




Royal Netherlands Air Force

# Mayday in the Sahel

## The story of an Apache crash during a UN mission

Royal Netherlands Air Force
Defence Helicopter Command
Captain Maarten van Rossum
Executive Officer 931 Squadron, Gilze Rijen Airbase

4 October 2026








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27 oktober 2026

# Introduction

- Who am I?
- Mali & MINUSMA
- March 17
- Reflection



# Who am I?



# Mali & MINUSMA

- West Africa
- Landlocked
- 4.5 × New Zealand
- 25 million people
- 94% Muslim
- 66% under 25



# Mali & MINUSMA

- **2012** — Tuareg rebellion
- **March 2012** — Army stages a coup
- **MNLA & Jihadists** take the North — Azawad declared
- **Jihadists** take control and advance South
- **2013** — France intervenes
- **2013** — **MINUSMA** takes over



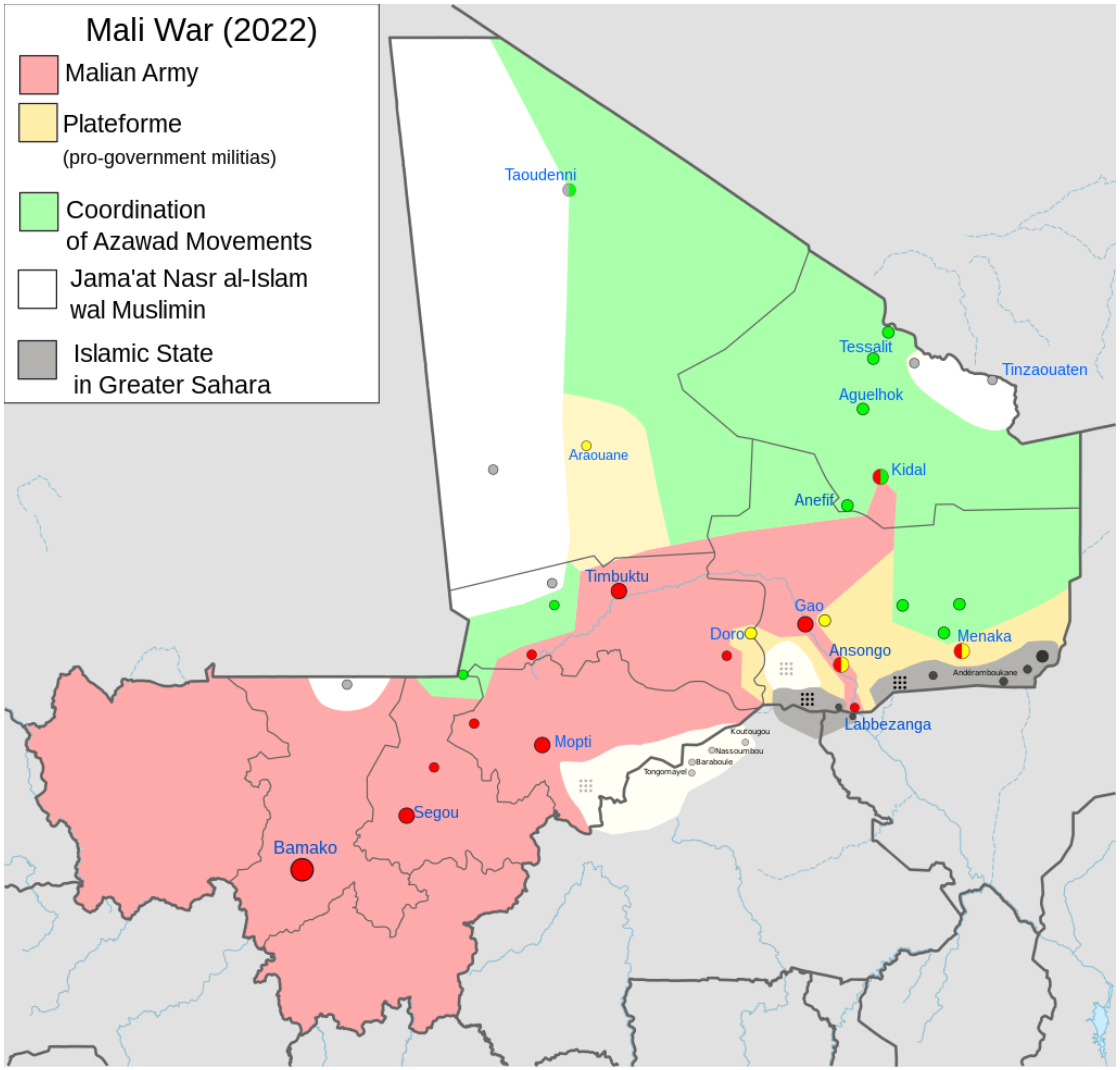




# Mali & MINUSMA

- 53 countries contributed troops
- Up to 13,000 military personnel
- 300+ fatalities
- One of the UN's deadliest missions




