

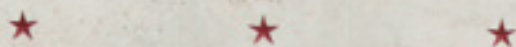


NATO
+
OTAN



NORTHERN STAR

Magazine for HQ JFC Brunssum – June 2014



EACH FOR HIS OWN MEMORIAL
EARNED PRAISE THAT WILL NEVER DIE
AND WITH IT
THE GRANDEST OF ALL SEPULCHRES
NOT THAT IN WHICH
HIS MORTAL BONES ARE LAID
BUT A HOME
IN THE MINDS OF MEN



- Royal Tongan Marines say farewell, lower flag in Afghanistan.
- How the Dutch keep their land dry.
- Transatlantic Move
- Focus on the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic



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COMMAND GROUP CORNER

By General Hans-Lothar Domröse

Life invariably takes you by surprise and I doubt few of us would have thought world events would develop as they have in recent months. As I write this, the situation in Ukraine seems as critical now as at any stage during the crisis to date, with much work to be done to find a resolution to the problem. Nevertheless, the uncertainty and unrest on the Alliance's borders has brought the relevance of NATO sharply into focus and with it the relevance of our own headquarters. I have made several trips to the Baltic States recently and throughout I have been struck by the warm welcome I have received from all quarters. NATO is of primary importance to the region and that means Brunssum. The investment our headquarters made last year in building links, and which we sealed during Exercise Steadfast Jazz, is really bearing fruit and is testimony to our Regional Focus line of effort, one of my three priorities.

Work for the transition from ISAF to RSM continues, whatever form that might finally take, and we have a key part to play in that transition. The first key leader training has been conducted and with more to follow. We can also derive immense satisfaction from the very successful first round of presidential elections that were held in April. As you read this, we are likely to be on the cusp of a second round of voting and we look for an equally successful process for the election run-off, though we can take nothing for granted and the stakes remain high.

I have been your commander for 18 months now and during that time I have seen a marked shift in how the headquarters does its business. I believe we are now more focussed and much of that comes down to your hard work and the lessons we learnt last year as we prepared for our certification on Exercise Steadfast Jazz. It is now that we are starting to reap the rewards of the investment we made in training and in changing our mindset to being a deployable headquarters. We have not completed the journey yet and much remains to be done, but we have made considerable progress and should be proud of what we have achieved.

There have been physical changes in the headquarters too, notably the increase in the size of the staff, and I am not referring to waistlines! All the Nations are making a concerted effort to bring us up to strength and our Peacetime Establishment is looking healthier by the day. With that though comes more work; new people need to be welcomed and introduced to the headquarters so they can become productive as soon as possible, and they need to be trained so they can become part of our NRF capability. In December's article last year I mentioned Exercise Trident Joust and this event will become a



General Hans-Lothar Domröse

focal point for our training efforts during the second part of the year.

In April we witnessed the departure from the Netherlands Army of the Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Richard Tieskens. I was sorry to see Richard leave, but delighted for him personally, as he left to take up a new position outside the military heading the organisation managing all Dutch government properties. He worked tirelessly for the benefit of this headquarters and it is testament to his hard work that SACEUR will be able to sign the Garrison Support Agreement with our host nation in July, the first headquarters in the new NATO Command Structure to be able to do so. This is no mean feat and is just one example of the unglamorous but vital work Richard drove forward.

As part of a shuffle in the headquarters to cover gaps, Major General Michel Yakovlev has become the Chief of Staff until late summer, at which point he will leave on promotion to become the new Vice COS SHAPE, a well-deserved appointment and for which we congratulate him wholeheartedly. In his place we will be able

to welcome Lieutenant General Janusz Adamczak of the Polish Army. We will have to see if his arrival at the headquarters for his walking-in ceremony upstages that of a purple Citroen! We also welcome Major General Hans van Griensven of the Netherlands Army as the new DCOS Plans, as well as all the other new arrivals across the staff since the last Northern Star article. The pace of life in the coming months will continue to be busy but we must take the opportunity to enjoy some summer leave, recharge our batteries and spend time with our families. We must not forget the love and support they provide, be they living here in the Netherlands or back in our native countries. Equally we must spare a thought for those still deployed away from home, including those from our own headquarters, and the families they have left behind. I am sure we are doing all we can to provide the support they need. To finish off, I am confident we are well placed to play our part in the challenges ahead and to respond to whatever calls are made upon us. We are as relevant as ever and our reputation is high. It is incumbent on us all to keep it that way.

Colophon

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For more information, call ext. 2687 or +31 (0)45 526 26 87. The editor reserves the right to edit submissions.

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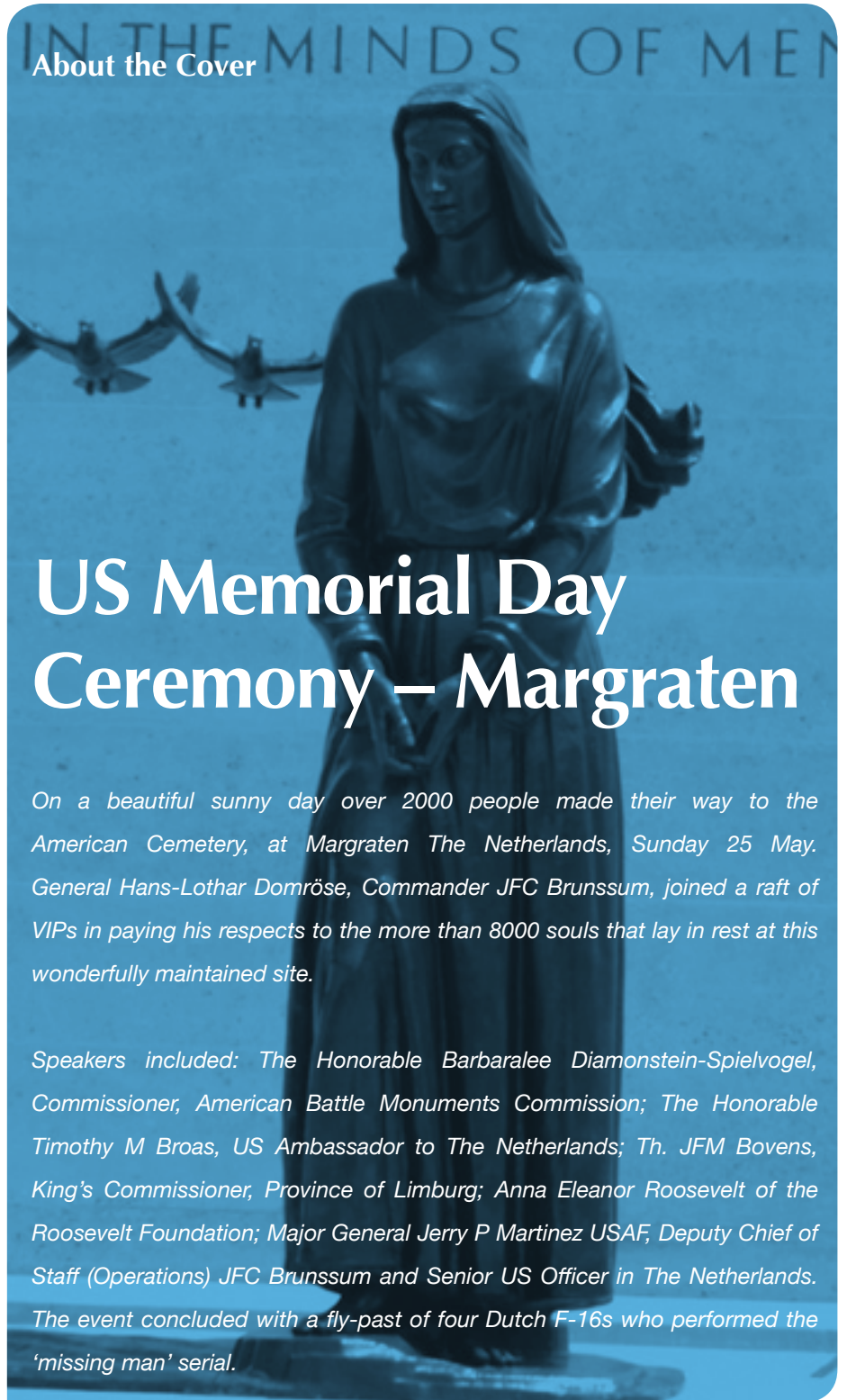
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About the Cover



US Memorial Day Ceremony – Margraten

On a beautiful sunny day over 2000 people made their way to the American Cemetery, at Margraten The Netherlands, Sunday 25 May. General Hans-Lothar Domröse, Commander JFC Brunssum, joined a raft of VIPs in paying his respects to the more than 8000 souls that lay in rest at this wonderfully maintained site.

Speakers included: The Honorable Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel, Commissioner, American Battle Monuments Commission; The Honorable Timothy M Broas, US Ambassador to The Netherlands; Th. JFM Bovens, King's Commissioner, Province of Limburg; Anna Eleanor Roosevelt of the Roosevelt Foundation; Major General Jerry P Martinez USAF, Deputy Chief of Staff (Operations) JFC Brunssum and Senior US Officer in The Netherlands. The event concluded with a fly-past of four Dutch F-16s who performed the 'missing man' serial.

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Royal Tongan Marines say farewell, lower flag in Afghanistan

Story and photo by Cpl. Cody Haas

CAMP BASTION, Afghanistan (May 1, 2014) — Distinguished military service members with Regional Command (Southwest) and International Security Assistance Force including Lt. Gen. John Lorimer, deputy commander of ISAF, attended a farewell ceremony and witnessed the lowering of the Kingdom of Tonga flag, aboard Camp Bastion and Leatherneck, Afghanistan, April 28.



Royal Tongan Marines

During a morning ceremony aboard Camp Bastion, each Royal Tongan Marine was awarded medals for their devoted service to the coalition's efforts. Afterward, the Royal Tongan Marines lowered their flag aboard Camp Leatherneck to symbolize the end of the country's participation in support of combat operations in Helmand province and return to their homeland.

"I feel my men have done a very good job here along with our training in the United Kingdom before we deployed," said Royal Tongan Marine Lt. Col. Cyle Tuevai, the national contingent commander with Her Majesties' Armed Forces.

During the short morning ceremony, the Royal Tongan Marines sang their national anthem, a song written and composed by one of their own lance corporals, and performed the Sipi Tau, the traditional Tongan war dance.

"You have repeatedly demonstrated courage and capability," said Lt.

Gen. Lorimer, as he addressed the Royal Tongan Marines. "You should be justifiably proud of the important role you have delivered here on Camp Bastion, protecting thousands of military and civilian personnel."

