



Interview with Major General Ole Køppen, the departing Deputy Commander of Multinational Corps Northeast.

Sir, you are just about to end your service at the Headquarters Multinational Corps Northeast and retire afterwards. Has it been good to have had the last military assignment here, in this HQ in Szczecin?

It has been the best period of my whole military career indeed. Partly, because I have become a general. It also seems that the international environment and me just work very well together.

What I have been most pleased about was that after a few months of being here in 2008, the staff had realized they could relax and speak freely when the Deputy Commander was coming. That was one of my intentions and I do hope that the staff members have been appreciating the accessible Deputy Commander they had. I also hope that they have noticed that I was capable of doing a few things, such as being an Exercise Director during several exercises.

Do you remember the moment when you learnt about your assignment to Multinational Corps Northeast?

It was in late April 2008. I was on my way back home from a meeting where we discussed the

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Wednesday, 21 April 2010 09:54

future of the Danish Army when I was called by the commanding General from the Personnel Branch. He asked: "Ole, what would you say if I suggested to you that you should become the Deputy Commander at the Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin for the rest of your military career?" and I said "Thank you" without hesitation.

What expectations did you have?

In the mid 1990s, I was the commander of the engineer battalion that was attached to LANDJUT in Rendsburg. I had an idea that the Headquarters in Szczecin would be the same, but on the other hand, with so many new nations coming here, I actually did not know what to expect. But I decided to try and give everybody the feeling that he or she was very well respected here. In all farewell talks I had with the staff members here, I have specifically asked how they had felt treated. Everybody replied that they had tremendously enjoyed being here.

What will you remember most?

The comradeship. The small size of this Headquarters is very fine because everybody knows one another and everybody feels responsible for one another.

How about the military related things? What are you most proud of?



I appreciate very much that I have been the Exercise Director for several exercises and saw people performing very well. It was indeed very comforting for me that after Crystal Eagle 2008 we received a positive feedback from the four brigade staffs we were training. They all felt that they had been offered training on a very high level. I was also very pleased to hear that we were the best Corps Headquarters that completed the final test before Kabul at the Joint Warfare Centre in Stavanger last year. Although you might think this is just a bunch of people coming from different countries in the Headquarters, we can actually cooperate effectively – that is a major achievement! It is also good that we are all working in a foreign language, except for our two Americans. Even if someone is not that good in English, it does not matter, because we can use a mix of languages and get to work. That is the way I like people to go on by doing their best, having their antennas out and simply learning.

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Sir, you have mentioned the international environment of the Corps several times. Will you miss it back home in Denmark?

Yes, definitely. I have been smiling here almost every day. The mere fact that I sometimes teased people was an expression of my feeling very well here. As an example: when one of the secretaries sent out the invitation for the event to celebrate my birthday, I actually rejected it answering, "I do not want to be 60 years old". She came to my door and asked "Sir, did you really mean that?" But I simply could not resist it... I think that although I am a general, it is alright for people to see me happy and notice there is a human being deep inside.

Are there any other things you will miss?

I think I will miss not being here anymore, not being among you, because I feel that we have created tight bonds. You have probably noticed that I did not say I would miss the uniform. But I think there is a part of one's life when you can wear a uniform and then it is over. But it has been the major part of my life. Last year, when I wrote my biography I ended up with 89 pages. My wife read it and said there was a lot of boring stuff in it, but not for me. Being an officer or non-commissioned officer in the armed forces means so many different things. You are not just sitting at your desk. For some periods, you run around in the terrain and hardly get any sleep during exercises. I was also in Kosovo, Iraq several times and once in Afghanistan – I think I could have not imagined that my life should be like this that when I was a young school boy.



And if you had a chance to decide again to join the army or not, would you join it?

Yes, I think so. That is actually quite astonishing because I was a quiet, little boy. I think the parachute jumps we had when we finished the Military Academy were one of the thresholds I passed – me jumping out of an airplane with just a bag of clothes in the rucksack. It has been also very fine for me that in all the positions I had as a leader or commanding officer I was cooperating with people. I remember the crest I received from my guys when I was a section commander at HQ KFOR. Just "thank you" was written on it and they said there should not be anything else because I had given them the latitude of doing their jobs on their own instead of looking over their shoulders all the time. I only checked the final results. That is actually

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comforting when you can just get people moving in the direction you want them to move.

I reckon there have been more highlights in your military career.

I think the highlights were when I could have people following me and doing things without being told because they knew what I expected. I think I have seen that feeling of solidarity and comradeship several times when people sense it is a common cause they are working for. I remember when I was a staff officer in the material acquisition branch at the Defence Command and even though it was a complicated job, everybody stuck together and assisted one another. I also look back at the 19th September 2009 when I was standing at Wały Chrobrego in Szczecin for a couple of hours in the sun for the 10th Anniversary celebrations of the Multinational Corps Northeast. Even though I was originally a little skeptical to have officers and NCOs from 10 different nations marching there, in the end it was a good show and I think it was special with all those fine visitors we had. As you can see, there have been many highlights I will never forget, I simply cannot point out a specific one.

Sir, your military service comes to an end; what are your plans for the future?

I am starting a new chapter in my life. To be honest, I had been very worried to get back home and have a holiday for the rest of my life. But I have been lucky enough to get a civilian job as a technical manager in a small housing company in Copenhagen.

Do you think your military experience will be useful?

I will be dealing with people so I guess my ability to cooperate with people that I have learnt throughout my military career will be useful. I will be responsible for all the technical things and arranging some repairs, but also making plans e.g. if the windows need to be changed or new equipment installed.

You have recently contributed to a book on engineering, are you going to write more?

I think not at once. But the place where we have our summer cottage used to be a big gravel pit in the late 1900s. You can still see the remnants of it on the coastline. The gravel was loaded there and shipped away. And there were people coming from all over Europe. You can find wild flowers there that are not endemic to this area; for example, I have even seen some flowers that are typically growing in the Alps. I have checked the Internet and it seems the history of Zealand has not addressed this subject. I think it would be great if I could find some pictures or anything written down and just collect it.

I can see you have a lot of plans...

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http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBLiZZ_gtbq