Mali War (2022)
Malian Army
Plateforme
(pro-government militias)
Coordination
of Azawad Movements
Jama'at Nasr al-Islam
wal Muslimin
Islamic State
in Greater Sahara
Taoudenni
Tessalit
Tinzaouaten
Aguelhok
Araouane
Kidal
Anefif
Timbuktu
Gao
Doro
Menaka
Ansongo
Anderamboukane
Labbezanga
Mopti
Koutougou
Nassoumbou
Baraboule
Tongomayel
Segou
Bamako

# Mali & MINUSMA

- 2014–2019
- Intelligence gathering
- Special Operations Land Task Group (SOLTG)
- 1,200+ one-day patrols & 120 multi-day patrols



# Mali & MINUSMA

Helicopter Detachment:

- 4 Apache helicopters
- 3 Chinook helicopters
- 120 Personnel





Tasks:

- Logistics support
- Aerial reconnaissance
- Aeromedical Evacuation
- Close Air Support

# Mali & MINUSMA

Fire Crew

- 1 Sergeant Major
- 3 Sergeants
- 4 Corporals






Tasks:

- ARFF
- On-Base Fire & Rescue
- Off-Base Rescue

# Mali & MINUSMA

Equipment:

- 1 Mercedes 290GD Command vehicle
- 2 + 1 Mercedes Actros Out of Area trucks



# Mali & MINUSMA

## Vehicle

- Built by Rosenbauer
- Dimensions: 11×2.5×3.5m
- 700 HP
- Weight: 29 t

## Mission capability

- 40 kVA generator
- Rear-mounted electric winch
- 300 bar air compressor

## Firefighting

- Water tank: 5,000 L
- Foam tank: 300 L
- Dry chemical: 135 kg
- Pump: 3,500 L/min @ 10 bar
- Bumper turret: 2,000 L/min
- Rosenbauer FLASH CAFS




Mauritania
Nouakchott
نواكشوط
Mali
Gao
Dakar
Senegal
The Gambia
Bamako
Niamey
Burkina Faso
Guinea-Bissau
Guinea
Conakry
Benin
Sierra Leone
Freetown
Togo


Gao International Airport
RN17





# Background

## Dutch UN attack helicopters strike Mali rebels in north

By David Lewis, Emma Farge

3 MIN READ

DAKAR (Reuters) - Dutch United Nations attack helicopters carried out air strikes on Tuareg rebel forces in northern Mali on Tuesday, the first such engagement by Dutch forces serving in the U.N. mission in Mali.

The U.N. mission, known as MINUSMA, said it was responding to heavy weapons fire directed at its peacekeepers in the town of Tabankort. It said the helicopters only destroyed a rebel vehicle after firing warning shots that were ignored.

A spokesman for the MNLA Tuareg separatist rebels, who are involved in peace talks with the Malian government in Algeria, denied warning shots had been fired and said five fighters had been killed and several others wounded.