The Tongan troops served with the Camp Bastion Force Protection Wing where they helped guard the base perimeter as well as man the entry control points.

"While in Afghanistan the troops conducted force protection training exercises at least twice a week. It's important to stay sharp while we're here," said Tuevai.

Tongan troops have continuously deployed to Helmand province in six-month rotations since November 2010, when the commander of the Tongan Defense Service signed an agreement in London committing a minimum of 200 soldiers to the mission in Afghanistan, nearly half of Tonga's entire military force.

The last deployed contingent of Royal

Tongan Marines account for more than 10 percent of total Tongan forces. A 10 percent commitment of troops from a nation of approximately 500 service members strong is equivalent to the U.S. sending approximately 140,000 service members into the region.

"Your mission now complete, you can return to Tonga with proud hearts and heads held high, reassured you have had a truly positive effect to not only the ISAF mission, but to the safety and prosperity of the people of Helmand province," said Lt. Gen. Lorimer, as he addressed the troops. "You leave behind a great legacy."

Since the beginning of their commitment, the Kingdom of Tonga has sent almost three-quarters of its entire fighting force into Helmand province.

"We have sent 70 percent of our homeland forces here since 2010, and that is as much as we have to offer," said Tuevai. "We are honored to be the last contingent here."

"Return to Tonga as valiant victorious warriors, a status you wholly deserve," said Lt. Gen. Lorimer, addressing the troops. "You truly have been fantastic ambassadors and representatives of your armed forces. Well done."

Transatlantic Move

Story by HQ AIRCOM Public Affairs Office based on information provided by the Canadian Air Force

Canada supports NATO in promoting security and stability in Central and Eastern Europe



CF-18 Hornet

NATO's core task is to protect and defend the Allies. The Alliance has taken a series of measures to reassure its members especially in Central and Eastern Europe and to demonstrate unity, resolve and commitment to collective defence.

In the air domain, NATO has increased its air activity in Central and Eastern Europe including flying more air policing sorties over the Baltic region as well as increased training activity over Poland and AWACS surveillance flights over Poland and Romania.

In a special move that reflects the country's commitment to NATO reassurance of Allies, Canada deployed an Air Task Force of six CF-18 Hornet fighter aircraft to Campia Turzii, Romania, where they arrived on 7 May 2014. The CF-18 fighters are to conduct multinational training exercises as part of Canada's commitment to its NATO Allies. The Canadian Air Task Force have begun to work and train with their Romanian counterparts.

The six CF-18 fighters from 425 Tactical Fighter Squadron, based at 3 Wing Bagotville in the Province of Quebec, may later join NATO's air policing mission in Eastern Europe. These fighter aircraft and aircrew are trained to perform air defence, air superiority, training, aerospace testing and evaluation, and tactical support missions.

The Air Task Force is composed of some 200 men and women; it is an integrated force with all the necessary operations and support functions to provide units of agile, task-tailored, scalable, readily deployable, expeditionary aerospace power.

The CF-18 Hornet is Canada's multipurpose fighter jet, and its pilots are well trained to carry their flying missions. The participation of CAF personnel in NATO exercises and training activities provides Canada with an excellent opportunity to develop their skills and enhances their ability to operate with our NATO Allies while building cohesion within the Alliance.

The CAF's response in support of NATO's reassurance measures promotes security in Central and Eastern Europe. It demonstrates readiness, professionalism and commitment to the collective defence of NATO Allies.

The six CF-18 fighters, Canada deployed are one measure of Allies in demonstrating NATO resolve and solidarity. NATO's air policing mission in the Baltic region is currently led by four Polish MiG-29 fighters and supported by four United Kingdom Typhoon fighters – both assets deployed to Siauliai, Lithuania – four Danish F-16 fighters deployed to Ämari, Estonia, and four French Rafale fighters, currently deployed to Malbork, Poland. In addition the Alliance operates AWACS platforms from France and the United Kingdom as well as one NATO AWACS aircraft over Poland and Romania. Several allies operate aircraft flying in support of NATO measures or bilateral training.

NATO rescue submersible Nemo trains for real life rescue scenarios

Story and photos by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Doug Mappin, U.S. Navy Reserve Navy Public Affairs Support Element Midwest

BALTIC SEA – DYNAMIC MONARCH 2014, the world's largest submarine rescue exercise, is designed to test international forces' interoperability and ability to respond to submarines that have become disabled, anywhere in the world, utilizing the International Submarine Escape and Rescue Liaison Office (ISMERLO) and emergency response procedures and equipment.

The Russian Kursk disaster in August 2000 caused officials from the world's navies to realize that due to differences in national escape egress systems, systems incompatibility would make submarine rescues difficult, if not impossible. As a result, most submarines today have switched to interoperable emergency egress systems, making it possible for humanitarian rescue efforts to occur using submersibles such as NATO Submarine Rescue System (NSRS).

During Dynamic Monarch 2014 off the coast of Gdynia, Poland, NSRS has been mating with submarines from NATO member nations Poland and the Netherlands, and NATO partner Sweden.

"NSRS is a very safe and proven system to rescue the Sailors of a stricken submarine," said Senior Pilot Supervisor Tom Heron.

The Submarine Rescue Vehicle (SRV) component of NSRS, called Nemo, is capable of rescuing 12 Sailors at a time during a stable emergency, or as many as 15 during a time constrained emergency. The 30-ton Nemo can be utilized world-wide, transported by plane or by ship, and can operate in excess of depths of 610 meters. The seven-year old submersible is owned by Norway, France and Great Britain.

When called upon, Nemo's crew of 3-5 crew members (two in the control module) would be launched from the surface, maneuver to a stricken submarine, latch upon the sub's egress hatch and then transfer Sailors to the surface.

"The Nemo can operate underwater for up to four days," Heron said. "When Nemo drops down to a submarine a great number of factors can determine the likelihood of affecting a rescue. Nemo can latch onto a submarine laying on the sea bottom at as much a 60 degree list."

During Friday's training evolution, Nemo was lifted off its cradle on the



(BALTIC SEA) Recovery specialists help retrieve the NATO Submarine Rescue Submersible Nemo after conducting underwater rescue training with the Dutch Royal Navy's HNLMS Bruinvis.

Swedish vessel HSWMS BELOS and gently deposited into the waters of the Baltic. After systems safety checks were performed, Nemo submerged and approximately 35 minutes later dropped to a depth of 90 meters to latch onto the hatch of the Dutch submarine HNLMS BRUINVIS. The successful mating proved that in an actual emergency, Nemo could safely rescue the 60 BRUINVIS Sailors.

Depending upon the severity of an incident, the rescued crews can be directly released once on the surface, or placed in decompression chambers to prevent medical conditions such as decompression sickness, more commonly known as "the bends." Decompression sickness occurs when nitrogen and other normally inert gases form bubbles in the human body's blood stream. It can lead to debilitating conditions and even result in death.

To safely transfer personnel and prevent the bends, Nemo's aft hatch can directly link to either BELOS' hyperbaric chamber system or to the Transfer Under Pressure System (TUPS) unique to NSRS. TUPS is a combination

of transportable chambers that can permit as many as 72 transferees to be comfortably treated after a rescue where atmospheric pressures are greater than surface levels.

"DYNAMIC MONARCH is important because it brings together a wide variety of public officials from many countries working toward a common goal," said Commander Jeroen Van Zanten, Royal Netherlands Navy. "It brings divers, technicians, engineers, and medical experts, who all come to work and observe these systems and build relationships for those who serve on the seas. Such operations serve to prove that we can do this, that it works and it builds confidence for our submariners who can see that these systems do work. They can see that in time of need they can be rescued."

Headquarters Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum - Visits and Activities

Prepared by Adjutant Edwin Tromp, photos by PAO JFCBS

Headquarters Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum major activities are depicted along five lines of effort within the Brunssum Campaign Plan. Each of these activities requires an ambitious level of attention and effort. Beside routine staff work we plan and conduct special activities in the form of visits and training, as well as, social events on a regular basis. We would like to provide you an overview of those activities by taking a quick look at a few selected events.

April 2014



Commander JFC Brunssum Visits Italy and Portugal

22/04/2014
General Domröse recently visited Rome to discuss Exercise Trident Juncture with the Italian Chief of Defense Staff (CHOD),

Admiral Luigi Binelli Mantelli. He then travelled to Lisbon to meet the Portuguese Minister of Defence, Mr. José Pedro Aguiar-Branco, and CHOD, General Artur Pina Monteiro, for similar discussions. Italy and Portugal, together with Spain, will be Host Nations for the exercise which will take place between September and November 2015



Netherlands Defence College Visits JFC Brunssum

On 22 and 23 April 35 students and 5 coaching staff of the NLD Defence Academy, at Breda, visited JFC Brunssum.

After welcome remarks by MG van Griensven and the NLD Senior National Representative briefings followed by the Political Advisor and the Planning, Training and Intelligence Branches.

The purpose of the visit was to provide a clear overview with regard to the tasks and responsibilities of an operational headquarters.

The students (primarily Dutch but including 3 from other NATO countries) were all attending the Higher General Staff Course at the NLD Defence Academy. As part of the module Operational Art and Planning, students are offered an opportunity to get acquainted with a headquarters at the joint level in order to be better prepared for possible future assignment to NATO.



National Dutch Memorial Day 2014

Air Marshal Graham Stacey CB MBE RAF, Deputy Commander JFC Brunssum, was the senior representative of the headquarters at the annual national memorial service, in Brunssum, 04 May.

Together with a number of dignitaries, notably the Mayor of Brunssum - Mayor Luc Winants - attendees first assembled at the Gregorius Church, Dorpstraat, for an international ecumenical service. On completion of this heartfelt and well orchestrated event the congregation walked the short distance to the nearby cemeteries where a large number of local people joined them.

Promptly at 2000 a Spitfire flew overhead and the memorial service at the Dutch cemetery commenced to commemorate Dutch military and civilian victims who fell in WWII and subsequent wars. This ceremony was followed by a special memorial service at the adjacent British War Cemetery to honor 328 British soldiers and airmen laid to rest at this cemetery.

The event concluded with the release of 328 balloons by young children to the accompaniment of bagpipes.



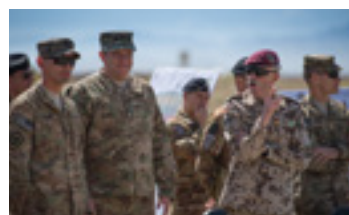
Danish Policy Makers Visit JFC Brunssum

Air Marshal Graham Stacey, Deputy Commander JFC Brunssum, warmly welcomed a group of Danish policy makers to the headquarters Wednesday 23 April. Brigadier General

Torben Møller, Director of Management and Senior National Representative for Denmark, chaired the session.

