder Airport. This time it was a EC120B Colibri helicopter with registration OY-HTK. The owner of this Eurocopter is the film production company Thomas Kristensen APS from Copenhagen. The rare bird was en route from Calais, France to Groningen Airport. It refuelled and stayed overnight at Den Helder Airport.

Photo: Den Helder Airport
On Friday, 17 August, we bid farewell at Maritime Airbase De Kooy to the last operational Westland Lynx helicopter that had been stationed until then on one of the naval ships. The official farewell of the Westland Lynx was held on Tuesday, 11 September with a special fly-by of Apache, Cougar, Chinoek and NH90 helicopters. The Royal Netherlands Navy has been working with this type of helicopter since 1976. A total of 24 of these aircraft were stationed at our neighbours. They were used for SAR and training tasks and for the detection of submarines from the navy frigates.

The Defence Helicopter Command, which also includes Maritime Airbase De Kooy, has a new commander: Captain Jan Willem Westerbeek. He succeeds Captain Theo ten Haaf, who accepted the job of Deputy Director Operations at the Armed Forces. The transfer of command took place on Monday, 20 August at Airbase Gilze Rijen.

Since recently, CHC Helicopters Netherlands has had a brand new Sikorsky S92, the successor to the recently phased-out S61-N helicopter, at its disposal at Den Helder Airport. The S92 can transport a total of nineteen passengers over a distance of up to 430 nautical miles.

On 1 September of this year, oil company BP became the new supplier of Jet A1 fuel for the helicopters and aeroplanes operating out of Den Helder Airport or calling in at the airport in transit. Before the end of the year, BP will start construction of an entirely new fuel system, including an expansion with three new tank locations.

For the past seven years, lawyer Irma van den Berg has been involved in drafting and submitting the necessary permits, based on the Nature Conservation Act, for Den Helder Airport. A new application for this permit was very recently submitted. Work on this application had already started in mid-2011, since it often involves more than meets the eye. The application in question was submitted on 24 April of this year to the Province of North Holland and is expected to be granted shortly.
Eye catchers at the static show were the two strikingly painted Westland Lynx helicopters. Highly manoeuvrable helicopters that had their official farewell earlier this month after 36 years of trusted service. Jan Verest would have liked to have seen the Lynx fly one more time, but unfortunately this was no longer possible. “However, we were able to give a demo with the successor of the Lynx, the NH90.” Aside from the air market and the static show, most of the visitors’ attention went to the air show. Conny van den Hoff: “We brought in something entirely new with the Jet Provost Team. It was the first time that this team demonstrated its skills outside England. The Dutch Thunder Yaks also gave a beautiful show and the performance of the French Breitling Jet Team was fascinating.” Jan Verest confirmed this, but was also enchanted by the demonstration of the Swip Team. Both the airport director and the project manager commended the cooperation of the Municipality of Den Helder, the Police department and the Royal Netherlands Military Constabulary. But also the many volunteers, including traffic directors from Den Helder and Leeuwarden and students from the Aviation department of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, who lent a hand in and around the passenger building. Jan Verest: “There are two working groups under the project group that organises Heldair Show Maritiem: working group ‘Air’ was directed by 1st lieutenant Jan Duin and working group ‘Ground’ was directed by lieutenant Corrit Goedlink. Both had already started preparations a year ago. These working groups and the small team from Den Helder Airport were putting in full days to get everything set up and running smoothly, particularly during the final weeks prior to the event.” Conny van den Hoff was also very pleased with the companies at Den Helder Airport that opened their doors for the visitors. The motto of Heldair Show Maritiem 2012 this year was ‘Come Together’. According to the airport director, this name was consciously chosen due to the close cooperation between Den Helder Airport and Maritime Airbase De Kooy, which could not exist without each other and which was recently confirmed with a 10-year joint use agreement. But it also referred to bringing many people together to enjoy this special event. “I would estimate that between 25,000 and 30,000 people attended the event. And that is a wonderful reward for everyone who helped to organise it.”

