

Dutch perform combined live-fire at Grafenwohr



Photo by Pfc. Jerry Wilson

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More than 800 Soldiers from the Dutch Army's 14th Artillery Battalion, 200th Logistics Brigade, and 42nd Tank Battalion recently came to Grafenwohr for a combined live-fire training exercise.

"Normally the Dutch Army trains at Hohenfels," said Capt. Jan Steller, A Battery commander. "But because we have our new guns, the Panzer Howitzer 2000NL, in combination with the Leopard 2 A6 tanks, we needed a maneuver area where we could do a combined exercise that combined the effects of direct and indirect fire."

Steller explained that the tanks provided direct fire and his artillery unit supplied the indirect fire.

"We were also looking for an area where we could train the new doctrine we have in accordance with our new gun, the Panzer Howitzer 2000NL," Steller said. "The Grafenwohr training area was one of the areas that could allow us to train the way we wanted to."

Steller explained that Dutch artil-

lery units have trained at Grafenwohr in the past but that they trained with the M-109 Howitzer, the predecessor to the new howitzer.

"After some reconnaissance of the training area prior to coming we decided that Grafenwohr might be the perfect place to train our new doctrine," he explained. "And after two and a half weeks I can say that it is the perfect terrain for our mission."

Steller explained that the howitzer is self-propelled and capable of driving up to an area and firing at the target.

"The gun is able to do its own determination of precision of aiming," he said.

Steller said this is because the weapon has its own global positioning system inside that makes these howitzers fully autonomous.

The system contained in the new gun is a combination of the Dutch Information Fire Support System which is a digital system that does all the communications needed for shooting and the howitzers autonomous controls makes the new gun a state of the art weapon Steller said.

"This system allows us to be very accurate and maneuverable," Steller said. He added they are able to deploy the gun very rapidly making it a valuable weapon.

In addition to training with the new guns, the Dutch trained with another new vehicle, the Fenek forward observation vehicle.

According to Steller this wheeled armored vehicle is equipped with a series of day and night sensors that allow the Dutch forward observers to scan an area and target the enemy for the big guns without leaving the vehicle.

While no plans for future exercises at Grafenwohr have been scheduled as of yet, Steller hopes to return again in the future.

"This was one of the first exercises in which we have used the Panzer with such skill," he said. "I hope we can make this a regular training area, because for the new system Grafenwohr is a brilliant area to train in." □

Above: Dutch Soldiers prepare their new artillery: the Panzer Howitzer 2000NL gun for the long trip home, following a two and a half week exercise.