Inter alia, the primary roles and responsibilities of JFC Brunssum were briefed - ISAF, NRF, Regional Focus - whilst the Joint Force Command's deployable remit was emphasized ("... deployability is in our DNA" the Air Marshal said).

The visit concluded with a lively question and answer period covering a range of topics including Russia/Ukraine. Discussion continued over a light lunch.



SACEUR and Commander JFC Brunssum Visit Afghanistan

The Commander, Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum, General Hans-Lothar Domröse,

accompanied the SACEUR during an official visit to Afghanistan 22-23 April.

General Domröse visited RC-West in Herat, RC-North in Mazar-E Sharif and Headquarters, ISAF in Kabul in his capacity as the out of theater commander for NATO operations in Afghanistan. Throughout the visit, Commanders highlighted the excellent performance of the Afghan Security Forces especially in securing the 5 April elections.

General Domröse also visited the Mihail Kogalniceanu Airbase in Romania which is a hub in NATO deployment and redeployment operations.



Manfred Wörner Seminar visit Joint Force Command Brunssum

A group of 34 American and German students participating in the annual Manfred Wörner Seminar visited Joint Force Command Brunssum, Monday 12 May.

The Seminar, named in honor of the former NATO Secretary General and Defence Minister of West Germany who tragically died of cancer in 1994, brings together young German and US delegates to broaden comprehension of US, German and European security interests.

General Domröse, Commander JFC Brunssum, welcomed the group and explained the responsibilities of his HQs: ISAF, the NATO Response Force and Regional Focus.

Following this briefing the Political Advisor, Drs de Sitter, went into greater detail with regard to Regional Focus; he was followed by a subject matter expert who proved greater clarity of the status of events in Afghanistan.

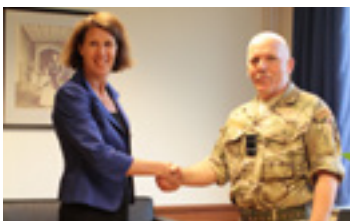


JFC Brunssum Operational Capability Concept Evaluation & Feedback (OCC E&F) Team Support Swedish Armed Forces

The OCC E&F team visited Sweden to monitor a Self

Evaluation Level 2 serial in the period of 05-09 May. The aim of the visit was to support the Swedish national Evaluation Team (within the spirit of the Operational Capability Concept) in their evaluation of Infantry, Engineering and Logistic Units declared to the NATO OCC pool of forces and their suitability for future engagement in the NATO Response Force.

It was quickly apparent that all participating Swedish military personnel were very motivated and professional – people, equipment, materiel, plans and documentation were well prepared. The Swedish units are firmly on course to achieve good results during the “Field Inspection” planned for the end of this month; in turn this will enable them to meet assigned objectives in NATO-led operations.



Netherlands Permrep and Milrep Visit JFC Brunssum

Her Excellency Mrs Marjanne de Kwaasteniet, Dutch Ambassador to NATO, and Lieutenant General Jan Broeks, Dutch Military Representative to

NATO, visited JFC Brunssum Thursday 15 May.

Following an office call with the Deputy Commander, Air Marshal Graham Stacey CB MBE RAF, the visiting VIPs were briefed on the role and responsibilities of the headquarters. One of the issues highlighted was the broad diversity and experience of the multi-national staff – a staff that enjoys representation from all 28 Alliance nations and embraces 5 Partnership for Peace countries.



Prince Harry Visits Exercise Steadfast Javelin 1

In the vicinity of Margari, Estonia, the Estonian President, Mr Toomas Hendrik Ilves, accompanied by His Royal Highness Prince Harry of Wales, visited allied

troops participating in Exercise Steadfast Javelin 1. Estonian soldiers from the Scout Battalion, British soldiers from the Duke of Lancaster Regiment (the “Lions of England”), and US paratroopers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade met with the distinguished visitors.

Steadfast Javelin 1, a NATO-led exercise, was briefed to the VIPs by Colonel Artur TIGANIK, on behalf of Commander Joint Force Command Brunssum (General Domröse), the general officer conducting the exercise.

The visit, again, emphasizes the strong commitment amongst allied nations to the principle of collective defense. The Estonian people can rely on their NATO Allies to take appropriate and proportionate actions to monitor and maintain their security.

During this morning's VIP visit the Estonian Scout Battalion and the Lancaster Regiment officially became sister battalions – an act that overtly symbolizes the integration and linkages that exist, and continue to be forged, between NATO member forces. Soldiers from these units have previously served together, under ISAF command in Helmand Province Afghanistan, and other exercise scenarios.

NATO member and partner nations continue to engage in regular exercise play so as to maintain high levels of readiness should a security threat emerge that demands a military, rather than diplomatic, solution.



Exercise Trident Jaguar 2014

On 10 May 14 the JFC HQ Brunssum Deputy Commander, Air Marshal Graham Stacey, attended the Trident Jaguar 2014 Distinguished Visitors Day in Menorca.

As the very first Allied Command Transformation (ACT) sponsored Command Post Exercise (CPX), TRIDENT JAGUAR 2014 involved the NATO RAPID DEPLOYABLE CORPS - SPAIN and Naval Striking Force NATO Headquarters, both operating as Joint Task Force Headquarters under direct command of SACEUR. The DV Day included a tour of the facilities at the San Isidro base and aboard the USS Mount Whitney. Air Marshal Stacey stated that he was most impressed with the professional and enthusiastic way both HQs had embraced the SJO Task Force HQ concept. Such exercises are excellent examples of genuine multinational cooperation delivering real capability for NATO at an important time. He also praised Spain for the first class support they had provided to Trident Jaguar.

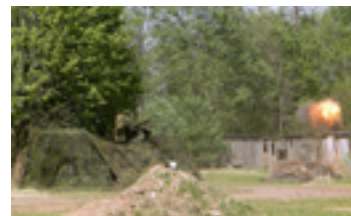


General Domröse Assumes Command of Exercise Steadfast Javelin1

In KÄÄRIKU, Estonia, on the 16th of May 2014, Exercise Kevadtorm evolved into Exercise

Steadfast Javelin 1. At the same time command authority was transferred from the Estonian Defense Forces to General Hans-Lothar Domröse, Commander Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum.

This exercise will involve more than 6000 soldiers from 8 NATO nations. “It is my great honor, as the NATO co director of this event, to represent my commander on the ground in Estonia as this exercise unfolds”, said Colonel Fernando Ravena. Kevadtorm 14 is an annual Estonian Defence Forces’ exercise with the purpose to train and certify Estonian forces. The exercise is purely defensive. Colonel Artur Tiganik of the Estonian Defence Forces stated: “I am proud to participate in this NATO exercise on behalf of my country. This is a clear symbol of the Alliance’s commitment to us and our belief in NATO”. Steadfast Javelin 1 will enlarge the number of participating nations by including additional assets deployed in the framework of NATO’s long established Baltic Air Policing mission. In addition to improving and sustaining perishable military skill-sets Exercise Steadfast Javelin 1 serves to demonstrate the Alliance’s unwavering commitment to unity, resolve and collective defence. All NATO exercises generate platforms that ably demonstrate the high levels of military capability available to the Alliance and assure the populations of member nations that their security is taken seriously. With NATO Allies in the Baltic Sea region - Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark and Poland on board - the exercise demonstrates the strong unity that exists amongst the Baltic allies. The participation of US, UK, Belgian and French contingents is a symbol of NATO’s rock-solid commitment to collective defense in the region.



Exercise Steadfast Javelin 1 Visitors Day

On the 19th of May 2014 the Estonian town of Helme hosted the Visitor's Day of Exercise Steadfast Javelin 1 in beautiful weather with the temperature touching 31°

Celsius. On the ground an exhibition, provided by the Estonian Defense Industry, was organized in the compound of the 2nd Brigade (EST) Combat Support Battalion. In the skies aircraft participating in NATO’s Baltic Air Policing mission entertained the crowd with a strafing demonstration. Visits and Aln his remarks, the JFC Brunssum and Exercise Steadfast Javelin 1 commander, General Hans-Lothar Domröse, emphasized that NATO is defensive by nature, adheres to the law of armed conflict and abides by the principle of proportionality. “We always display a friendly face first but if anybody breaks the rules this will quickly change”, he said.

June 2014

Focus on the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic

Story provided by Col Dvorak

The primary mission of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic (ACR) is to ensure the military defense of the country against aggression and to meet commitments derived from international obligations and treaties of the Czech Republic on collective defense. It is also set to fulfill tasks within peacekeeping operations in regions of instability or conflict, and to implement rescue and humanitarian missions both on the national territory and abroad.

The Czech Republic successfully completed its accession talks and became a NATO member country on 12 March 1999. The Czech military is engaged in the integrated NATO military structure, contributing to defense, operations and civil crisis management planning. It takes part in the procedural and organizational aspects of nuclear consultations, participates in joint exercises, and actively commits its troops to NATO-led multinational operations. The ACR is also engaged in the EU military structure, as the Czech Republic became an EU member on 1 May 2004. The Czech military participates in joint exercises and operations within the EU military framework.

In 2013, the Czech MOD and the Czech Armed Forces has been developing a future-oriented, long-term defense policy in order to fulfill the political-military ambition set out in the Defense Strategy of the Czech Republic (2012). The overall purpose of the Czech defence policy is to protect the security of the Czech Republic, and to contribute to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area by maintaining and further developing multilateral security and defense institutions, primarily NATO. The principles and measures presented below serve the dual purpose of strengthening NATO and developing appropriate national defense capabilities.

The political-military challenges of the Czech Republic remain as committed as before the economic crisis:

- To provide one brigade-sized task force for NATO Article 5 operations;
- To develop the capability to participate in three parallel crisis management missions with one battalion-sized task force, and two company-sized task forces (land or air equivalent);



Czech soldiers in Afghanistan salute the raising flag during morning ritual.

- To regularly provide troops with high-readiness stand-by arrangements (NATO Response Force, EU Battle Groups). In this endeavor, we intend to employ the Visegrad defense cooperation whenever it is deemed beneficial.
- To develop the ability to contribute to additional operations with specialized forces or expert teams, including, but not limited to, Special Operations Forces and expert military mentoring and training teams.

National specialization remains the key differentiator that will contribute towards the high-end profile of the Czech Armed Forces in the future. Our ambition is to specialize in areas with a higher added value, such as defense against weapons of mass destruction (CBRN protection), special operations forces, military medical services, multinational logistics, and helicopter capabilities. Concrete projects currently being implemented include building the Visegrad EU Battle Group and developing both the Multinational Aviation Training Centre (MATC) and the Multinational Logistics Coordination Centre (MLCC). In order to maintain this level of ambition, the Czech MOD has transformed military structures and eliminated one level of command, improved the system of defense planning and spending, reduced non-military tasks of the armed forces, and cut the number of civilian personnel in the MOD. It is also striving to strengthen bilateral and multinational cooperation.