Postscript:
The organisation of Heldair Show Maritiem regrets the crash of two aeroplanes that were en route to their home base or their next air show after the event. Fortunately, both pilots and the technician who was on board are doing well under the circumstances.
**Dancopter is back again**

They are roosting again at Den Helder Airport. The helicopters operated by Dancopter from Esbjerg in Denmark. Their mission from 1 July: to fly passengers and goods between the mainland and the Dutch sector of the North Sea oil and gas fields for a period of at least five years for NAM/Shell, says Dancopter Base Manager and helicopter pilot Bram Sevenhuysen.

At the time of this interview, Bram Sevenhuysen has just set up and furnished his office in the airport office complex at Den Helder Airport and is in the middle of the start-up phase for the operations that have been commissioned by NAM/Shell. Bram actually has two jobs: “I wear the Base Manager’s cap for 50% of my time and spend the remainder up in the air as a pilot.” Before joining Dancopter in 2008, Bram had already acquired a great deal of experience in flying helicopters. “When I started as a fixed-wing pilot in 1991, I found it difficult to find work after a time. So I decided to enrol in a helicopter pilot training course. When I qualified in 1997, I stayed on in the same sector.” As a helicopter pilot, he has worked for various employers such as Schreiner Airways, for whom he transported harbour pilots from the Maasvlakte to seagoing ships and also flew an air ambulance helicopter from a base in Nijmegen. When Schreiner was taken over, he continued the latter activity under the flag of CHC Helicopters. “My next job for CHC was flying offshore trips from Den Helder Airport as the captain of their S61N helicopter. After a while, I was offered the opportunity of flying Search and Rescue (SAR) operations in Ireland with an S61 helicopter. I really loved that job. Having flown Search and Rescue for two years, I then briefly worked as a wealthy Irish businessman’s regular pilot before I joined Dancopter.”

A second chance

In fact, Den Helder Airport is familiar ground for Dancopter. “We were posted here a number of years ago for a job for Shell; the initial assignment was flying offshore helicopter trips for a period of three weeks. Those three weeks turned into a period of approximately 3 years. When the three years were up, there wasn’t enough work for us here, so the operation at Den Helder Airport had to be shut down. But obviously we hoped to be given a chance of coming back at some stage. And those hopes were answered when a contract with NAM/Shell was signed recently. The contract will run for five years with various renewal options and consists of a number of different activities. For example, since 1 July we have been flying two EC155B1 helicopters out of Den Helder Airport on trips from and to locations in the Dutch sector of the North Sea oil and gas fields and we have started up operations out of Norwich with two helicopters of the same type, flying to and from locations in the British sector. The spare helicopter for our operations in the Netherlands and England will be stationed at Den Helder Airport. Our team at this airport will soon number 14 pilots and 8 service technicians, most of whom live in the Kop van Noord-Holland area. This is obviously also a positive boost for employment here.” The contract with NAM/Shell also includes helicopter operations from Kristiansand to the Norwegian sector. Dancopter will start this activity on 1 July 2014.

Strengths

Dancopter has temporarily rented office space in the airport office complex at Den Helder Airport and storage space in Hangar 5. Den Helder Airport is currently building an office extension at Hangar 5, which DanCopter is due to occupy in December. The two helicopters will make approximately 12 flights a day. Dancopter, whose primary site is located in Esbjerg, Denmark, is a fast-growing helicopter operator.

The first helicopter flight was made in the Danish sector of the North Sea oil and gas fields on 1 February 2003. Now, nearly 10 years later the parent company is active in Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, England and Nigeria where a collaboration has been set up with a local partner. Bram Sevenhuysen continues: “Dancopter is part of the Blueway Group. Dancopter falls under Blueway Offshore, one of the divisions in this group. This company also operates in Norway in the offshore sector. The group also has onshore activities in Norway in the form of Airlift, a company that deploys aircraft for lifting work. In addition, Airlift operates a unit that makes SAR flights from Spitsbergen.” When asked about Dancopter’s strengths, the base manager says: “In addition to quality and safety, our major strength is flexibility. We are capable of setting up an operation almost immediately in any part of the world. And we always take off on time. That’s what I call added value.”

**Het Twickelerveld**

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Bristow Helicopters started conducting search and rescue (SAR) operations at Den Helder Airport in December 2003. The operations are commissioned by NOGEP A, the Netherlands Oil and Gas Exploration and Production Association, i.e. the trade association representing the interests of the oil companies engaged in the exploration and production of oil and gas in the Netherlands. In the event of an emergency, the Coast Guard may use Bristow’s SAR helicopter, according to Jörg Langenhorst, who as Chief Pilot is responsible for civilian SAR operations at Den Helder Airport.

