European Union Force Chad / CAR

Duration: 18 May 2008 – 18 March 2009
Number of military personnel: 154
Decorations: none
Fatalities: none

Background

Chad, a country with some 10 million inhabitants in 2007, gained its independence from France in 1960. From then on, the country was characterised by political instability arising from internal and ethnic divisions. A constant factor was the division between the Arab Muslim population making their living from livestock-breeding in the poor desert areas of the north and the Christian-animist crop farmers in the relatively prosperous south. In 1990, President Idriss Deby came to power following a coup d'état. Deby tried to create a calmer situation by making peace with a number of rebel groups. The rebels were willing to disband their movements in exchange for political participation and integration in the national army. In October 1997, however, they took up arms again out of dissatisfaction with the non-compliance with the agreements on the part of the Chadian government. Ten years later, on 27 October 2007, the government (still led by Deby) and the four main rebel movements signed the Sirte Accord, under the auspices of the Libyan president, Muammar Gaddafi. Nonetheless, the conflict flared up again a month later, culminating in the rebels’ advance to the Chadian capital of N'Djamena in late January 2008. The government troops withstood the attack and after a week the rebels retreated to their bases in eastern Chad.

The rebellion in Chad was closely linked to conflicts in neighbouring Darfur (Sudan) and the Central African Republic. The rebels operated with impunity in the border area of the three countries. In particular the camps for refugees and displaced persons in eastern Chad were plagued by banditry and crime on a large scale.

Mandate and organisation

The Chadian police apparatus was unable to protect the population and refugees against bandits and criminals. The UN Security Council therefore decided to establish a UN police mission, the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), in order to train Chadian police officers for deployment in the refugee camps (resolution 1778 of 25 September 2007). The mission was part of a regional approach to the conflict in Darfur. The Security Council made grateful use of the offer by the European Union (EU) to provide a peace force for the duration of one year, which would protect the personnel and facilities of MINURCAT outside the camps. The UN needed more time to build up its own ‘protection force’. The European Union Force in Chad and the Central African Republic, or EUFOR Chad/CAR, was also tasked with protecting vulnerable civilians, refugees in particular, and providing security for aid workers. The European troops were allowed to use proportional force to protect themselves or the civilians. The Chadian police maintained order inside the camps. The EU mission comprised 3,700 military personnel from fourteen countries, 1,850 of whom had French nationality. Irish Lieutenant General Patrick Nash directed the operation from the operational headquarters in Mont Valérien, just outside Paris. EUFOR’s field commander was French Brigadier General Jean-Philippe Ganascia. The area of operations was divided into four sectors. Poland was responsible for the northern sector, France for the central sector and Ireland for the southern sector. The fourth sector was in the
Central African Republic. Most of the rebels were in the Irish sector, as were 70% of the
refugees.

The first military personnel of the EU force arrived in Chad in late January 2008. Chadian rebels attacked the capital, N’Djamena, on 2 February. They captured large parts of the city and besieged the presidential palace. President Deby held his ground, however, and managed to repel the rebels two weeks later. The EU postponed the deployment of its troops by two weeks.

**The Dutch role in EUFOR Chad/CAR**

In a letter to the President of the House of Representatives dated 6 November 2007, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defence and the Minister for Development Cooperation announced the government was looking into the possibility and desirability of a limited contribution to the EU mission. The ministers stated explicitly that the ‘bridging mission’ should not be allowed to shift focus away from the main issue, the situation in Darfur. Given the regional nature of the issues, the operations in Chad and in Darfur, respectively, could not be viewed in isolation. That was why the Netherlands was also considering making a contribution to the UN operation in Darfur.

On 29 February 2008, the Council of Ministers decided to send a reconnaissance unit of 60 marines to eastern Chad, to serve as the eyes and ears of the Irish battalion led by Lieutenant Colonel Paddy McDaniel, and the battalion which took over from them, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Kieran Brennan. The House of Representatives was initially concerned over the neutrality of the mission, given that lead nation France had come out in support of Chadian President Deby. After having been reassured, however, of the strict distinction between the French troops already present in Chad (1,200 personnel) and the troops participating in the EUFOR mission, the House approved the government’s decision on 27 March 2008.

The UN Security Council mandated the mission for the duration of one year, commencing when EUFOR reached initial operating capability, which was on 15 March 2008. According to the Article 100 letter, the Marine Corps was to be responsible for the first eight months (two rotations). The last four months would be the responsibility of the Royal Netherlands Army (RNLA). In early March, Ireland decided to delay the deployment of its troops by a month, whereupon the Netherlands Ministry of Defence adjusted its rotation schedule. The RNLA’s contribution was cancelled and the marines were to provide a reconnaissance platoon for two periods of five months.