The Czech MOD is currently shifting from a period of austerity to a period of financial stabilization. After five years of budget cuts, there is now a broad political consensus in the Czech Republic for maintaining the existing nominal value of the defense budget for the entire period of 2013–2015 (approximately USD 2.1 billion annually, which represents around 1.1 per cent of the country's annual GDP). While remaining well below the threshold of two per cent of GDP, and far from perfect, the defense sector is now working within a more predictable budgetary environment. The ultimate goal is to gradually increase the defense budget after 2015.

The participation of the Czech Republic in multinational operations greatly contributed to the transformation of our

forces. In particular, the ISAF operation has tremendously increased our interoperability with allies and partners. While scaling down and transforming our presence in Afghanistan, the Czech Armed Forces will remain actively deployed in foreign operations, including regions critical to European security (e.g. Greater Middle East, Africa). Active Czech participation in the EU Training Mission in Mali represents the first step towards implementing this new geographical focus.

Main challenges: In the years ahead, it will be critical to maintain the momentum of cooperation and continued interaction with Allies and partners through robust exercise and training programs, covering all types of scenarios (from small scale, specialized operations to Article 5 contingencies). Four per cent of the Czech Armed Forces' budget will be dedicated either to operations or exercises to maintain the level of interoperability.

The defense of Europe under the NATO umbrella, as well as the crisis management structures of the EU, will be one of the key priorities of the Czech defense policy. The Czech Republic will continue to diversify and cultivate "defense partnerships" within NATO, the EU and other multilateral frameworks. Our future strategy will be based on strengthening our partnerships with the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Poland, and other neighboring countries. Partnerships will also expand to Asia, Africa and Latin America, and will reflect a variety of national, geopolitical and industrial interests. In particular, we want to build a close partnership with the Allied Command Transformation (ACT) in order to help develop our national defense capabilities.

A strong and efficient NATO is the cornerstone of Czech and European defense, as well as the key instrument holding the transatlantic political and security community together. To keep the Alliance relevant and useful, we need to further develop our collective military

capabilities based on a high level of interoperability. We see the NATO Response Force as a crucial operational tool of the Alliance, as well as a means of increasing credibility and interoperability of our defense capabilities.

By actively participating in the structures and activities of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) of the European Union, the Czech Republic seeks to achieve three interconnected goals:

1. Protect Europe's security by assuming an appropriate share of responsibility for international crisis management activities carried out on Europe's peripheries.
2. Maintain and develop its national defense capabilities through multilateral cooperation (pooling & sharing projects, European Defense Agency).
3. Keep the transatlantic security and defense link strong, cohesive and relevant by demonstrating Europe's ability and willingness to contribute sufficiently to both protecting itself and managing broader international security.

To navigate through these challenges and opportunities, the MOD is currently preparing a long term outlook. This document will be based on the above-listed strategic documents adopted in the past three years, namely the White Paper on Defence (2011) and the Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic (2012). For the first time, it will connect the political ambition to the specific long-term concept of the development of the armed forces, including providing guidance for acquisitions and the defense industry. This combination will allow for thorough and transparent long-term planning, leading to a more reliable national defense system and active contribution to the collective defense system of NATO and the EU.

Apologies

The April edition of this magazine erroneously attributed the article 'NATO: Hard or Soft Corps?' to the Public Affairs Office Allied Land Command Izmir. This was incorrect. The article was written by Professor Lindley-French in his blog and represents his personal views.

E-3A Component NATO International Civilians - Sheer Diversity

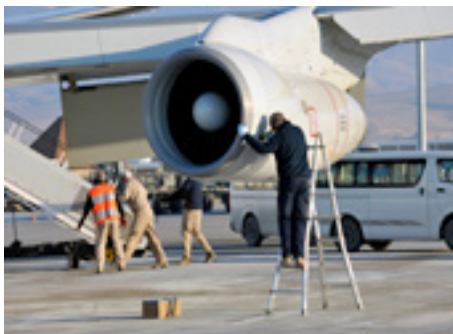
Story and pictures provided by Civilian Staff Association, Geilenkirchen

The NAEW&CF E-3A Component is an integrated, multinational, rapidly deployable Alliance asset providing airborne surveillance, command, control and communication capabilities. These are of particular significance to its key role in Council-approved operations such as Operation Afghan Assist (OAA) in support of ISAF. The Component's task spectrum also encompasses flexible, efficient support for NATO exercises and for the safeguarding of Summits and major international public events.

The Component's high reputation for successful mission accomplishment stems from long-standing and very effective cooperation between military and civilian personnel from 17 nations working as a unique operational team to meet these requirements in the interests of the Alliance.

The local CSA represents more than 600 NATO International Civilian staff employed in a very wide range of occupational fields: financial, legal, medical, safety, administrative, IT, technical, firefighting and many others. "With a workforce of this size and diversity, and with deployment rotations frequently taking place, the CSA Committee very often has a tough time keeping up with all the key issues," remarks the CSA Chairman, Mr. Guy Vandebeek. "We are very fortunate to have such a dedicated, hard working CSA Staff Committee."

A notable aspect of working life at the Component is that many staff members at NATO Air Base Geilenkirchen and on



deployment have a constantly changing pattern of duty hours in an operational flying environment that is very different from that of office-bound NICs at static headquarters or elsewhere. Key tasks: servicing and maintaining large-body aircraft equipped with complex avionics and other mission-essential systems, and ensuring short notice, immediate response to critical technical issues.

These duties include heavy lifting, crawling into very confined spaces such as aircraft fuel tanks, working at heights of up to 12 meters from elevated platforms and scaffolds, safely handling aircraft fuel, hazardous materials and industrial processes, while also coping with extreme weather conditions of all kinds.

"All of this requires not only good physical fitness but also the flexibility and willingness to get the job done, whatever and wherever it may be," says CSA Vice Chairman Mr. Ben Pereira.



Good morale, team spirit and NICs' willingness to volunteer for extended time on deployment are key factors for ensuring mission fulfilment. The E-3A Component's operational support of ISAF from an air base within Afghanistan, where deployed Component personnel have a mandatory working week of up to 84 hours, has already entered its fourth year and is an excellent example of a context in which all these aspects are of great significance.

Speaking at the local CSA's New Year Reception in January this year, the Component Commander acknowledged this. "Whenever I see a new initiative at NATO level, I tell the people working on it that they can take the E-3A Component as a model of successful multi-national cooperation. We are smart defense in action. And I make sure to tell them this could not be achieved without the experience, commitment and continuity provided by our NATO civilian staff," he said.



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Royal Engineers Visit Amazon Bridge Site in Monte Cassino 70 Years Later

Story and photo by: VeShannah J. Lovelace SFC, USA JFC Naples Public Affairs Office

Naples, Italy – May 13 2014, 15 service members and civilians, representing 4 different nations from Joint Force Command Naples, paid homage to the Amazon Bridge site on the Rapido River at Monte Cassino in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the building of that bridge.

The trip was led by the Amazon Club, a dining club consisting of Royal Engineers based in Naples.

“It takes its name from the bridge that was built across the Rapido River exactly 70 years ago,” said British Army Col. David McIlroy, the Senior Royal Engineer at JFC Naples and President of the Amazon Club.

The Amazon Bridge took about 12 hours to build and was built over the Rapido River during the night of 12 and 13 May 1944, opening at 5:00 AM on the 13th. This was just one of the 2,494 bridges built by Allied engineers during the Italian Campaign.

“It was a bridge that was put in at significant cost. Of the lives lost on the British side on the day there were 15, and some 75 were injured during the build,” said Col. McIlroy.

An original painting by war artist Terence Cuneo depicting the action of the crossing of the Rapido Bridge hangs in the Royal Engineers Headquarters Mess in Chatham, England.

The Amazon Bridge holds major significance because the crossing of this bridge allowed the Allies to break through the impenetrable Gustav Line which turned the tide of the Italian Campaign. Prior to construction of the Amazon Bridge thousands of lives and equipment had been lost by the Allies in fruitless attempts to break through the Gustav Line, which reached from Ortona on the Adriatic across Italy to Minturno on the other side. It was made up of a series of fortifications, minefields and other strong points based on the rivers and mountains that cross Italy. Part of that line included the strong point of Cassino and the Rapido River which was the entry to the Liri Valley along Route 6 and the gateway to Rome.

The day of our trip started with a visit to the Cassino War cemetery in the same general area seated below the Abbey of Monte Cassino, a key site of the Italian Campaign. The Abbey overlooks the Liri Valley and caused problems for the advancing Armies. Sappers (a collective name for engineers) who lost their lives on the 12th and 13th are buried in this cemetery.

After paying our respects and admiring the beautifully maintained burial ground we made our way to the infamous Rapido River. Admittedly upon first site, the river did not



Cassino War cemetery

seem very imposing. I mentioned this to one of the American Army engineers on the trip, Lt. Col. Michael Biankowski, to which he quickly responded, “maybe, but you can’t get a tank across it.” That immediately put the significance of that, and all the other bridges, in perspective for me.

All the bridges built during the war were temporary structures (many reused in other locations throughout the war) as such the location we visited was not the exact location the bridge was built, however you could see it off in the distance. You could also see the Abbey looming above which helped the visitors envision the scene of those brave men building a bridge in the wee hours of the night under the cover of darkness while enduring heavy enemy fire.

As we watched the steady flow of the current pass along the river our host British veteran, Derek Flippance, a time-served Sapper and volunteer curator and researcher from the Royal Engineers Museum in Kent, England, provided us with an oral history of the conditions under which the bridge was built and gave us background information on the exact type of bridge and how it had to be constructed under those conditions.

The first piece of information we were provided, which again placed the events that took place in perspective, was the fact before the bridge was built the distance

across the river had to be measured. With that, and in full sight of the pace of the current, we listened as Mr. Flippance explained how the commander’s driver, who was the squadron’s strongest swimmer, swam across the river with a line tied to his ankle to measure the 80 foot gap.

“To do this he donned a black pullover, used black boot polish on his legs and dived in carrying a rope. He managed to swim across and they were in the act of pulling the rope tight to get a true crossing span when along the bank at the top a German patrol appeared. The person on the other end of the line saw the Germans, the guy in the water couldn’t see him because he was below them. The guy on the home bank began pulling him back and due to the current the swimmer ended up 30 yards downstream. In the end the gap was measured more by luck than judgment,” explained Mr. Flippance.

