

Taking the chances and going forward (Video)

Written by AG

Friday, 01 October 2010 18:37



Friday, 1 October 2010, was the last day Brigadier General Josef Heinrichs spent in Baltic Barracks. In the past four years, General Heinrichs participated in both missions in Afghanistan, several training and exercises and, above all, directed the Corps' personnel as their Chief of Staff (December 2006-May 2010).

***Anna Gałyga:* Sir, you arrived in Poland in 2006, what do you remember from your adjustment phase to a new living place and a new job?**

Brigadier General Josef Heinrichs: When I arrived, Brigadier General Henryk Skarżyński was the Corps' Chief of Staff and the Headquarters was preparing for the first mission deployment to Afghanistan. As one of the deployers, I concentrated on the mission preparation for the Headquarters and for myself. Little time was left to integrate in the new garrison but I was very positively surprised about the openness and active support provided to me. My neighbours in Szczecin have been very friendly and supportive, too. Altogether, it was an easy doing to integrate into a new environment. But I actually started to get to know the garrison city of Szczecin better after my redeployment from Afghanistan in late summer 2007.

What aims did you pursue during your tour of duty?

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The short-term goal was to properly prepare the Headquarters for the ISAF mission and provide the ISAF Commander, at that time the American General McNeill, a functional and capable staff element to succeed in the mission as well as to redeploy without any losses and casualties. Taking into consideration the comments from the higher leadership of the mission, including the former MNC NE Commander General Egon Ramms, I can say that our Headquarters performed outstandingly.

After the mission, my aim was to provide the Corps' Commander Lieutenant General Zdzisław Goral an effectively and efficiently working staff. General Goral ensured a very good climate of trust which enabled me to lead the staff along his priorities. I intended to maintain a high standard of professionalism within the Headquarters and the acceptance of the capabilities and performance within the NATO environment. Where possible, I also wanted to further develop the Headquarters. As the Senior German Flag Officer I wanted to represent my country towards the host nation and the multinational community, too.

The comments given to the current Corps' Commander Lieutenant General Rainer Korff during the mission confirmed that my aims have been accomplished so I can leave the Headquarters having achieved very good and satisfying results. This could only be done with the outstanding and continued support I received from all Headquarters members; most of all, I would like to thank them. Since ours is the smallest headquarters within NATO, I could get to know every single person and this would not have been possible with 600 or 700 people. We have created a well-working social climate here; I would also like to mention the families.

Sir, time for a little summary comes: more than 4 years, 2 missions in Afghanistan, Crystal Eagle 2008, and the 10th Anniversary – you have experienced a lot of important moments in the Corps' history. How different or similar was the Corps back in 2006 and now in 2010 from your perspective?

When I arrived here in summer 2006, the Headquarters had achieved many goals. For example, it was certified as a graduate readiness forces land headquarters but it had never proven its capabilities in real mission yet. Successes achieved in the ISAF mission in 2007 and 2010 have helped to build self-confidence in the Headquarters members and make them proud of themselves. We have grown from 8 nations in 2006 to 11 today, which obviously is a clear sign that serving with MNC NE is attractive to the participating nations. We have improved our Command, Control and Information System (C2IS) capabilities with the procurement and fielding of Szafran, which is the first NATO-certified corps headquarters C2IS. We are an appreciated provider of our mission experience as we prepare national and multinational contingents for their mission deployments. I could enumerate many more achievements here,

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but I would not say that the Corps is different or similar compared to 2006. I think the Corps has used the chance and the challenge to further develop and transform itself.

How do you see the future transformation of the Corps then?

The MNC NE is a well integrated element within the wider NATO Force Structure. The Corps has proven its mission capabilities twice within less than 4 years. That is the highest mission density of all NATO corps. Our nations are well aware of our capabilities so I am optimistic that MNC NE will survive next transformation steps.

Which moments of your service are most memorable?

I think the missions in Afghanistan because I participated in both and they were a special challenge for the Headquarters. In-between the missions, Crystal Eagle 2008 was very demanding from the training perspective. The key question was whether we would be able to transfer our mission experience to other units. After those three weeks of exercise, I received external comments that read: the nations were very satisfied with what we provided to the training audience. And for sure a great moment was our 10th Anniversary last year that showed the immense recognition the Corps Headquarters had been receiving from the nations but also the citizens of our garrison.

Baltic Barracks is not only about work, but also about people – have you felt a well integrated member of this multinational family?

I have felt very well integrated; I think we have a great team here in Szczecin and I hope I also had a share in it. During the missions with only about 10% staff at ISAF HQ in 2007 and again 10% at IJC being our personnel, there was always a very good MNC NE identity – people proudly showed their MNC NE badge, MNC NE members stayed together during meals even if they were assigned to different divisions. All this indicates that people feel like a family and we have discussed already that also our families are part of this big team.

What are you plans for the future?

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I am going back to Germany and my new assignment as Deputy Chief of Staff for Organisation in the Army Office, which is the German Training and Doctrine Command of the Army. My job will be, together with my division, to develop future personnel structure for the army, which must be seen as the special challenge in the context of transformation within the German Armed Forces.

You will certainly be asked questions about your service in Poland. Sir, what are you going to say about Multinational Corps Northeast?

The Corps is not well known to people who do not work in this area; they may have certain understanding of what a corps is but there is a huge difference between high and low readiness corps. I will tell them this small Headquarters mobilized more than 80% of its personnel to provide the required staff support for the ISAF missions and we actually did better than some high readiness headquarters. I will also tell them that people working here are highly motivated, they do great jobs every day and that it is a capable command and control element. You can be sure I will be a good advocate and ambassador for the Headquarters.

A military life entails moving from one place to another and you have experienced farewells like this one in Baltic Barracks, but is there anything you will miss from Szczecin or Baltic Barracks?

When you work 4 years in an environment you get to know a lot of people. You come to appreciate not only their work but also them as individuals. I will miss many people working and living here, including the family members. I had great neighbours and I will miss them alike. And I think this is something absolutely unique.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwlgIATE-cc>