# March 17

**Planning**

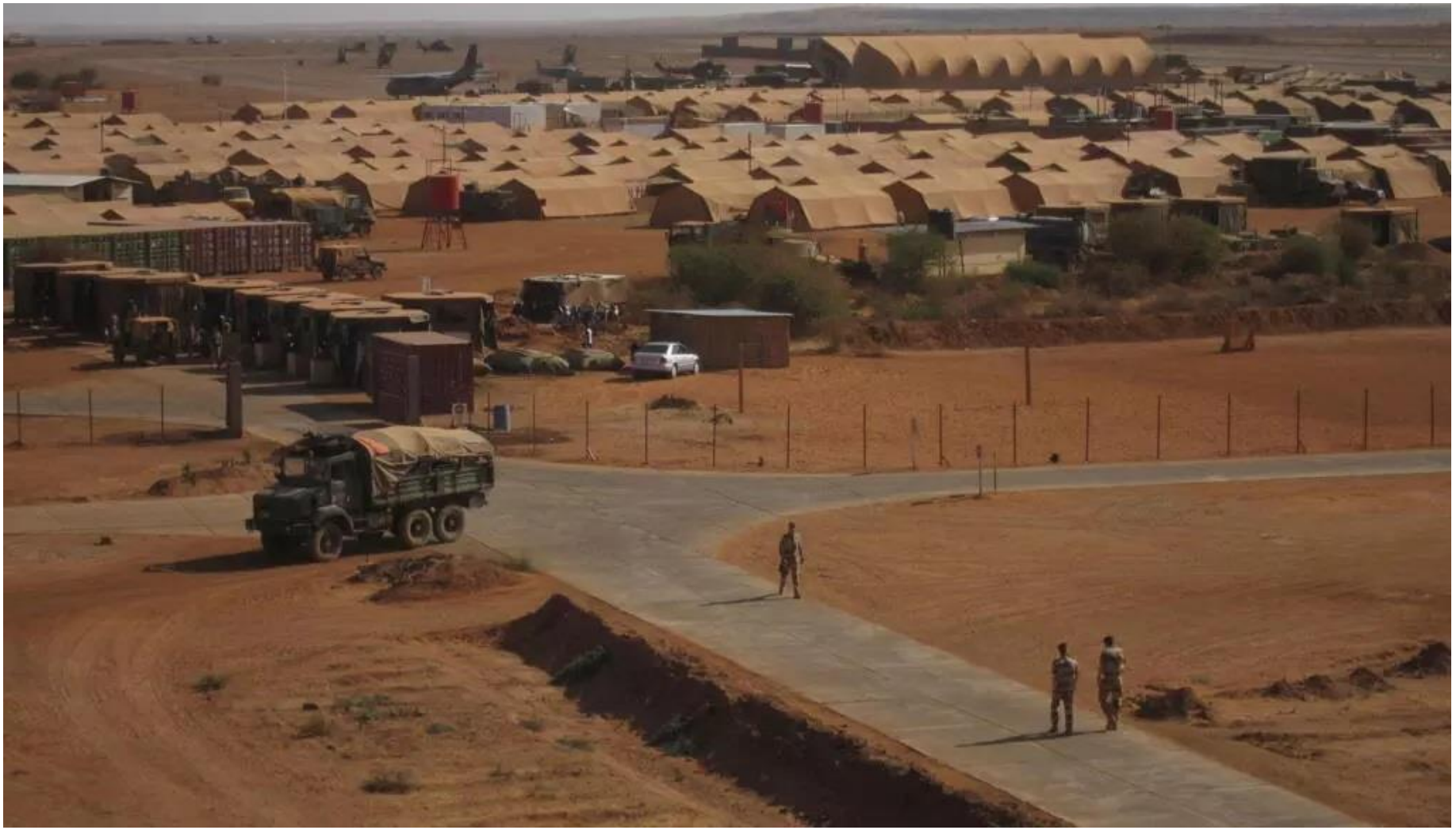
- Morning: Kidal resupply (Chinook + Apache)
- Apache aerial gunnery (2 sorties, morning and afternoon)
- In between: refuelling, re-arming, crew change
- Afternoon: further gunnery
- Evening: return of Kidal detachment