“To get to the bridge site they could only get there in the dark because the Germans overlooked the whole area. And you see the Rapido, imagine trying to swim across there when it’s in flood...with the Germans on one bank, the Indian military patrolling the other bank and the Indians weren’t friendly if they saw something moving in the dark they shot at it, they didn’t ask questions,” added Mr. Flippance.

We learned the details and timeline involved in constructing the 80 foot, double single, Bailey Bridge along with the adversity that accompanied it. The confusion created by open artillery fire, German guns firing smoke throughout the construction site, the loss of communications and installation of "runners" as a result, lorries and hay stacks set ablaze, taking on and suppressing enemy fire and dealing with casualties both wounded and dead were just some of the obstacles the Sappers faced that evening.

After our history lesson on the bridge the group placed a poppy wreath and memorial plaque near the site and observed a moment of silence in reverence to the brave Sappers who due to their heroic actions on the evening of May 12, 1944 made it possible for the allies to six days later break through the formidable Gustav Line and subsequently, take Rome and eventually conquer Italy.

"It's amazing how with their lives threatened and under horrible conditions what all these Soldiers did to achieve their objectives," said German Army Lt. Col. Hans Jakobi with JFC Naples CIMIC branch.

"Crossing this river was the key for this operation. The Allied Forces planned and built 8 bridges to bring all their armor on the other side because fighting infantry against infantry the German defenders had the better positions and to overwhelm

them could only be done with armor so these bridges were really the key to the whole operation," added Lt. Col. Jakobi.

The next stops on our battlefield tour were to a different part of the Rapido River to visit memorials dedicated to the US 34th Division who unsuccessfully tried to get over the Rapido North of Cassino January 24, 1944, but were held up in the mountains. We also visited another site in memoriam to the US 36th Texas Division who attempted to attack over the Rapido January 20, 1944 but were forced back after very heavy losses.

"That was an understatement. The 36th Texas Division got wiped out, there's no question about it," said Mr. Flippance.

As we stood at the memorial site we were shown where the water level would have been in winter or January when they tried to cross. During our visit there was a heavy current similar to a white water rapid. Sadly it was easy to see why they met their fate attempting to cross in that location.

The day ended with a visit to the San Pietro Infine museum and restaurant. The battle of San Pietro Infine occurred between December 8-17, 1943, and was a major campaign. The Allied Forces attacked from the south against the German's heavily fortified position in and around the town of San Pietro Infine located south of Monte Cassino. This battle is the first in which troops from the Italian Royal Army fought

alongside the Allies following the armistice with Italy.

The original town of San Pietro Infine was totally destroyed in a matter of hours during this battle. The museum is dedicated to and reflects the lives of the civilians who inhabited the town and escaped to caves during the battle for survival.

As with any great outing the day concluded with a group luncheon held at the restaurant at San Pietro Infine. This was a great opportunity to discuss and reflect amongst ourselves the significance of all we saw together throughout the day. It did not go unnoticed or unappreciated the diversity within the group. Among us there were British, Canadians, Germans, and Americans, engineers, infantrymen, women and civilians.

"To come here with serving NATO Soldiers is something really special. What has made it special as well is we've got some German NATO Soldiers with us. They've told us a lot of what happened from the German side which I find is great to know about to compare the two," said Mr. Flippance.

In the end I believe we all finished the day with a greater knowledge and appreciation for the engineer corps of all our respective countries.

Tourniquets and Training, NATO Civilian Pre-Deployment Training at Vyskov

Story by Andy Rogers, A3 JFC Brunssum

At 0600 on a cold late March morning, 10 staff from JFC Brunssum were to be found surrounded by baggage outside the warehouse waiting for their transport to Dusseldorf en-route to Vyskov in the Czech Republic for 7 days of NATO Civilian Pre-Deployment training.

This course is now mandatory in principle for all NATO civilians and has been running for some years. It is aimed to provide staff with the necessary skills to survive in a hostile environment as part of a deployed HQ and, most importantly, to know what to do when working with our military colleagues in some fairly high pressure situations.

Initially very sceptical about the course, I can report that the team who manage and run the course have actually got it about right and did not seek to spend the whole week teaching us how to be soldiers.

Vyskov training base itself is some 3 hours south of Prague by bus on one of the worse roads that I have ever been on and I lived in Belgium for 2 years. It sits at the bottom of a large military training area and is the main training base for the Czech army as well as being home to the British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATT) and the Counter-IED Centre of Excellence. On a Sunday night, however, it is a ghost town of epic, crumbling, communist 70s architecture.



Negotiating with an Afghan chief in his hut

Despite the somewhat daunting surroundings we were soon welcomed by the course administrator and settled into our very acceptable accommodation. The only disconcerting thing was the presence of body armour, helmet, sleeping bag and first aid kit in the room which was quickly followed by the issue of NBC clothing and respirator as well as a very fetching pair of what looked like plumbers overalls.

Saturday and Sunday passed in blur of lectures on first aid, map reading, survival, counter IED and an odd addition of a lecture on Gender issues. Kept well fed by the hardworking chef in the restaurant we gradually started to get the hang of it all. Inevitably the course is targeted at deployments to Afghanistan but this was not exclusive and most of the lessons taught are applicable wherever we might be sent.

Vyskov town itself is not a great run ashore. For a start it is a long walk from the base, particularly when it is raining, and, when you get there on a Sunday night, it is closed although, with our newly learned survival skills, we did manage to find a bar in the basement that sold very acceptable and well priced Czech beer.

On the Monday morning it was like someone had delivered an entire army overnight. All of a sudden, the camp was buzzing with soldiers heading off to lessons or up into the training area and we had another morning of lectures before our first foray into the training area. Meeting outside the accommodation block after lunch in full 'battle' gear we caused a degree of comment from the rest of the army trainees who believed that the BMATT had started to train combat plumbers!

Lesson 1 - transport trucks are very difficult to get into when wearing body armour, rucksack and helmet particularly when you are only 5'7" and the step in is higher than you can reach. Even worse when you are a 5' Italian lady from Naples. However, we soon developed a mechanism of 'launching' her into the truck every time we had to go somewhere.

The first afternoon's exercises consisted of a bit of negotiating with an Afghan chief in his hut, trying to remember all that we had been taught on not offending the locals, whilst making basic errors in radio procedures and heading off in the wrong direction across the wide plains of the training area.

Matters became a little more serious later on when we came across a 2 vehicle car crash with a number of casualties requiring the first of what would be many tourniquets.

Tired and not a little hungry, we eventually made it back to camp about 1800 in time for more filling Czech fare and a couple of well deserved beers.

Tuesday was more of the same with lectures in the morning and practical sessions on the training ground in the afternoon. This time we were stranded in a minefield and had to 'prod' our way out (really not a fun thing to do) as well as trying to find an IED command wire which 7 of us walked straight over without seeing.



Captured by some rebels

We also got to meet our very own survival trainer in his little forest camp all set up with bivouacs, water stills and fire making kit. We learnt very quickly that carrying a lighter is definitely the way ahead as all this rubbing of sticks and blocks of wood is quite frankly not very successful.

Wednesday morning brought NBC training – no big issue to the ex-military amongst us who have been donning really uncomfortable kit for decades but a bit of a surprise for the others. Following the classroom lecture on what various chemical agents can do to you with some very graphic images of the outcomes, coupled with the current situation in Syria this is a sobering piece of the course.

In the afternoon we mounted up into that truck for a 24 hour stint out on the training ground. Things had started to get more serious and we headed off with considerably heavier packs and a degree of nervousness. After a gentle introduction to some fire-fighting techniques we headed into the training area proper and were fairly quickly captured by some rebels whose mood had changed from reasonable to very grumpy and shouty in a couple of seconds.

Yes I know it is only an exercise and not for real but when you are lying on the ground with your body armour dumped on top of your head to keep you looking down, your watch has been taken and there is a boot on your back with a lot of screaming and shouting going on, it starts to get quite realistic. There are also ticks the size of small elephants walking across the ground in front of your face just looking for a juicy Brit to jump onto for a bit of a feed.

Eventually we were all suddenly friends again and we were sent on our way after a debrief from the resident psychologist. Not 200 yards down the track a team of two vehicles arrived to get us out of the area to safety – but – 500 yards further down we hit an IED and come under small arms fire and have to run for our lives under covering fire from the soldiers with us. Not wanting to make life easy, one of these soldiers promptly got shot requiring

him to be carried/dragged from the area and another tourniquet applied as well as a call for a medevac.

Later that evening we arrived at the 'forest camp' for a very uncomfortable and cold night in a large wooden barrack hut. To compound matters, late in the evening the camp came under attack and we were hurried into a shelter whilst mayhem carried on outside. Just when we thought it was over, the latest screaming casualty came running in to the shelter clutching the stump of her arm which proceeded to spray copious amounts of blood around. Quickly breaking out the next tourniquet, we managed to save her and eventually returned to the hut for a night of no sleep.

On our final morning in the field we headed off to the fire ground once more and had to complete a fire walk/run through a number of burning buildings; smoke filled cellars and walls with flames licking at your legs. Respirators on, we set off in pairs marvelling at our bravery.

The rest of the morning passed in a bit of a blur. I will not spoil the surprise for those who are going to the next course but it was a sobering, disorientating and uncomfortable 3 hours of captivity followed by a rescue and a wild tank ride across the range before being delivered back to the base for a well earned shower and lunch.

The course itself concludes with a presentation ceremony in the beautiful Vyskov Town Hall and a tour up the tower for a view of the surrounding countryside. In the evening the staff lay on a magnificent buffet and there was the opportunity for a few hours in Prague the following day whilst waiting for the plane home.

Overall this is a course that is well worth doing. Even after a 30 year military career, I learnt a huge amount. For those who are going on the next courses I would strongly advise that you spend time getting fit and breaking in new boots. The staff running the course are also to be commended on their professionalism, humour and friendliness as they patiently steered us through the perils of another day on the range.

Rapid Reaction Corps-France host the US Army Secretary during Rochambeau exercise.

Story by CPT Audrey Chauchiel, photos by RRC-France PAO

The Secretary of the United States Army, Mr John McHugh, recently conducted a tour through Europe and, on 15th May, he took time to meet staff from the French Rapid Reaction Corps while on exercise at Mailly, in the Champagne region of France.

The multi-national headquarters is participating in Exercise Rochambeau 2014, where it is commanding a large NATO force facing a complex crisis scenario. The exercise involves the participation of more than 3200 military personnel from 14 different nations, and Mr McHugh took the opportunity to observe the French Rapid Reaction Corps there, currently ready to fulfil its mission as the Land Component Command of NATO Response Force 2014.

