

## The Corps in Szczecin

Written by PAO

Wednesday, 15 January 2003 09:00

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**The Multinational Corps Northeast was inaugurated on 18th September 1999 in Szczecin by Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, who handed over its colours to the first Corps commander, Gen Henrik Ekmann. On 22nd September 2000, the Corps attained full readiness for collective defence of NATO territory. Krzysztof Maciejski talked about the origin and functioning of the Corps with LtCol Grzegorz Ciechanowski, Chief PI&VIS Branch in the Corps HQ.**

**Krzysztof Maciejski: The Multinational Corps Northeast started its activity on 18th September 1999 in Szczecin. What is its origin?**

LtCol Grzegorz Ciechanowski: In June 1997 in Madrid, it was decided that Poland would be admitted to NATO structures. Afterwards, the Defence Ministers of Germany, Denmark and Poland started intense preparations for establishing a multinational corps in Szczecin. According to previous arrangements, from 1997 Polish officers took several months' preparatory courses in Rendsburg, the base of the German-Danish LANDJUT Corps. At the same time in Szczecin, a „preparatory group” was co-ordinating the renovation and organization of the Corps HQ. The intention of the three Defence Ministers was that all the actions should be co-ordinated in such a way as to enable inaugurating the Corps at the same time as Poland's admittance to NATO. And so it happened.

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**KM: The inhabitants of Szczecin use the term "NATO Corps" while the proper name is "Multinational Corps Northeast". Could you explain the structure of the Corps?**

GC: We are not subordinated to the NATO structures in the sense that we are not a NATO Multinational Corps. Our only subordination is to the trinational Committee while our operational training is conducted according to the rules worked out by the Joint Headquarters North East in Denmark. We operate according to the rules applied in NATO. All the operational procedures applied in the Corps are copied from the Alliance and the working language is English.

**KM: The situation of the Corps must entail certain tasks for the formation. What are these?**

GC: The Corps has three basic tasks. The first and most important one is the collective defence of NATO territory, followed by natural disaster relief missions and participation in peace support operations. We are fulfilling these tasks using all the troops at our disposal: Polish 12th Division, German 14th Division and the Danish Division. Besides, there are specialized units, e.g. a howitzer battalion and two combat engineer battalions. The communications are provided by the Multinational Signal Brigade.

**KM: How does the staff function in this context?**

GC: The staff does not consist of servicemen as seen by the civilians, meaning that we do not sit on tanks wearing headsets. The staff structure is very economical and thus more efficient. It is based on narrow specialization. The officers have broad competence and a high degree of independence in their work. The chief of staff is Gen Karl Erik Nielsen from Denmark, whose only task is organizing the work and functioning of the staff.

KM: What does a „G-division” mean? GC: We have six G-divisions. In G-1, there are two branches: the Personnel Branch and the Public Information & Visits Branch. I am chief of the latter, which means that I will be succeeded by a Pole at this post and the national employment structure will be maintained. The other divisions are: G-2 for operational intelligence, G-3 for training, G-4 for logistics, G-5 for operational planning and CIMIC, and G-6 for information systems, communications.

**KM: The Corps has a characteristic logo. Could you explain it?**

GC: Since we originate from the LANDJUT Corps that existed in Rendsburg, we took over its

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colours. In the first version, the crest contained two swords and the inscription „NATO” in the middle. As the Corps does not strictly belong to the structure of the Alliance and as the latter was joined by a new country, i.e. Poland, it was decided that the logo should include the emblem of Szczecin. The navy blue background represents the Baltic Sea, the three white waves: the three Danish straits, and the three swords: the three nations.

### **KM: The existence of the Corps in Szczecin increases the city’s status. What other benefits does the city derive from it?**

GC: There are a great many, on various levels. I will mention some of them. Firstly, it arouses great interest as the first structure of this kind in the newly admitted countries, which is demonstrated by the number of visits in the HQ. Moreover, before the exercise „Strong Resolve 2002”, the HQ employed 15 Szczecin’s companies to put up tents, provide communications, toilets, mobile telephone networks, etc. Such contacts contribute to promoting the city as well. At the same time the Corps guarantees stability in the region. There are about 120 families living in the city, for whom houses and flats are rented, there is a British school run by Polish teachers. The necessary supplies are delivered daily by companies operating in Szczecin. I also have to stress that the adaptation of the barracks by Polish workers in 1999 cost a total of 46.000.000 PLZ. The civilian employees of the Corps are solely inhabitants of Szczecin.

### **KM: What criteria have to be met by Poles to serve in the Corps?**

GC: The main requirement is the command of English. We communicate in this language on the daily basis. Besides, experience in working in an international environment; each of the Polish officers has served or taken courses in the Western armies. Also the conscripts communicate in English. KM: I take it that a Polish officer’s salary corresponds to the Western standards? GC: I wish it were so. We are employed on the basis of 3-year contracts. Each nation is responsible for remunerating its own servicemen. I earn exactly as much as the other Polish officers. I only get a monthly allowance of about 200 zloty extra.

### **KM: We have observed intense military traffic in Szczecin. What is the reason?**

GC: On 1st March, a two weeks’ exercise „Strong Resolve 2002” started. It was conducted on an unprecedented scale. The exercise took place in Norway, where the soldiers trained defending a NATO country’s territory. In Poland, a peace mission was conducted. The exercise involved 30 thousand soldiers and 300 armoured vehicles from 11 NATO and 13 PfP countries. Most of the undertakings were carried out in West Pomerania, from Ustka through Drawsko Pomorskie to Szczecin. Our Corps HQ hosted the command for the land operations conducted on Polish territory.

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**KM: Thank you very much for the interview.**