Jörg Langenhorst is of German descent, but has been working for many years in the Netherlands. He has this to say about it: “In 1997, via an exchange programme between the Dutch and the German navy, I ended up at what was then still Naval Airbase De Kuyper in Den Helder. I flew Lynx helicopters there until 2004. After starting on the Lynx as a student, I went through the entire process to become an instructor; I then applied for a job at Bristow Helicopters. There were no vacancies at the time, but I was able to start a year later at Bristow’s SAR department at Den Helder Airport.” Jörg received his type ratings by flying SAR helicopters: first for the Super Puma Mk 2, later for the Puma Tiger and even later for the Sikorsky S-61 N. “Here, too, I started at the bottom of the ladder: I have now been Chief Pilot and Head of the SAR department for about two and a half years.” He manages approximately 30 people, including twenty pilots and other crew members and ten mechanics. “It is unusual to collaborate with so many different nationalities here. Our team is comprised of people of Dutch, German, English and Scottish descent. All with different backgrounds and cultures that together form a very close team.”

Cooperation
Since the Defence department has insufficient SAR capacity, NOGEP A decided to insource it themselves. “Bristow started with this at the end of 2003. First for a period of five years, with twice an option to renew for one year. After that, the contract was constantly renewed and we have now been in this position for almost ten years. We hope that another year will be added or that a long-term contract will be concluded again.” The SAR work for NOGEP A mainly consists of evacuations of wounded men from offshore platforms in the Dutch sector of the North Sea. “On average, this occurs once a week. It often involves little things: bruised fingers, a broken arm or leg or people who have hit their head. But we also evacuate people with heart problems or people who become badly wounded in a crash.” It has also been agreed with NOGEP A that the Dutch Coast Guard may call on Bristow’s SAR helicopters in life-threatening situations. “We are often used for search actions for missing swimmers or surfers. And we recently participated in a search action for a missing airplane. Later, it turned out that this plane had crashed on the Maasvlakte due to inclement weather. Our people then provided medical assistance on site.”

Effort
Bristow has two large Sikorsky S-61 N SAR helicopters stationed at Den Helder Airport. Jörg: “From 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., we are ready with a helicopter at 15 minutes’ notice. After an alarm comes in, we are airborne well within that time. During the night, we are kept in case of an alarm and airborne within half an hour. Every SAR helicopter is manned by two pilots and two crew members. We have a special thermal imager on board that can trace people at sea. But if an employee has a so-called personal location beacon and falls off a platform at sea, we have equipment on board to lead us to this beacon. We also have radar equipment to detect ships and strong searchlights. In the event of a threat of a ship colliding with a platform or an oil platform, the SAR helicopter is used to evacuate the crew from the platforms. We call this downmanning. If there is sufficient time, we can take along nine people at a time, each on a seat. In an emergency situation, we cram the entire aircraft full. The record number of people we have evacuated in an SAR operation is 33. This took place in the UK, when a crew had to be evacuated from a sinking ship.”

A lot of training
The SAR crews are on call for 24 hours, which start or end daily at 100 p.m. During each shift, about one and a half to two hours are practiced according to a fixed programme. This also includes hoisting exercises to pick people up out of the water or to pick up the wounded from a sailing ship. For the hoisting, the heli is equipped with two electrically powered hoists (winches) that are operated by one of the two crew members. The other crew member is medically trained and is used to pick people up out of the water and to treat the wounded. “In the shipping sector, ships are always willing to cooperate in these exercises. A rescue operation that made a great impression on me was an incident in the North Sea in 2006, when we had to go in search of the lifeboat Anna Margaretha in a very heavy storm. It had capsized a couple of times and had incurred a lot of damage. After we found it, we brought a wounded crew member on board and took him to hospital. And some two years ago, a shell dredger sank to the north of Terschelling. We received a crew member on board who was picked up out of the water by another ship. We brought the man to hospital. It was the first time that I had someone on board who didn’t make it.”

