



## Hart b.v.: an expanding nickel alloy supplier in the Oil & Gas and (Petro)-chemical industries

Hart b.v. is opening up a new office. The Netherlands-based specialist in nickel alloy piping materials is opening a sales office and warehouse in Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. From there it will serve customers all over the Gulf Region and beyond. Stainless Steel World felt that the moment was right to visit the company as it seeks to establish itself as *the* nickel alloy specialist in the Middle East. We talked to Martijn Verstappen (Manager, Middle Eastern office), Lizette Hartholt (Sales Manager), and Henry N. Hart (Managing Director).

*By John Butterfield and James Chater*

### Growth strategy for the future

Things are changing rapidly at Hart b.v. Based in Nijkerk, The Netherlands, the company has not always been the nickel alloy specialist that it is today. "Hart b.v. started out in 1964", Lizette begins "and although Hart b.v. has always been

involved in piping materials as well as plate and bar, originally we concentrated on stainless steel rather than in nickel alloys. When Henry took over the business from his father in 1991, the emphasis changed and we started focusing on nickel alloys and build the company

strategy around these materials. In 2008 we had expanded our customer base to such an extent that the next logical step was to start building up significant stocks. We started off with seamless pipe, and have, since 2008, expanded our stock program with new wall thicknesses, sizes,





*Stock in nickel alloy seamless pipe.*

skills.” “We can now discuss business in Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish,” adds Lizette. Despite the economic crisis in which everybody has suffered to some extent, we have managed to grow year upon year. We do not expect this to change in the near future. We are doing our very best to sustain our growth and to continue to strengthen our position in nickel-alloy piping materials.

### Heading east

Hart b.v. aims to increase its overseas business by bringing its products nearer to its customers. The opening on 1<sup>st</sup> September of a sales office and warehouse in Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates is clearly a step in the right direction. Located at Sharjah International Airport Freezone, the new office will offer a full range of nickel alloys pipe and fittings exceeding that which is currently available in the region. “We will be stocking a full range of 625 and 825 from the outset, as these are important for the oil & gas and (petro-) chemical business,” Martijn elaborates. “We intend to supply the whole Gulf Region from our local warehouse, and are planning to supply a 24-hour delivery service, for repairs, shutdowns, maintenance and small expansion projects.”

Most of the projects in the region will require carbon steels, stainless steels and nickel alloys. However, Hart b.v. does not quote for complete projects including all those materials. “We are a niche supplier,” Henry emphasizes.

“We can offer expertise the traders do not have. Hart b.v.’s focus is to act as distributors to the project traders rather than working directly with all the end users. Only in the case of projects which only consist of Nickel Alloys we might offer directly to the EPC contractors and end-users.

The Middle East office will be set up one step at a time. Martijn Verstappen, currently Sales Manager in the Nijkerk office, will move to Dubai with his family and be in charge of this office.

Whilst there he will make sure that the business mentality, culture and ethics of the new offices adhere to the same principles as those in The Netherlands. It is a challenge that he is greatly looking forward to.”

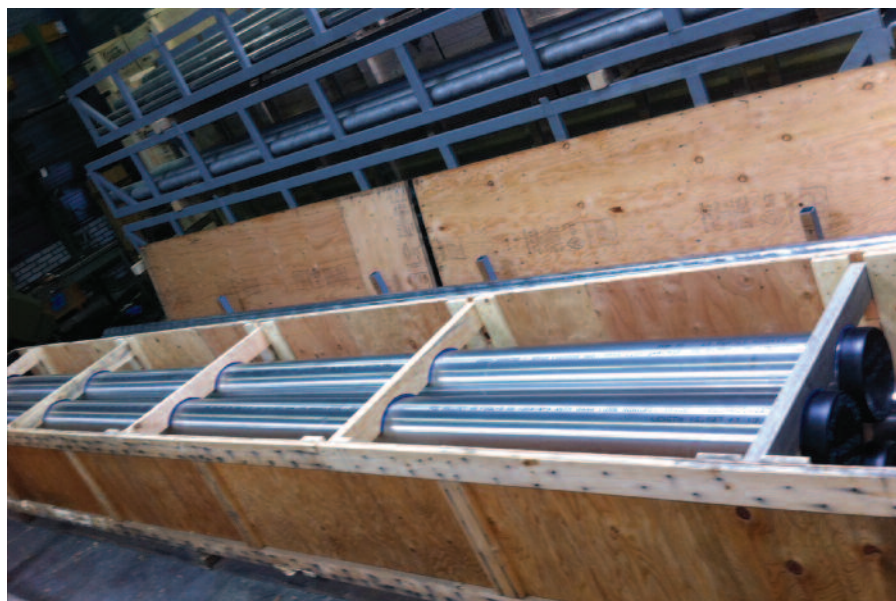
The two offices in Nijkerk and Sharjah will work closely together, sharing the same CRM system. The Middle East office will also be able to draw on stock from The Netherlands warehouse. It is the intention that it will serve the whole of the Middle East, and in the future it is hoped to expand to other countries, for instance India, which is currently served by Hart b.v. in The Netherlands.

Will the Middle East warehouse expand the products and materials currently available? “Not immediately but we expect to increase this over time as we have in Nijkerk,” replies Martijn, “Moreover, if the local market has a particular demand, we will increase stocks in other materials and perhaps other products, as long as they fit within the Hart b.v. scope and portfolio of Nickel Alloys.”

products and grades. For instance, we started offering grades 200, 400, 600 and 625, in 2010 we added Alloy 825. During this same period we also increased our fittings stock. We now stock nickel-alloy seamless pipe and seamless BW fittings, a full range from ½” up to and including 8”.