**Special circumstances**

- All operational aircraft committed
- No direct MEDEVAC available


UN 56 3105
KLu
UN













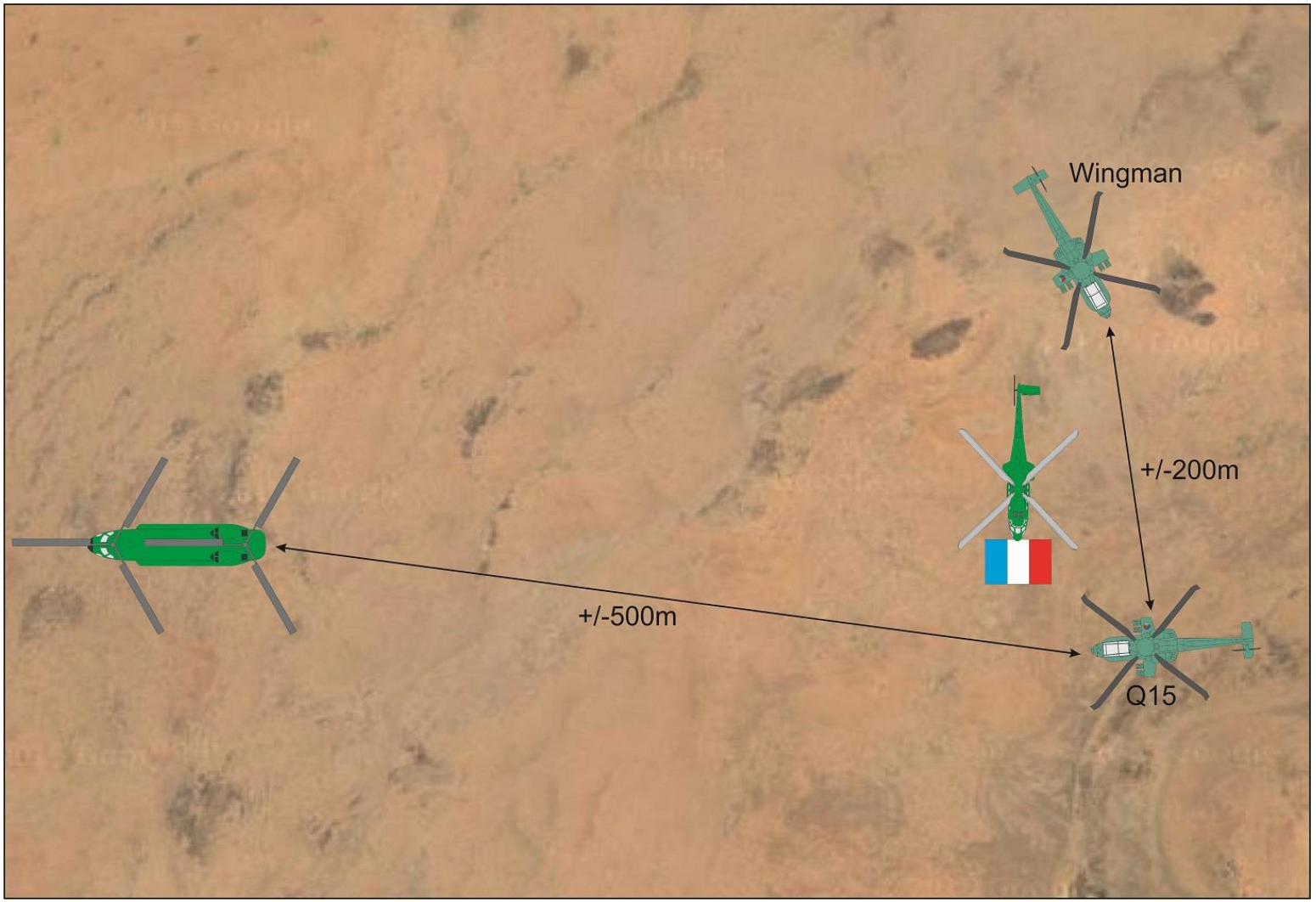



UN




DANGER
DANGER
DANGER

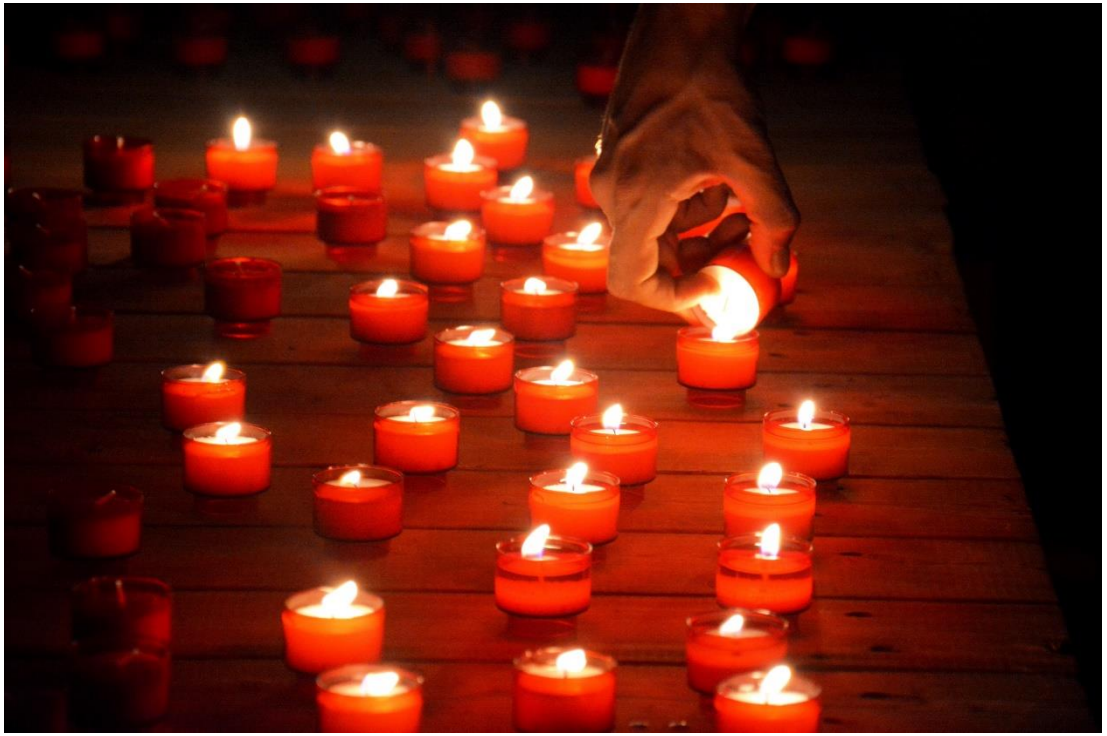



Wingman
+/-200m
+/-500m
Q15


28-4261
UN
FIRE - RESCUE
NLAF




amp dimmen






G-988



**Captain René Zeetsen**



**First Lieutenant Ernst Mollinger**

# Reflection

- Trust is built before the incident
- Train the capability, not the scenario
- Leadership is sometimes about stepping back
- We train for what we hope never happens




EUROPA
Eindhoven

# Thank you for your attention