In the meantime, the Marine Corps had not sat idly by. The First Marine Battalion received its formation and readiness orders in late January, while on exercise in Norway. The orders stated that the battalion’s reconnaissance platoon would form the core of the detachment. The platoon was then augmented by a support team with antitank weapons and 60mm mortars, a medical team and a maintenance team. The platoon staff was also expanded. As the request was for a motorised reconnaissance unit, the BSV10 Viking, an armoured amphibious tracked vehicle, was chosen as the primary mode of transport. That turned out to be an excellent choice. The Viking was particularly suited to the conditions in southern Chad, which was plagued by heavy rainfall in the summer season. Despite this, there were still regions which even the Viking could not reach. This slowed the operational tempo even further. The only advantage was that the rebels and organised bandits were not able to move during that period either. The arrival of the rainy season also brought some unexpected visitors. Hundreds of toads tried to jump over the earthen wall of the Irish-Dutch camp at the start of the breeding season.
The detachment was further augmented to include a national intelligence cell (NIC - two personnel) and staff officials for the operational headquarters in Mont Valérien, the tactical headquarters in Abéché (Chad) and the battalion headquarters in Goz Beida. The four Dutch military personnel in Mont Valérien worked in the areas of logistics and intelligence. A Dutch colonel-physician was posted to Mont Valérien as head of medical planning for the mission. In Abéché and N’Djamena there were four Dutch military personnel from October 2008, in positions such as communication and information systems planner, engineer adviser and deputy head of finance. The deployment of these staff members was not part of the Article 100 procedure, under which the government must inform the States-General beforehand. These military personnel were deployed on the basis of general agreements between EU countries regarding support for European headquarters. The headquarters of the Corps de Réaction Rapide – France in Lille provided the staff of the EUFOR headquarters in Abéché and N’Djamena from 11 January. One of the staff officials who were transferred to Chad was a Dutch lieutenant colonel. Another two military personnel were attached to the Irish battalion staff, including the Dutch detachment commander. He advised the Irish battalion commander regarding the deployment of the Dutch reconnaissance unit.

One of the staff officials for Abéché, a sergeant, left for Chad as early as late January 2008. A second official followed on 8 April. Until the construction of the headquarters was completed, they stayed at the European Camp near the capital. A Dutch-Irish reconnaissance mission flew to Abéché by Dutch C-130 Hercules on 25 March and then travelled to Goz Beida over land. While the reconnaissance team was active in Chad, the Hercules flew shuttle flights between N’Djamena, Abéché and Douala (Cameroon), in support of EUFOR. The team returned to the Netherlands on 2 April. The quartermasters and a number of staff members, including the detachment commander, flew to N’Djamena via Dublin on 18 May. The other members of the detachment followed on Sunday 1 June. Upon their arrival in Chad, the shortage of tactical air transport became painfully clear. Despite the deployment of a Dutch C-130 Hercules (22 May to 4 June), it was more than a week before the main force arrived at Camp Ciara in Goz Beida. From 9 to 23 October 2008, another C-130 Hercules of the Royal Netherlands Air Force was deployed, this time during the troop rotation of the Dutch reconnaissance unit. In the third week of October, the Hercules was damaged due to a tail landing.

In Goz Beida, the reconnaissance platoon relieved a unit of the Irish Army Ranger Wing, which had been operating in the country since late February 2008. As long as there was no helicopter available for medical evacuations, the Dutch platoon had to stay within a hour’s travel of the camp. This severely limited the operations of the marines. A French SA330 Puma helicopter, stationed in Abéché, had to be used. This helicopter could be called in to support operations near Goz Beida. While waiting for four Russian MI8 helicopters, Ireland hired Moldovan helicopters to fill the gap. Those helicopters, however, did not meet the safety requirements, nor were there enough medical personnel available to man the helicopters. A Dutch medical team nonetheless ensured, together with a French and an Austrian team, that the helicopters could actually be deployed 24 hours a day. The Dutch medical team arrived in Chad in early September 2008. It was deployed throughout the EUFOR area of operations, including in the Central African Republic. The four Russian helicopters did not arrive until mid-January 2009. They were, however, unable to carry out medical evacuations, because they could not fly at night and had insufficient communications equipment.

In its Article 100 letter of 29 February 2008 to the States-General, the government said that rebel groups in particular posed a threat to stability in eastern Chad. The marines soon found that, as expected, refugees mainly needed protection from banditry and crime. Major Leungen considered the situation to be “very complex” and summarised it as follows: “Hardly anything can be taken at face value. There are several conflicts that are all intertwined. It is
difficult to get a grip on it”. In October 2007, Dutch journalist Koert Lindijer gave an apt description of the situation in the region: “In eastern Chad there are bandits, rebels, militias, government troops, renegade government troops and deserted rebels active, more than a dozen armed groups in all. Some fighters are rebels or government soldiers by day and bandits by night.”

Only once did the rebels specifically make their presence felt. On 14 June, a few hundred of them threatened a number of adjoining camps of non-governmental organisations in Goz Beida and the Djabal refugee camp of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). They were about to start looting when personnel of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) alerted the Irish battalion staff. The reconnaissance platoon was then deployed as a rapid-reaction force. A stalemate threatened. When the marines made it clear they did not intend to give ground, the rebels decided to cut their losses. The rebel leader apologised to the Dutch platoon commander for the occurrence of this threatening situation. He indicated that the rebels did not want a confrontation with EUFOR and handed over the keys to several captured vehicles to the platoon commander. Around 235 personnel of aid organisations were temporarily evacuated to Camp Ciara as a precaution.

The Dutch detachment returned to the Netherlands in mid-March 2009. From early March to 15 April 2009, a redeployment team of twenty personnel was in the area to transport the detachment’s materiel to the Netherlands by air.

**Detachment commanders, EUFOR Chad/CAR**
Major (Marine Corps) W.T. Leungen (18 May – 23 October 2008)

**Senior National Representatives, EUFOR Chad/CAR**
Major F.T.M. Snels (8 April 2008 – 5 August 2008)
Major P.R. ’t Hoen MSc. (5 August 2008 – 15 April 2008)