

I will never forget “the Szczecin guys” (VIDEO)

Written by AG

Wednesday, 19 December 2012 08:34



Interview with the outgoing Commander of the Multinational Corps Northeast (MNC NE), Lieutenant General Rainer Korff, presenting his thoughts and feelings on the day of the change of command ceremony.

Anna Galyga: Sir, your tour of duty is coming to an end; was it a good experience to be the Commander of the Multinational Corps Northeast, here, in Szczecin?

Lieutenant General Rainer Korff: It was a great time. It was not my first commanding position but this time it was a multinational environment of eleven nations, and then twelve nations after Croatia joined the Corps in January 2012. I really appreciated bringing all the cultures, traditions, backgrounds of people closely together in order to fulfil our tasks. It was also the first time when I was together with my family so close to other nations. All in all, I can say I really enjoyed this excellent time to have been the Commander of the Multinational Corps Northeast for the last three years.

Which moments will you remember most?

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The best moment was – and I will never forget it – the welcome parade for my personnel coming back from Afghanistan. I had a good feeling that everybody came back sound and safe from the mission. It was very important for me to welcome them together with all the families; I still keep in mind the situation when we were waiting for them for a couple of hours at the airport.

Sir, you must have had some expectations and assumptions when taking over the command of the Multinational Corps Northeast in December 2009; have they been met?

Obviously, I had some expectations concerning the challenges and how the time would be filled up. But I remember having only one wish and intent – to make sure that Multinational Corps Northeast fits into the NATO family. Three years ago there were clear indicators that a lot of things would change concerning the NATO structure, NATO concepts and strategies.

I was hoping to get a full support of all HQ members and, even more importantly, the support of all the nations being involved in the HQ. And, indeed, I have experienced that throughout my service. Without this, we would not have achieved the progress, development, and all those steps into the future to make sure that this Headquarters is a very important part of the NATO Force Structure within the new construction of NATO Command Structure. We were all successful in that.

How would you characterize the events that shaped your tour of duty in Szczecin?

The first year of my service here, 2010, was the time of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. I also had a chance to meet families within the framework of our Family Care organisation. It was a new experience for me because in Germany families do not usually live in the vicinity of barracks; here in Szczecin it is quite the contrary. Concerning the mission itself, my intent was to use the lessons identified and lessons learned for our own purposes, to incorporate them into our HQ. Right after the redeployment, we started working out a plan how to do it. I remember all those exercises when we were exploring the cross-functional team concept or the Information Dominance Centre organisation.

The second year, that is 2011 was mostly characterized with a lot of newcomers arriving at the HQ. We had to train them and integrate them into the Corps family.

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And the year 2012 is the exercise year when the whole training cycle has been completed so that the mission preparation process for the mission in Afghanistan can be initiated next year. We have also developed our relations with the NATO Rapid Reaction Corps-Turkey and prepared our cooperation prior and during the mission in Afghanistan.

Based on all those achievements and good results, I can say we have been really successful. Moreover, we have earned a good name for providing “exercises on demand”. The commanders of the training units in the upcoming Crystal Eagle 13 emphasised that for the first time they could request what they wish to train. And this is what we do: they can tell us what they want and then Multinational Corps Northeast will make it possible. I think it is a very good way ahead.

Sir, out of all these accomplished tasks, which do you consider your biggest achievement, your biggest success?

First of all, all the successes, results and outcomes were not mine, it was always the teamwork. That is a reason why I am so happy about the cohesion of the family of the Multinational Corps Northeast. On the one hand, our team is able to produce excellent products, fully concentrate on exercises like Crystal Eagle, Anakonda or Dragon, but, on the other hand, it builds up an integrated family that meets off-duty and celebrates holidays together. This is what makes us strong and special.

The most important outcome of that teamwork is a clear picture sent to the politicians, to the decision-makers in the nations of how exactly Multinational Corps Northeast can be used, under what conditions, and what MNC NE can offer in terms of training other units or integrating other nations. All this has been described in our document “Vision 2015”, which is currently being further developed into “Vision 2018”. This document describes the Corps’ future and I am very glad that all the member states agree with it. This document is the key to all our successes. It describes that the Corps is ready for missions across the whole spectrum of operations, to prepare “exercises on demand”, to attract other nations and commanders of units to train with us. This is our showpiece, and a way to put into practice the “pay-back concept” to the nations for their investment in the Corps. I am sure that my successor will pick up all those ideas and will strengthen the continuity of these activities.

In the course of realizing the Corps’ tasks, have you faced any difficulties?

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I would probably consider “time” to be a good keyword. I had expected some things to come into practice quicker, but in a multinational environment good things sometimes take time. It requires more effort to coordinate things with all the nations. For instance, it took nearly 2.5 years to introduce a common beret but I am really glad we eventually have it. Another example is the adjustment of our “Vision 2015” that shall last 6 months until all nations agree on it but it is a normal process.

Sir, the HQ is preparing for the biggest exercise next year, Crystal Eagle 13; is it a good moment to leave?

It is the best time to go. Since the mission will be the first priority for the new commander, he will have a very good starting position having about 6 months to decide on details concerning mission preparation process. In fact, the mission will have a major influence upon his tour of duty as it falls exactly in the middle of his service for the Corps. And the preparations for the Crystal Eagle 13 are well on track and the HQ is experienced in conducting such exercises so I am sure it will be a success.

Will you miss the HQ?

For sure I will miss the environment, I personally enjoyed being and living in Poland. And if you asked my family, they would not like to leave, at least not yet. My son enjoys the international school environment very much and my wife is also very happy here. I will never forget “the Szczecin guys” and everything we did during the last three years. The term “the Szczecin guys” I heard from Lieutenant General David Rodriguez, the Commander of ISAF Joint Command in 2010 when I was visiting my staff serving in Afghanistan. We were at the Joint Operations Centre when General Rodriguez used that expression “the Szczecin guys”. And, indeed, I saw many small pennants presenting the MNC NE crest attached to the computer screens. Even though I only saw the backs of those soldiers, I knew they were from Szczecin. That slogan “the Szczecin guys” was the best praise I could get, indicating that the community of MNC NE in Afghanistan demonstrates high quality of work and cohesion.

There is also one more reason why I will particularly miss this HQ. It seems to be the last time for me to serve in a commanding position, and commanding troops is the highest you can achieve in an army.

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Sir, what will be the next position then?

It is a very long and complex name. I will be the commander of the German elements of all multinational corps, including Szczecin, the Commander of the so-called ground organisation of the German Army, including everything what is related to training and education; I will be responsible for the concept and development of the German Army and I will be in charge of all the procurement of the German Army. Last but not least, I will be the Deputy Chief of the Army. It will be a very interesting job because it will cover everything what is needed to run an army so I am really looking forward to it.

At the very end, is there anything you would like to say to the personnel of the Multinational Corps Northeast?

Thank you very much for your support. I really appreciate that kind of assistance I received from the small family in Baltic Barracks, not only the Headquarters staff but also Headquarters Company, National Support Elements, and the huge family outside the barracks – Command Support Brigade along with its battalions, people on Polish and German side of the border and others who also wished me well.

Finally, “good luck” to my successor, Major General Bogusław Samol – our Deputy Commander. I do wish him “fortune” and a “good hand” (*“glückliche Hand” in German – editor’s note*) in commanding MNC NE for the next three years.

God bless you all.

Photo & video by: Marian Cihon, SVK CIV

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOoJ6C6zprE>