The US Army Secretary emphasized the importance of such an involvement, adding : "whatever the future brings, we need to have a viable NATO Force at readiness providing the protection and assurances that it always has since its very beginning".

Mr McHugh concluded his visit of the exercise with a tour of the headquarters of the 28th US Infantry Division, who are participating in Rochambeau as a subordinate unit to the French Rapid Reaction Corps.



Mr McHugh welcomed by the RRC-France Commander, LTG Eric Margail at the entrance of the RRC-FR HQ in Mailly, France, deployed for Exercise Rochambeau 2014.

NATO Common Operational Picture (NCOP)

Story by MAJ Marcel MARTENS, LT Gregory MARKHAM and MSGT Serdar KOCAK



In today's fast paced modern warfare, usually comprised of multiple geographically dispersed Component Commands, using numerous Functional Services, a single Situational Awareness Picture is vital to ensure that each entity and sailor/soldier have a common unified vision of the Commander's intentions, actions and force locations. To do this the command must incorporate a Common Operational Picture. This picture must depict items such as current operations, possible Courses of Action (COAs) for future coordinated efforts, friendly and adversary forces, their operational capabilities, logistics capacities, and climatic conditions, to name a few, and all of this must be displayed in an up to date real time operational picture. To do all of this, JFCBS utilizes the NATO Common Operational Picture, or simply named NCOP.

The NCOP software is able to filter large amounts of data that is provided by each sub-command, and other important data providers, via their own specific suite of Functional Services (FS). It is from this information, that the NCOP managers, located in the JFCBS JOC, create Information Products (IPs). These IPs can then be displayed with a few clicks of the button, and show the Commander, or any of the NCOP users, exactly what is relevant to them, the entire battle space operations, or any other information of interest.

The NCOP can also define pre-designated views that enable the NATO Commanders and Coalition Forces to have one unified picture open for discussion or planning. Whether the Commanders want to see the same Area of Interest, a specific mission, certain sets of enemy or friendly forces, it does not matter. With NCOP, all personnel who are interested or involved in the operation,

can view the same information at the same time, with the same geographical area displayed in the background from anywhere in the world using their own computer or war-room assets. This vastly increases the entire team's situational awareness, which leads to enhanced coordination and de-conflicted and coordinated planning, thus ensuring a fast and decisive allied victory! Looking at the history of the COP applications at NATO, we find that it started in May 2002, when we began to use the Initial Common Operational Picture (ICOP). Due to limited functionality and flexibility the ICOP fell short of user's expectations. To fill this gap it was decided to create a more capable and complex Joint Common Operational Picture (JCOP). The JCOP, provided by the organisation now called the NCI Agency, was able to provide an interim capability to support allied/NATO operations. The JCOP was then tested during exercise Steadfast Joist in 2008 (SFJT08), and based on its performance, it became the approved COP for NATO at that time. The final step to create a more robust and fully integrated Common Operational Picture, was fulfilled by the development of the NATO Common Operational Picture (NCOP). By the end of 2013, the software developers at Thales, who created the NCOP, stated that it was ready to be deployed for its first operational test, in Exercise Steadfast Jazz 2013 (SFJZ13). The decision for the JTFHQ to use the NCOP software instead of JCOP during our NRF certification exercise SFJZ13 paid numerous dividends in the ability of the JFC to have a vastly more integrated Situational Awareness picture. SFJZ13 was very successful and part of that success came from the use of the NCOP software, which proved to us that considerable progress was made in our COP.

NCOP is interoperable with most of the operational functional services, such as ICC (AirC2IS), LC2IS, MCCIS, JOCWatch, JOIIS, LOGFAS and NIRIS, just to name a few, that all provide data to the NCOP. The data is then filtered to create Information Products (IPs) that fulfil the Commander's intent/guidance or desired information requirements and then gets displayed to the entire JTF and other commands to not only see the picture, but to use it for their own unique situations.

On the JOC IMS Portal page there is link to the NCOP for anyone who is interested in seeing what this amazing Functional Service has to offer. The portal also contains more NCOP information, a Computer Based Training (CBT) application, JFCBS NCOP SOP/ SOIs and numerous power-point presentations for the novice user. Check it out and train yourself as NCOP will be used in our upcoming Operations and Exercises. If you have any questions or concerns please contact the JOC IM section, who develop and maintain the COP.

Burns Night at Kasteel Limbricht

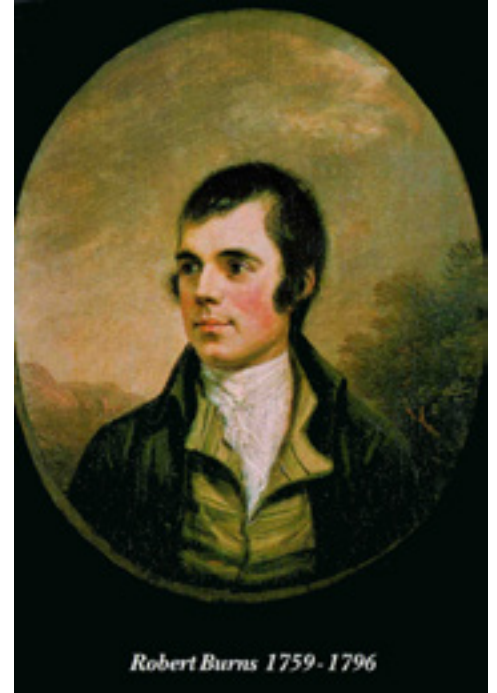
Story by Wing Commander Allan Steele JFC Brunssum Legad Office

The British Officers' Club teamed up with the Allied Officers' Association to host another successful Burns Night at Kasteel Limbricht in February.

The evening was a celebration of the life and work of Scotland's national bard, Robert Burns, an Ayrshire ploughman born into humble circumstances in 1759 who is still celebrated the world over for his literary genius, humanity and belief in international brotherhood. The evening opened with the traditional "Address to the Haggis", which was delivered by Scotsman, Wing Commander Allan Steele, armed with both dirk and dram, closely followed by stirring military pipe music of "Scottish Soldier" to really set the tone.

Readings then followed, with Major John MacLeod enlightening guests by providing an analysis of Burns' life. This was followed by Major Mike White toasting the female guests (a nod to Burns' renowned love of the fairer sex) and Lieutenant Commander Michelle Ward replying on behalf of "the lassies" (a fitting gesture acknowledging Burns' advocacy for equality). The guest of honour, Air Marshal Graham Stacey, touched upon his own Scottish heritage and recalled Burns' internationalist instincts by re-emphasizing the need for nations to continue to work together, rather than growing apart.

Whilst Robert Burns is undoubtedly a symbol of Scotland, like golf, whisky, the telephone and penicillin (the list goes on!), his appeal is truly ubiquitous – his work belongs to all of humanity and to every nation, making the celebration of Burns Night particularly apt for our international environment.



Brunssum Team GB – Vise Marathon Fundraising Challenge

Story by Corporal Zoe Fowler GBR

On a cold, wet and windy 11th May 2014, 15 highly motivated (yet mostly under trained) RAF, Army and Civilian members of JFCBS Brunssum set off to take part in the Maasmarathon de la Basse Meuse in Vise, Belgium. The day would bring blood, sweat, tears, chaffing and many many blisters, but our story begins in Jan 2014.....

After taking part in a half marathon in the UK, once the pain had subsided and the bad memories faded, the time was right to fulfill a lifelong ambition....to run a marathon! Having missed out on the ballot for the London Marathon, I investigated the local area and discovered the Vise Marathon in Belgium, close by and most importantly flat! Wanting to spread the love, I invited all UK personnel at Brunssum to take part in the day as not only was there a marathon distance but also a half marathon and 9.1k run. This was also a perfect opportunity to raise some money for a charity and burn off those Christmas calories. After much canvassing (harassment/peer pressure) we had amassed 21 people to take part in all 3 events. With so many worthwhile charities out there a vote took place and the majority decided on The Royal British Legion, a British charity providing financial, social and emotional support to members and veterans of the British Armed Forces, their families and dependants. The hardest part was not the run itself, but the dedication required to train for the event, rearranging your life to accommodate those long slow runs. Due to fulltime work, 2 kids, a husband and a dog, my long runs began every Saturday morning at 0630 whilst they were happily tucked up in bed. These were made even more grueling in those dark cold winter months.

As the weeks went by so did the distances, as did the increase of injuries. Numerous



A very proud team

team members sustained problems with their joints and muscles, sadly leading to some having to drop out from the event. This left us more determined to complete it in memory of those that could no longer join us on the day.

Race day arrived, as did the clouds and rain! In typical Military fashion this only made us more determined, 'if it ain't raining it ain't trainin'. The marathon runners were the first to set off at 0905, followed by the 9.1k at 0930 and lastly the Half at 1100. As the 4 marathoners stood there at the start line at 0900, the anticipation, excitement and nervousness was overwhelming. It was at this point I thought to myself 'what on earth have I done', but it was too late to back out, there was too much charity money and pride at stake. So we wished each other good luck and with a bang we set off for 42.195k. We all started off well,

steady paced, adrenaline flowing nicely... until the head wind hit, which lasted most of the race. At times it was a battle not to be blown over, let alone go forward. But still we carried on come rain and shine until each one of us crossed that finish line. First in the team to cross was Brian Hagan at 3:13, followed by Daz Crowley at 3:46. Next up was Zoe Fowler at 4:19 (go me!) and at 4:52 was Dave Manning. All half marathon runners crossed the finish line between 1:42 and 2:22, with big Dan Tennant finishing his 9.1k run in 45 minutes. Big congratulations to everyone in the team who achieved so much, and for those that got those well earned PBs, but most of all by raising just under 2000 GBP for the RBL. We should all be proud. Now it's all over would I do it again?... Maybe I will consider it once I stop wearing flip flops in my uniform and can do up my trainers!

Major Fabio Ranieri

Country : Italy
Location : Southern Europe
Land Boundaries : 1.899 km
Coastline : 9.226 km
Population : 59,943,933 (2013 estimate)
Capital : Rome
President : Giorgio Napolitano
Climate : The climate varies considerably from the north to the south of Italy.

In the north of the country - the area between the Alps and the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines - the climate is harsh, with very cold winters and very hot, particularly humid summers. In central Italy the climate is milder, with a smaller difference in temperature between summer and winter and a shorter and less intense cold season than in the north; summers are longer, but the sultriness of the northern cities is mitigated by the sea. In southern Italy and the islands winters are never particularly harsh; spring and autumn temperatures are similar to those reached in the summer in other areas of Italy.

