



One of the top-notch retired German servicemen, General Henning von Ondarza paid a visit to the Headquarters Multinational Corps Northeast on August 6, 2008.

Visiting the Headquarters

General Henning von Ondarza was warmly welcomed and hosted by the MNC NE Deputy Commander Major General Ole Køppen and Chief of Staff Brigadier General Josef Heinrichs. General von Ondarza already visited the Headquarters seven years ago and so it must have been very interesting for him to be briefed on the Corps' development and achievements. "Seven years ago it was still a kind of building up the headquarters. Of course, the main difference was you did not have your Afghanistan experience and you did not have a perspective to go back there in 2010. Nobody was thinking about that kind of mission those days", said General von Ondarza. For the General this Headquarters is unique for one reason. Once he was commander of the headquarters "Allied Land Forces Schleswig-Holstein and Jutland" (LANDJUT) in Rendsburg, Germany, which in fact was to form the nucleus of the Multinational Corps Northeast in the years to come. "I asked many questions and I always compared this Headquarters with the other Headquarters in Rendsburg, so I have got a very good picture now".

Polish connections

General's connections with Poland have had a long tradition. First of all, family of von Ondarza owned a farm near Leszno for several generations. From time to time he visits the area and meets his Polish friends. Secondly, when General retired in 1994, he became an adviser in the Polish Ministry of Defence. "I had two quite interesting years in Warsaw", General recollected his cooperation with among others (vice) admiral Piotr Kołodziejczyk, Jerzy Milewski and Zbigniew Okoński. He took part in numerous discussions about Poland's membership in NATO, military training or sending officers to SHAPE or Brussels. In a conversation with Jerzy Milewski, General von Ondarza gave an idea to move the staff from Rendsburg to Poland. "Telling the people in Poland that you are joining NATO and what you will do there is fine but the people need something concrete", he said. Therefore, General von Ondarza can be treated as one of the authors of the concept that led to the creation of the Multinational Corps Northeast.

General von Ondarza does not advise the Polish Ministry of Defence any more but he still maintains some connections with prominent people from the world of the army and politics. However, one of the highlights of his life was a private audience with one of the most famous Poles, Pope John Paul II.

Sharing military experience

General von Ondarza is very fond of his military career as he achieved a lot. He also gathered valuable experience and decided to share it with others. Therefore, when he retired in 1994, he not only advised in Poland, but also in Georgia – "It was a very interesting and very different world from here. I was helping them to develop structures, further modern leadership or to improve the conditions of a military hospital; I advised what to do with retired generals – a wide range of issues! - Germany also helped them financially". Subsequently, General got involved in the industry – "I joined three different industries in Germany and France. I travelled for them especially in the Arabian countries, Romania, the Czech Republic", etc.

As a result, General von Ondarza is very much involved with the current developments in the world of the army. "Technological jump in the last 50 years, not to speak 100 years, is tremendous. Let us take communication as an example. As a commander you are able to reach an individual soldier in the field and see the picture he is seeing. So the information flow is tremendous in the strategic and global sense. But one has to realize that there is a danger to over- control the people. There is an old tradition in the German Army that you give a task and then you give a means to do it. But you have to trust your people because they have expertise to do their job. Now you can always interfere with the action, so you can kill real initiative of the people", explains General. Apart from possible dangers, General also notices chances, like for example saving manpower due to the technological advance.

It is important to state that the nature of warfare and challenges in the battlefield in Iraq or Afghanistan differ significantly from the ones faced during the World War II. "It is a very different thing to fight terrorist. It is not enough to have weapons; the key factor is to get the hearts of the people and their support for military operation to secure the area, liberty and human rights", General explains. "In the future you cannot exclude tensions and war; it belongs to the nature of

human beings. In the old days it was meant for example to get more land, now governments have to secure for example free trade and resources like oil – maybe water supply soon. Therefore, one of the tasks of the armed forces is to adjust to changes – "The armed forces are always developing depending on the mission, challenges or dangers that have changed. It is a permanent process and you can see it also in this Headquarters: basically you can see the same line like in my Headquarters back in Rendsburg but the mission has changed so there have been a lot of changes as well".