A lot of experience
Bristow Helicopters has a lot of in-house SAR experience. For some 25 years, four SAR helicopters were flown in England, two in the north out of the Shetland Islands and Outer Hebrides and two in the south out of Portland and Solent. “We lost this contract to the competition five years ago. Part of it, however, will return next year, when we will be operating with two S92 helicopters from the Shetlands. We also still have an SAR service in Norway, close to Hammerfest, for which an EC225 is used.” Thanks to the stationing of two S-61 N helicopters, Den Helder Airport has a very high readiness level. “During the past years we have achieved an average of 99.8 percent. But what makes this so special is the fact that, despite the many different nationalities in our team, we can provide optimal service and an excellent product. This makes me very proud of my staff.”

[Image 20x1079 to 257x1191]

As Chief Pilot, Jörg Langenhorst manages the SAR operations of Bristow Helicopters at Den Helder Airport (own photo)
Balgzand: Crossroads for Bird Migration

Each month, in cooperation with several colleagues and volunteers, Wim Tijsen counts the birds on the Balgzand and just off the coast of the former island of Wieringen. A Natura 2000 area, unique in the world and crossroads where migratory birds from Greenland to Siberia come to fatten up before flying on to southern Europe or Africa. In short, an incredibly beautiful and unique nature reserve that Wim Tijsen has fallen in love with and that he believes should be handled with extreme care.

By profession, Wim Tijsen is the project manager of meadow bird protection at Landschap Noord-Holland. “I teach farmers and volunteers how to protect meadow birds. I also try to motivate them to take them into consideration, particularly during breeding season.” As a volunteer, he also works as a wetland inspector of the Balgzand and the coast of Wieringen for BirdLife Netherlands. “The Netherlands has a variety of Natura 2000 and wetland areas. They are closely monitored by so-called wetland inspectors who report on the condition of the area, how it is managed and whether certain types of birds are improving or deteriorating. You can actually consider us the eyes and ears of the Netherlands Society for the Protection of Birds. We also focus our attention on the spatial planning of Natura 2000 areas and the wetlands. This is also why I have been consulted on the expansion of the number of flight movements of Den Helder Airport. In addition, I am on the committee for advice and assistance for the remote areas of the Municipality of Hollands Kroon.” Once a month Wim counts the birds on the mudflats and reports these numbers to SOVON Vogelonderzoek Nederland. He can often be seen at the tide gauge station on Wieringen, where he has an excellent view of the Balgzand and the Wadden Sea, just off the coast of Wieringen.

Of international importance

The wetland inspector has this to say about the importance of the Balgzand area: “The Balgzand is a crossroads for bird migration, particularly for shorebirds. They come here from Greenland to Siberia, having covered distances of two to four thousand kilometres or more. When they arrive here, they are very emaciated. The Balgzand is then used to regain their strength or to fatten up, as we call it. After that they usually migrate further south. It is a very quiet, eutrophic area. This is of international importance for the many types of birds that fatten up here, such as the red knots, spotted sandpipers, grey plovers and spoonbills. The Balgzand is an assembly point for spoonbills, particularly in late summer. Sometimes there are as many as eight hundred. Other types of birds that are regularly encountered include brent geese, curlew sandpipers, curlews, common terns and unusual terns and many different types of gulls. Birds take a couple of weeks to fatten up. And sometimes it even takes them a couple of months. The majority continue to migrate again, but there are some that stay; it is striking to see some 100 spoonbill couples that breed annually on a dam about a kilometre off the coast of Den Oever. All in all, it is a unique area that you find nowhere else in the world. There is good reason why it has been designated a Natura 2000 area.”

Birds

When asked whether the birds on the Balgzand become accustomed to the helicopter traffic and from Den Helder Airport, Wim replies: “If things happen on a regular basis, birds get used to them in one way or another. If a helicopter or aeroplane comes along every now and then, they take that for granted. A kind of habituation occurs. But it is the unexpected things that provide unrest. The ideal situation is and remains a sense of tranquility, and to avoid having flight traffic in such a bird area as much as possible.”

For the new permit requested by the airport, IMARES has to test reactions from the birds. It also investigates whether the increase in the number of flight movements has an effect on the birds. “I am in a committee that can assess that report, together with a number of experts.” The wetland inspector has this to say about the additional flight movements that may be coming with fixed wing aircraft: “In theory, I believe that scheduled planes have even less effect on birds than helicopters.” However, Wim hopes that the results of a study on the effects of the flight traffic on breeding meadow birds, recently held in the vicinity of all Dutch airports, will be included in the decision-making on the new permit for Den Helder Airport.

