

First impressions of Afghanistan

Written by N. Peter H. Christensen
Thursday, 18 February 2010 15:40



First impressions by Lieutenant Colonel Peter Christensen, Danish Army, of the MNC NE way to Afghanistan and his first two weeks spent at the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Joint Command in Kabul. More than two weeks have passed since the first group of personnel of the Multinational Corps Northeast (MNC NE) reached Kabul.

Heading for Afghanistan

On Monday, 1st February, at 15:00 hours we gathered in the auditorium of the Headquarters, where our German Commander Lieutenant General Rainer Korff gave his farewell speech to the first chalk of personnel deploying to Afghanistan. Two military priests also blessed us. Most importantly, we learned it had been agreed with the French NATO Rapid Reaction Corps that they would replace us in Afghanistan in the beginning of August. Sounds like a good plan.

On Tuesday, 2nd February, the meeting was scheduled for 14:30 hours. It was the final time to say goodbye to the second team and those who stayed in Szczecin. At 15:00 hours, it was confirmed that everybody was present. After the last kiss and hug, three buses escorted by the police drove us to the airport. At 16:45 hours Deputy Commander Major General Ole Køppen gave his farewell speech, after which we passed through the passport control and went on board of the C-17 transport aircraft. With a snowstorm on the way, we took off half an hour earlier than planned. The crew got the plane in the air despite the snow and fierce winds. Flight

First impressions of Afghanistan

Written by N. Peter H. Christensen
Thursday, 18 February 2010 15:40

time: 9 hours. We landed at the Kabul International Airport (KAIA) at 02:30 Szczecin local time, which was 06.00 Kabul local time because the time difference is 3 ½ hours. I didn't have much sleep en route.

First night in Kabul

After the in-processing (ID cards, dinning tickets, e-mail accounts and accommodation), I moved into a tent which was a temporary solution. I was told that I could expect the final accommodation in one or two weeks. The heat was turned up in the tent, so it was very hot with the space in the top cabin. Any movement on the bunk bed made the whole structure swing. I did not have much chance to sleep well during the first night.

Work

We met our predecessors on Thursday. The day went through in accordance with "the Buddy" principle: the "old" shows the "new" around introducing to people, workplace, daily rhythm, procedures, etc. I was assigned to one office with our Senior Danish Officer Søren B. Bojesen. Since there are five workstations and only three of us in the office, there is plenty of space. I work in the CJ2 area supporting the users and being a project officer for implementation of a lot of new NATO facilities. I expect there is going to be plenty of work within the next 6 months.

Life at KAIA

The camp has everything you need within the walking distance. It is very dusty, too. But when the temperature comes up to 10 degrees, it becomes very nice. Snow and rain came on Saturday night. We woke up in a white camp. However, most of the snow melted during the day when the thermometer's quicksilver crept up to 6 degrees. But I saw several snowmen and snowball fights in the camp – of course we could play :)

Afghanistan is a country whose weather and natural environment can be harsh to people: either too much or too little of rain or sun. Kabul is situated on a rather flat plateau surrounded by the mountains. The country has seen little snow this year. This bodes water shortages later on. Paradoxically, recent storms and subsequent thaw resulted in flooding some places.

The camp is located at approximately 1850 metres altitude. We must adapt to oxygen-depleted air. You can feel it clearly the first time you exercise – you get a short breath. In spite of this there are very good opportunities to stay in shape here thanks to weight training equipment, exercise bikes, treadmills and cross-trainers.

New home

I have moved to my final home. Since the building is brand new, the furniture has still been packed in boxes. Instead of waiting for someone to come, I have assembled my desk, chair and wardrobe by myself. Just to get all the clothes and things in the right place. I have also found a bedside lamp. So, I have nicely decorated my room for the next 6 months. Each room has heating and air conditioning systems that keep us warm and I will be able to cool down when

First impressions of Afghanistan

Written by N. Peter H. Christensen
Thursday, 18 February 2010 15:40

the sun burns later on. Many colleagues of mine will take over beds from their predecessors and move to even better conditions.

More MNC NE personnel arrive

On Wednesday, 10th February, the second group of MNC NE personnel from Szczecin arrived in Kabul. They had a 12-hour trip with a stop in Hungary. We helped them to "tow" the equipment and get them in place in their tents. Good to be together again.

My colleague Lieutenant Colonel Kent Jensen moved into our room, so now there are three of us in there. I helped Kent to assemble the wardrobe, this time with borrowed tools, so it was much easier :)

Way ahead

Now the daily life has begun: I wake up early, work, eat healthy, do my workout, do not drink or visit bars, I am faithful to my wife and go early to bed.