Economy:

GDP : \$ 1.848 trillion
GDP per CAPITA : \$ 30.218
GDP per Sector : agriculture: 1.8%; industry: 24.9%; services: 73.3% (2010 est.)

Budget

Revenues : \$ 956.6 billion (2012 estimate)
Expenses : \$ 1.014 trillion (2012 estimate)
Currency : Euro (€)

Industries: Italy has a smaller number of global multinational corporations than other economies of comparable size, but there is a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises, notoriously clustered in several industrial districts, which are the backbone of Italian industry. This has produced a manufacturing sector often focused on the export of niche market and luxury products, that if on one side is less capable to compete on the quantity, on the other side is more capable of facing the competition from China and other emerging Asian economies based on lower labor costs, with higher quality products.

Exports : \$ 483.3 billion (2013 est.) Engineering products, textiles and clothing, production machinery, motor vehicles, transport equipment, chemicals; food, beverages and tobacco; minerals, and nonferrous metals.

Imports : \$ 469.7 billion (2012 est.) Engineering products, chemicals, transport equipment, energy products, minerals and nonferrous metals, textiles and clothing; food, beverages, and tobacco.



When did you arrive in the Netherlands and which position have you taken?

I arrived in the Netherlands around the end of August 2012; since then I have been working as Staff Officer / Information Operations Targeting within the Effects and Influence Branch (J3).

Tell us about your military career.

I joined the Army at the age of 17, in 1986, as an enlisted soldier in the Artillery Branch. I reached the rank of Warrant Officer Class 2 and was, subsequently, commissioned as an officer in 2001. I have worked in both tactical and staff-level appointments within national and NATO environments - mainly in Exercises & Training, Intelligence, Human Intelligence & Counterintelligence and Information Operations. My last post, before being assigned to JFC Brunssum, was at the NATO Rapid Deployable Corps - Italy, located near Milan.

Do you have any experience with other international missions?

I worked at the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps Headquarters, in Mönchengladbach (Germany), as a Senior Non-Commissioned officer, from 1997 to 1999. I deployed several times in Peace Keeping Operations / Monitoring Missions, as follows:

1 year in Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia Herzegovina as an EU Monitor (2000-2001); 2 times with the Kosovo Force (2004-2005), several times in Afghanistan/ ISAF (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009) and 1 year in Iraq at NATO's Training Mission in that country (2009-2010).

Tell us about your job and what kind of challenges you face.

Being a member of the Effects & Influence Branch is definitely interesting. As an Information Operations Targeting Staff Officer I have to deal with a number of challenges related to the communications environment and related effects. The great opportunity to work in an Operational- level Headquarters such as JFC Brunssum is surely unique and full of positive aspects. JFC professional development is a valuable asset that contributes to improved motivation coupled with a wider awareness of NATO's military doctrine, processes and procedures.

Is your family here with you?

Yes. My wife, Anna, is here with me. We live in Brunssum, not far from the JFC compound and we both enjoy living in the Netherlands. We are happy to take advantage of this great opportunity to visit the surrounding areas and better understand the local culture, community and traditions.

What are your hobbies?

Reading (mainly history, geopolitics), listening to classical music, hiking, travelling and discovering new places, diving and parachuting. Besides this I love university studies: I have a Bachelor's Degree in Political Sciences / International Relations, a Master's Degree in Foreign Languages with a focus on History and Literature, and a post-graduate Master's (1st Level) in Strategic Communications within International Organizations & Enterprises.

What do you like in your job?

What I like most is being a member of a multinational environment and having the chance to increase my professional background and knowledge by being exposed to my international colleagues. I really like my job and the whole J3 / Effects and Influence Branch with its members. Also, I had the chance to participate in several exercises, conferences and international forums related to the Information Operations world and provide my contribution to the NATO School Oberammergau as a mentor and facilitator for the Info Ops courses.

Your future plans?

I hope, upon return to Italy in 2015, to continue working within a NATO multinational Staff. Moreover, I would like to continue my civil studies about International relations and the geopolitical environment.

“Help the Afghan Children” Campaign on Turkish National Sovereignty and Children’s Day, 23 April 2014

Story by Engin YÜKSEL Of3 Turk Army



Turkish military personnel hand out the collected school appliances to the Afghan children.

23 April is one of the most important days in Turkish history because it is the date that the Grand National Assembly of the new and independent State of Turkey was inaugurated, in the capital city of Ankara in 1920, even before the proclamation of the Republic in 1923. Five years later, M.Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, dedicated April 23rd to the children of Turkey to emphasize that they are the future of the new nation, and since then, this day has been celebrated as “National Sovereignty and Children’s Day”.

The international aspect of April 23rd is best symbolized by the organization of the “international festival” hosted by Turkey since 1979. At that festival, children from more than 40 countries arrive in Turkey, celebrate Children’s Day and become familiar with one another’s culture and traditions. It is believed that memories of the event in children’s minds will contribute to a peaceful future and promote solidarity amongst nations, as intended by M.Kemal Atatürk, within the policy of “peace at home, peace in the world”. Accordingly, this year the 36th International Children’s Festival will be hosted by Turkey with the participation of thousands of children from many nations.

In recognition of 23 April, the JFC Brunssum Turkish Delegation planned and led a donation campaign which aimed at collecting school supply materials in order to support Afghan children. The campaign gave JFC Brunssum members an opportunity to contribute to the future of Afghanistan by motivating Afghan children in their education. Therefore, between 10 and 30 March, all JFCBS members were invited to make donations which may be “inconsequential for them [donators] but invaluable to Afghan children”. The campaign started with the placing of donation boxes in the Miners Rest, JFC Brunssum Library, International Conference Centre, Alliance Restaurant, NCIA Sector Brunssum, Geilenkirchen Air Base Turkish NSE, MCCE/Eindhoven, and NAPMA, accompanied by radio announcements (CFN and AFN), e-mails and flyers. During the campaign, aware of a responsibility in shaping the future of Afghanistan, JFCBS personnel showed their determination to help Afghan children and made huge contributions. Nearby, NAPMA, NCIA Sector Brunssum, AFNORTH, Geilenkirchen Air Base, and MCCE/Eindhoven personnel contributed precious donations. Moreover, the JFC Brunssum International Spouses Club made a 500 Euro contribution in support of the campaign. As a result a

total of almost 4000 pieces of school material were collected, classified, packed and sent to Kabul, Afghanistan.

Education in Afghanistan has been severely affected as a result of decades of war, civil unrest, internal conflict and political instability leading, in many areas of the country, to 39% adult literacy¹. However, since 2002, the educational system has made substantial progress and, accordingly, there has been a sevenfold increase in the enrollment of students according to the Afghan Ministry of Education.

In an effort to promote educational activities in Afghanistan every effort will be made to ensure the materials dispatched as a result of this campaign are used to good effect.

The JFC Brunssum Turkish Delegation sincerely thanks all those who contributed to this exceptionally worthy effort in direct support of Afghan children. We also thank ISAF HQs who ensured the educational materials sent to them were delivered to Afghan children in need via appropriate Afghan authorities.

1 UNICEF Afghanistan Country Office Education Factsheet, November 2011, (http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/ACO_Education_Factsheet_-_November_2011_.pdf)

Tribute to Lieutenant Colonel Steven P. Milliron

Former members from J3 LAND OPS are deeply saddened to learn of the death of Lieutenant Colonel Steven P. Milliron, US Army Aviation (AV). He served as a Deputy LANDOPS Branch Head at the Allied Joint Force Command (JFC) Brunssum 2006-2009. LTC Milliron's main focus was co-ordination of establishment, training, equipping and maturing of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police. He was an author of the Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) concept of operations. For his outstanding service LTC Steven Milliron received a JFC Brunssum Commander Commendation from General Egon Ramms.



Lieutenant Colonel Steven P. Milliron was a graduate of the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He commanded three troops: D and F Troops in the 2d Squadron, 1st Cavalry, Fort Hood, Texas and D Troop, 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry at Fort Polk, Louisiana. His further assignments included serving as S3 of the 3d Squadron, 6th Cavalry and Executive Officer of the 6th Cavalry Brigade, both in Korea.

Upon his return to the USA LTC Milliron was appointed as the Commandant of the Army Joint Support Team-Nellis, the Army Liaison Officer to the Air Force Air-Ground Operations School (AGOS) at Nellis AFB, Nevada. He was responsible for the Army academics that support AGOS' Terminal Attack Controller Course (TACC), Air Liaison Officer Qualification Course and the Joint Firepower Course. He was an author and co-author of a number of articles on Joint Terminal Attack Controller's (JTAC) training and tactics that are still in use in the US Army War College and Air Force University.

LTC Milliron's last assignment was as the State Inspector General at the Nevada National Guard, Carson City, Nevada. His dedication to the service,

excellent leadership and exemplary accomplishments were recognised by the Secretary of the Air Force Office in June 2013 when he and his staff from the Nevada National Guard Inspector General's Office received the 2012 Lt. Gen. John Flynn Inspector General Award. This was the first time the Nevada National Guard Inspector General's team won the Flynn competition and specifically in a State category.

Lieutenant Colonel Steven P. Milliron lost his fight with cancer and died on 10 May 2014. He leaves a wife, Tamara, daughter, Tiana and son, Ryan

This tragic loss comes as a huge blow to the Operations Division and broader JFC Brunssum community. We will miss our good comrade and friend who was always ready to assist others with his advice and happy to share a good sense of humour.

Did you
know



How the Dutch Keep Their Land Dry

Source: Delta Werken Online, Composed by Ed Frieser



The completion of the Delta Works was achieved when the Oosterschelde storm surge barrier, which eventually cost 2.5 billion Euros, was officially opened by HM Queen Beatrix on October 4th 1986

Summer is approaching and we are all looking forward to enjoy summer with sun, water and beaches. At present nobody wants to think of rain and storm, typical Dutch weather conditions. But speaking about storm brings me to the Oosterschelde Dam and the museum nearby in the Province of Zeeland, a great tourist attraction. The dam is a massive construction that was built as part of the so-called Delta Works. It is absolutely worthwhile to pay a visit, but so are other constructions that protect us from the sea. Maybe it is an idea for the upcoming summer to explore how we keep the Netherlands dry. The museum near the Oosterschelde dam teaches young and old how the Dutch do that. As a teaser let me give you a little bit of background.

Disasters

For the past 2000 years, inhabitants of the Netherlands have often had to cope with flood disasters. Some examples: St. Elizabeth floods (1404, 1421), St. Felixflood (1530), all Saints flood (1570), Christmas flood (1717), Zuider Zee flood (1916) and the flood in Zeeland of 1953. The Netherlands always had to fight the sea.