On excursion

“The good thing,” Wim says in conclusion, “is that Den Helder Airport consults with all parties involved, including the Wadden Association, Landschap Noord-Holland and the Environmental Federation of North Holland for this permit application. It is a good way to prevent conflict. Many people believe that environmental and nature conservation organisations are opposed to everything, but that is not necessarily the case. The Den Helder Airport currently has 25,000 flight movements a year. The Balgzand achieves this number easily each day and in a natural way without a drop of kerosene. That is good reason to ensure together that this unique area is handled with extreme care.” The wetlands inspector would also like to encourage everyone in the Den Helder region to come along on an excursion of the Balgzand sometime. To see with their own eyes what is going on in their backyard and how special this area is. “There is nowhere in the world where you find as many birds as you do here.”
She may be small in stature, but platform employee Inge Hekking knows how to hold her own in a crew that further consists of 22 men. She is undaunted and does not shy away from heavy work. Hundreds of bags from offshore workers pass through her hands each day. Her employer is CHC Helicopters Netherlands. But she is also in prime condition outside working hours since she has been doing high-level judo for years.

Her roots lie in Papua New Guinea, where Inge Hekking was born in 1960 in the village of Hollandia, in the interior of this former Dutch colony. “In 1962, our family was forced to flee to the Netherlands due to the prevailing civil war. My father was a sailor and would join us later.” Their arrival was followed by stops in various places across the Netherlands before the family settled in Den Helder. When asked how she ended up at Den Helder Airport, Inge replied: “About fifteen years ago I was called by a girlfriend, who worked here at Operations; she asked if I would come by for a cup of coffee. At that time I was working as a nutrition assistant in Gemini Hospital. When I looked out the window during my visit, I saw men walking with carts. When I asked what they were doing, my friend replied that they handled freight and luggage, accompanied passengers to and from the helicopters and provided fuel for the aircraft. It seemed like nice work that I would also enjoy. Particularly because I like to work outdoors.”

In a man’s world
To her great surprise her wish was quickly answered. “Two weeks later I received a phone call, asking whether I would like to come for a job interview. I was immediately taken on as platform employee, in technical terms, a ramp handler, although I figured that the men would not be happy to see the arrival of this small woman. But everything went well. They tease me sometimes, but I know how to teas them back. I’ve always been ready with a quick reply. I’m extremely happy here. There’s a lot of freedom and it’s delightful to spend a lot of time outdoors. I also like the opportunity to take all sorts of courses. For example, in firefighting, dealing with hazardous substances, refuelling helicopters, security and lifting and working with a forklift truck.”

The crew in which Inge works has fourteen permanent employees and eight insourced staff who work in three shifts, from 6:00 a.m. to 10:15 p.m. Inge also works in the night shift if a Search and Rescue (SAR) helicopter has to be deployed. “It’s always all or nothing for us.”

Before the helicopters take off, we’re very busy loading luggage and freight and accompanying the departing passengers. And when the aircraft return, freight and luggage are unloaded and the arriving passengers are accompanied to the passenger building. We also ensure that the helicopters have refuelled before departure. In addition, we ensure that the assembly points are always neat and tidy and we keep the records. Between flights there is some time to catch your breath.” Inge worked on a temporary basis during the first two years and received permanent employment in 1999.

Martial arts
Aside from her work at Den Helder Airport, Inge is also proficient in sports. “I have always done a lot of sports. Particularly fitness and weight training, but also various martial arts such as judo, jujitsu and pencak silat. Unfortunately, I had to stop the latter two sports after I had several operations on my feet, but I still do judo. I’m second dan. Although people still underestimate me, I know how to hold my own.” In her leisure time, Inge also likes to tinker with cars, together with her brother and she makes beautiful furniture from scaffolding wood. “I am very satisfied with what I have and always try to do my best. With the new AW139 and EC155 helicopters, the cargo hold is somewhat higher than with the S76, which requires somewhat more lifting on my part. But partly thanks to my good physical condition, I can still manage just fine.”