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The Dutch armed forces select Rheinmetall to modernize their Bergepanzer 3 Büffel armoured recovery vehicles, making them a match for today's operational requirements

Rheinmetall is to modernize the Dutch military's fleet of Bergepanzer 3 Büffel ('buffalo') armoured recovery vehicles. A contract to this effect was signed on 18 April 2019 at Soesterberg, a military base near Utrecht. In a first phase, four vehicles will undergo a combat performance upgrade. The order is worth a double-digit million-euro figure. In a second phase, a further 21 vehicles are to undergo corresponding modernization. This option, also worth a figure in the double-digit euro range, already features in the contract.

Starting immediately, Rheinmetall will completely overhaul the Royal Netherlands Army's Bergepanzer 3 Büffel ARVs, bringing them up to the latest technological and tactical standard. This will extend the service life of these tried-and-tested combat support vehicles – developed by Rheinmetall on the basis of the Leopard 2 chassis – through to the year 2040. The Dutch armed forces will take delivery of the first vehicles at the beginning of 2021.

Modernization work will take place at Rheinmetall locations in Germany as well as in Ede in the Netherlands. It will include a complete overhaul of the individual armoured recovery vehicles and a new digital operating concept; the installation of advanced visualization technology; mission packages featuring ballistic and mine protection; and new battlefield recovery equipment together as well as a universal transport platform. Also included in the contract are technical documentation, training and other services.

This service life extension will give the Dutch armed forces a reconfigured state-of-the-art ARV with significant growth potential. New force protection features both on and in the vehicle will keep the crew extremely safe from modern battlefield threats. Cutting-edge visualization systems, digital operating elements and command systems will support the crew while carrying out their tasks. Furthermore, new battlefield recovery equipment will boost the vehicle's tactical effectiveness. It will be transferred to the rear section of the vehicle. This will let the crew hook up to a damaged Royal Dutch Army vehicle such as the Bushmaster, Boxer, CV 90 infantry fighting vehicle, PzH 2000 self-propelled howitzer, Leguan bridge-laying tank, Kodiak combat engineering vehicle or the Leopard 2 main battle tank without having to leave the safety of the fighting compartment, before towing it from the battlefield at high speed in forward gear. In addition, the modified version of the Bergepanzer 3 Büffel ARV will feature a flexible-use universal transport platform mounted on the rear section of the vehicle. To cite just one example, this can be used for carrying equipment for recovering other vehicles. The new equipment has already demonstrated its effectiveness during deployed operations.

This contract confirms the emergence of a new standard for modern armoured recovery vehicles. As recently as December 2018, the Bundeswehr contracted with Rheinmetall to modernize its fleet of Bergepanzer 3 vehicles, ensuring they remain a match for current and future operational scenarios. Similar mission configurations are in service with the armed forces of NATO member Canada as well as Sweden.

Already underway, the service life extension of the Royal Netherlands Army's armoured recovery vehicles underscores once again Rheinmetall's comprehensive expertise when it comes to the globe-spanning Leopard 2 family. This expertise extends from maintenance and modernization programmes to advanced armament concepts, and from the production and technical knowledge of the system's original equipment manufacturer right through to comprehensive technical and logistic support for entire vehicle fleets – including service support during deployed operations. The portfolio of the Düsseldorf-based high-tech group for mobility and security also includes training and simulation solutions for Leopard 2 crews.

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