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## ‘SCHWEIZER WIEDERHOLUNGSKURS’

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### Winter scenes in Switzerland

Those who travel to Switzerland to see planes sometimes are surprised by the most idyllic views as a background, specially in wintertime. There is a lot of flying in this time of year in this country. Even right from the start of the year 2006 the so called ‘Wiederholungskursen’ have started where the national reservists are called for mobilisation to upgrade their skills or learn new techniques. For 2006 three times such an exercise is on the menu. In januari, june and september the various Swiss airfields are overloaded with activities, where also the so called ‘sleeping airfields’ are taken back in use again, airfields that are closed normally the rest of the year. This year the januari session had an extra dimension. Because of the international conference in Geneva the Tigers and Hornets flew their missions from Sion and Payerne fully armed and they had a ‘license to kill’ in case an intruder should suddenly occur in the special area.

Aviation activities are not only limited to the military scene however. You must realise that the whole wintersports happening implicates that – let’s say – for months long the number of inhabitants increases permanently and in some aera’s even doubles ! This period stands in the sign of risky-sports, where specially the foreign visitors generate extra risks and chance for individual accidents, and also by sometimes not sticking to local regulations complete avalanches can occur ! So it won’t be a surprise that many others have to be alert 24 hours a day. Ofcourse for a major part these activities are covered by civil organisations but the airforce works very tight together with them and they can and will play their major part whenever and where ever necessary. In times of crisis or escalation the civil organisations even fall directly under the military command and the central civil organisation in Zürich-Kloten will fall directly under the ministry of defence in that case. It is said that the only difference between civil and military organisations is the bright colors on the civil planes...

### Super Puma/Cougar, the ‘workhorse’

In Switzerland these “wiederholingskurzen” or repeat-courses do exist to keep the pilots and crews fully trained in their (winter) tasks and that within a variety of types of aircraft. At Alpnach during our last recent visit it was a coming and going of helicopters, by name the Super Puma’s, Cougars and Alouette’s 3. The AS-332M-1 Super Puma Th-89 (a total of 15 examples, since 1989 in service) appeared to be a direct hit concerning the Swiss needs with a capability to transport 4,5 tons of freight or 18 passengers. This helicopter made it possible for Switzerland to fulfill international obligations such as the under the motto “Sicherheit durch Kooperation” (Security by Cooperation) executed air-bridge with help-supplies via the UNHCR in Albania (1999 operation “Alba”). Later on they looked for extension and 12 AS-532UL Cougars came to stengthen the fleet since 2001. This type is known in Switzerland as the TH-98. On a number of points the TH-98 has been improved, amongst others also accomplished from the Swiss needs learned from the lessons of operation Alba.

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An Issys-unit (Integrated Self Protection Systems) of RUAG with multi warning sensor and chaff/flare dispenser gives the plane an advantage with a sophisticated self-defence system. One of these Cougars was later on used for KFOR tasks in Kosovo. Both the Cougar and the Super Puma are also used beside transport tasks for surveillance work and Search and Rescue.

### **Alouette III, for years deserving**

Se-3160 the Alouette 3 of which the first came in service in 1964, have certainly deserved his tracks with SAR flights in the Sierra's, the high mountains and back to FIRST AID POINTS OR Hospitals back down in the valleys. A total of 84 have been ever taken into service of which now still about 40 ones still fly as a military plane, and several still civil of which some are used for SAR tasks.

Although they search for replacement in the form of an armed transport helicopter, it is nevertheless plausible that the Alouette's remain flying considerable time after their 40 year old jubilee, if it were only that they are so very suitable and well arranged for the surroundings where they operate. On Alpnach an important facility exists for Alouette's to have maintainance at RUAG company and this facility is also used for foreign countries that use the Alouette III like The Netherlands Royal Airforce who had their machines updated here. Yet the last status in the circuit is that the continuity up to anyway in 2011 seems guaranteed as helicopterfield, whereas there already are plans on the design-table for the period afterwards. A field such as Alpnach is not only of strategic importance, but also important for employment of a part of the inhabitants of neighbouring places.

### **Turboporter, Switzerland's own product**

Another unit which we could observe during the wintry exercises was the militia sq Ltst 7 on Emmen which is equipped with 15 Pilatus Porter PC-6/B2-H2M Turboprops. Partly ever came as Pilatus 'Porter' in service and later provided with turboprop, and further later on partly purchased as 'Turboporter'. The plane can transport up to 7 passengers (for example parachutists with their equipment) and has outstanding STOL (Short Take Off and Landing) capacities, with the result that you can park him this way even on a small mountain grass-field.

For the aviation enthousiast the Porter is a treat to be seen in action. For one from nostalgic point of view, but also very nice to see how these planes are pulled out of their hangars by hand and started afterwards. This very characteristic own unique sound leaves you no doubt even when you only hear this plane from a distance. Important for the airforce is the use of these Turboprops for the actions of commands's of 'special operations' and the para-droppings of Fallschirmaufklarungs kompanie 17.

### **Cooperation is a matter of life-importance in Switzerland**

Ofcourse there is a good cooperation with the civil rescue services to deal with disasters like avalance or even damburst, but also the above mentioned army squadrons can be used both next to eachother. If we only look at fighting terrorism

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one will understand that the commando's of the Turboporters are good friends with the helicopterpilots, should they ever have to be rescued out of risky aerea's. Should it be from a spot where the Turboporter just cannot land (which won't be a considerable number...) there is always the possible help from the local helicopterservices.

Because Switzerland (forced by their mountains) is a country which can be proud on it's network of all the military and civil helicopter activities and possibilities in the airspace, guarded by their Tiger F-5E and modern F/A-18(C-D) Hornets, there will be quite some organisations that look a little bit jealous to this network !

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Wim Das en Kees Otten

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