The flood of 1953

The name 'Netherlands' gives a clue to the problem: 'Nether' means 'low'. It literally means 'The Low Countries', in French Les Pays Bas. Some parts of the Netherlands are up to 6 meters below sea level. When a storm develops and the wind stirs up the waves, the Dutch coastal area can become flooded. The last time this happened on a large scale was over fifty years ago in 1953. During the night of Saturday 31 January to Sunday 1 February 1953 the Province of Zeeland was hit by a heavy north-western storm pushing the water to a level of 4 to 6 meters above Normal Amsterdam Level (NAP) and breached the dams that protected the land from flooding. More than 150,000 hectares of land were flooded. Almost 2000 people died and many of the livestock were swept away by the fast moving water.

The Delta Works

Studies, conducted already in 1937 by Rijkswaterstaat (Department of Public Works), showed that safety in many parts of the Netherlands could not be guaranteed at times of storms and high sea levels. In the densely populated areas near the river mouths of the Rhine, the Meuse, and the Schelde rivers, it

proved very difficult to build new dikes or strengthen the original ones. The first solution was to close all the estuaries in the south-west: the Western Schelde, the Eastern Schelde, the Haringvliet, and the Brouwershavense Gat. This proposal was christened 'the Deltaplan'.

The first works

In 1950, the first river mouths of the Brielse Gat and the Botlek near Rotterdam were closed. The plan was to build the remaining dams in the following decades. Unfortunately though, the infamous flood of 1953 prevented this from happening immediately. The first dam construction between 1957 and 1961 was the Zandkreek Dam, which connects North-Beveland with South-Beveland. The second dam, the Veerse Gat Dam connects North-Beveland with Walcheren. The Veerse Gat Dam was constructed between 1958 and 1961. By 1958 the first Deltawork was already operational. It was the storm barrier in the river Hollandse IJssel. This barrier (not a dam) was of great importance because it protected the densely populated western part of the Netherlands against future flooding. Three years later, in 1961, two more mouths were closed: the Veerse Gat and the Zandkreek.

The water between these dams soon became fresh and is now known as the Veerse Meer (Lake of Veere); today a great recreational lake. Together, these two dams cut off the Veerse Meer from the Eastern Schelde and the North Sea.



Overview Delta Works

Haringvliet sluices and Brouwers dam

An enormous array of sluices was built in the mouth of the Haringvliet in order to drain off excess water from the River Rhine. The sluices are able to be opened during very cold winters, to prevent the tide from freezing. This could be necessary to prevent the freezing of the large Dutch rivers. It was therefore, only in emergency situations, that salt water from the North Sea would be allowed to enter the freshwater Haringvliet. After the construction of the Haringvliet dam, the Haringvliet gradually became fresh. By 1971, the seventeen sixty-metre-wide sluices were fully operational. The Brouwers dam, south of the Haringvliet dam, was finished almost a year later.

Oosterschelde or Eastern Schelde dam

The completion of the Delta Works was achieved when the Oosterschelde storm surge barrier, which eventually cost

2.5 billion Euros, was officially opened by HM Queen Beatrix on October 4th 1986. The storm surge barrier of the Oosterschelde is, without any doubt, the most impressive storm surging structure of the Netherlands. According to the original plans, the Eastern Schelde would be closed, just like the other river mouths. The water enclosed behind the dam would therefore become fresh, exactly like the water in the Haringvliet and the Lake of Veere. However, following resistance to the construction of a closed dam - people were concerned that the unique salt water environment of the Eastern Schelde would cease to exist - the Dutch government agreed, in 1976, to an alternative plan: instead of building a closed dam, an open barrier would be built, containing a number of sluices that would only be closed during heavy storms and high water levels. The unique freshwater environment and the favourable fishery conditions would be maintained. Sixty-two openings, each forty metres wide, would be installed to allow as much salt water through as possible. It was supposed to maintain the tidal movement. The Eastern Schelde storm surge barrier turned out to be one of the biggest structures of the world. The chance to have another flood has now decreased to once per 4,000 years. Moreover, the storm surge barrier should not have to be replaced in the next two hundred years. Hopefully, one does not have to think about a new solution until the middle of the 21st Century.

Significance of the Delta Works

Besides shortening the total length of the dikes by 700 kilometres, the Delta Works had many other advantages. Firstly, the agricultural freshwater supply was improved. Because the border

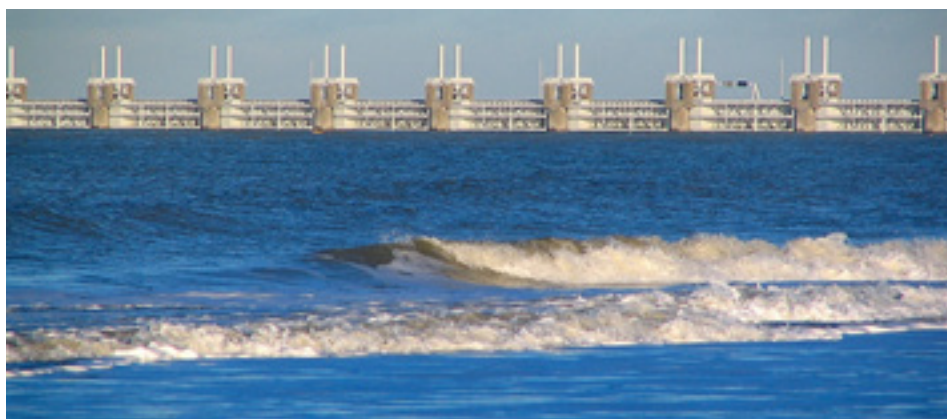
between freshwater and saltwater was moved further west, less freshwater was required to balance the freshwater-saltwater division. The excess water could be transported to the north of the Netherlands, in the direction of the IJsselmeer (IJssel lake), where extra freshwater was welcomed to improve the water conditions.

Secondly, the complete water balance of the Delta area improved. Thanks to the construction of the major and auxiliary dams, the streams in this area were able to be manipulated more easily. Different types of sluices made it possible to allow fresh water in, or polluted or excess water out.

Thirdly, the construction of the Delta Works encouraged traffic between the many islands and peninsulas. Large parts of the province of Zeeland had literally been isolated for centuries. The building of the Zeeland Bridge together with a tunnel under the Westerschelde in 2003, also helped increase mobility.

Fourthly, inland waterway shipping was supported by the Delta Works. In 1976, Belgium and the Netherlands signed a contract that would regulate shipping between the ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam. Obviously, this agreement had to be taken into account when building the Delta Works.

Finally, the Delta Works influenced new developments in the areas of nature and recreation. Understandably, a number of nature reserves were irreparably damaged, but as compensation, new nature reserves have emerged at different sites. Nowadays, dry shores are sometimes used as recreational areas. Due to the recent climate change and the rise in sea level, high water levels are more likely to occur near the coasts of Zeeland and Holland. The number of people that live in the polders, several metres below sea level, has in the meantime drastically increased since the flood of 1953. The general consensus among scientists, however, is that the reinforcement of dikes and the construction of dams and barriers is in no way the final siege in the battle against the sea. It is not for nothing that the code of arms of the Province of Zeeland shows the Dutch Lion standing half way in the sea and bears the motto: "Luctor et Emergo" meaning "I struggle and will survive".



Oosterscheldebijluchtdam – Delta Works

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- Each JFCBS ID card holder can take up to a maximum of 3 persons with him or her for the same discount prices mentioned above.
- JFCBS ID card holders obtain discount by showing their JFCBS ID card at the reception desk of Snow World.
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Full name:

Extension:



Winners Phantasialand

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Tickets won by:

Neil Corless NCI Agency Sector Brunssum

Alexandra Hartwig Director of Management Division

Wiel Crombach Base Support Group Division

Film Review



X-Men: Days of Future

"Well," deadpans Ian McKellen's Magneto, sizing up the X-Men's position from the rubble of a robo-wrecked future, "it's complicated." You can say that again, but the beauty of Bryan Singer's mutant-verse comeback is the light work he makes of potentially heavy lifting. Faced with huge fan hopes (beloved comic source, Singer's return), a crowded superhero market, two X-teams, temporal shenanigans and geographical jumps, Singer has refreshed the series with blasts of his original entries' X-factors: vim, levity, clarity and a sincere, soulful grip on the emotional stakes involved.

You know you're in sure hands as soon as Patrick Stewart intones The Themes – faith, destiny, hope – over shots of a stormy (honestly, the weather's foul) 2023 apocalypse, where mutant-killing robo-whatsit Sentinels have set Prof X a poser: "Is the future truly set?" The test for that question is a madly ambitious tale of choice and redemption, ushered briskly across space and time as 2023 Wolverine's consciousness is zapped into his 1973 body. His task: to fix the First Class team's fractures and fix the future.

Problem is, James McAvoy's Xavier has lost hope and started moping around like Bruce Wayne in a mega-sulk. Mystique (Jennifer Lawrence) will take some dissuading from her mission to kill Sentinel creator Bolivar Trask (Peter Dinklage), an assassination that will inadvertently escalate Trask's Sentinel programme. Dovetailing between Xavier/Raven's arcs, Singer draws heart from their past ties and heft from those chunky questions of causality and ethics that time-travel tales crack open.

Repetitive exposition sometimes nulls the pacing, but, just as Wolverine's violent way with kitchen-ware silences Xavier's gas-bagging during one dicey situation, so the plot restarts fast. From Quicksilver's (Evan Peters) delicious prison-bust show-stopper to a wicked mutant tag-team use of the X-Jet, Singer revels in the cool shit. Yet what impresses most is how close he sticks to Mystique and Xavier, even as football stadiums are raised for a multi-level but cannily (and literally...) contained climax.

Lawrence honours increased screen-time with emotional conviction, wounded eyes speaking volumes. Indeed, old and new cast-members shine through the screen-crowd. More McKellen would have been nice but Stewart monologues magnificently, Michael Fassbender relishes '70s Magneto's cruel cool, Dinklage makes Trask more than a 'tache-twirling tyrant and Hugh Jackman's sardonic Logan never gets old (and he has a 20-year-old's bum).

The climax revels in temporal paradoxes, but it also offers simple, smart pleasures, locking some plot threads into place and opening others teasingly. As for post-credits pleasures, future X-cursions look triply exciting after this assured reclamation of distinct comic-book turf. If The Amazing Spider-Man 2 showed how superhero cinema could become stuck in a rut, Singer's brisk, bracing old/new mash shows us the antidote. As Beast puts it, "Power's back on."

Verdict: *With style, heart and thrills, Singer has nailed the most ambitious X-flick yet. Popcorn pizzazz combines with X2's emotional sweep and something extra: a platform for the X-Men's screen survival.*

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