### Investing in people

Hart b.v. would not be where it is today if it did not invest in people. The number of staff has increased dramatically. Ten years ago there were only seven or eight people, now there are twenty-five. As well as increasing stock the company has also focused their attention on exports: “Because of our ever-increasing export business,” explains Henry, “we have recruited several people with language



*Special export packing.*





*Inhouse PMI testing.*

with certified Dutch laboratories for this purpose. A similar set up is available in the Middle East. This is because of the stringent demands of the Chemical and Oil & Gas industries. Hart b.v.'s policy is also to supply all documents, including certificates digitally when supplying products." Knowledge and experience are very much the pillars on which we base our company, and we intend to use this knowledge to expand to other areas of the world. This is one of the main secrets of Hart b.v.'s success. "The larger, more complex projects regularly include large sized specifications, which have to be studied closely in order to decide which additional testing is required. We have a quality department working on these projects even in quotation stage to make sure that the order is supplied with all the correct documents and conforms

### **The Netherlands as knowledge base**

Both Henry Hart and Lizette Hartholt emphasize that the company's headquarters will remain in The Netherlands. "Our Dutch office will remain the knowledge centre," Henry insists. "This is because we have so many years of experience in these materials and we have built up so many relationships with suppliers, mills and stockholders." The Hart b.v. Netherlands office will offer support in different areas to the overseas offices. The Netherlands will also continue to serve as the company's base in terms of quality control, purchasing and training. Quality is paramount in the critical applications in which nickel alloys are used, and Hart b.v. vets its suppliers carefully. Lizette: "We put a lot of effort into educating suppliers regarding our and our customers' requirements and have developed a thorough system to audit and select them. This is essential as more and more end-users require proof of quality, superseding the standard 3.1 certificate." "All of our stock materials that are purchased are subjected to additional testing to make sure that they conform to common international standards including ASME, ASTM, and NACE, and all materials are sourced from ISO certified manufacturers", Henry explains. "Where necessary we also arrange extra testing for particular clients. This can be arranged in The Netherlands as Hart b.v. works closely



*Stock in Nickel Alloy butt weld fittings.*





*Inhouse cutting facility.*

to the required specifications. Our own knowledge and skills grow with each new project. We also act as a filter: our suppliers receive only relevant information rather than overwhelming them with unnecessary detail.

Lizette believes that the supply of individual fittings and the management of whole projects go hand in hand: Hart b.v. needs to be a specialist for both ends of the spectrum. "This means we have to be incredibly versatile. We have customers who come to us for one single BW fitting, say a 2-inch elbow in grade Alloy 625, while at the same time we have projects that run from six to nine months requiring a vast amount of materials. In this way, we supply not only to big projects but we also meet the needs of our small customers. Every customer is important to us and we make sure that they feel this in the attention and support provided to them." Moreover, Hart b.v. has the facilities to do all its PMI testing and cutting in house and they are certified to remark materials under the PED. This means that they do not have to call upon Lloyds or TÜV inspectors to remark the material every time a pipe or bar is cut when used under PED regulations, which saves costs for customers, as well as time.

### **In company training**

With such a diverse customer base, Hart's staff has to be on the ball. This

means regular training throughout the year. "Training is always concerned with practical issues and is very hands-on," Henry Hart explains. "We start with products, quality, international standards and basic testing. The theory starts to come alive when you put it into practice." "We accept that it takes a couple of years before employees are capable of managing all aspects of the job and we realize that this time is necessary, continues Lizette Hartholt. "It is extremely important to us that our staff understands the requirements and challenges faced by our customers so that they can support them in the best possible way."

We asked Lizette what the effect of these training sessions was. "Our personnel's knowledge of products and materials certainly gives us an edge over our competitors. "It is immediately apparent to customers who approach Hart b.v. that we understand the materials and the products. Sticking to our niche, even though we receive hundreds of enquires for other materials, is crucial to this. We do not make promises that we cannot keep. We are, and will remain, a niche player. We do not intend to divide our attention over a vast array of materials."

### **Increasing Market share**

What is the next step for Hart b.v. once the Sharjah office is up and running serving the (petro-) chemical and oil & gas industries?

Lizette: "We believe that we can increase our market share of the nickel alloy piping market. This is a huge and growing industry world-wide. Up to now Hart b.v. has been an enormously important player in this field, renowned for quality and its knowledge of the materials and the products. On a world-wide basis, even if the market were not to increase significantly, there would still be a potentially large market share for Hart b.v." There are many geographical areas where Hart b.v. will be able to tighten its hold and take a larger piece of the pie, expanding further.

### **About Hart b.v.**

Hart b.v. is a European stockholder of piping materials in nickel alloys and titanium. From its base in the Netherlands it supplies pipe, fittings and flanges all over the world. It specializes in complete project management and full packages including bar, forgings and plate. In accordance with its vision of being closer to the customer, the company is about to open a sales office and warehouse in the Middle East. Products: seamless and welded pipe, butt-weld and forged fittings, flanges, tube, forgings, bar/billet, plate. Stock: seamless pipe sizes: ½" up to and including 8" inches.

Stock wall thicknesses: Ranging between sch10s and XXS.

Stock grades: 200/201, 400, 600, 625 and 825.