

Change of Command

by *Lt C. CRISTONI, Chief PI*

Change of Command Ceremony

Solbiate Olona, Italy. On 20 February 2004, at the end of a significant ceremony held in the Flags Square of the Ugo Mara barracks, Lieutenant General Mauro Del Vecchio took over as new NRDC-IT Commander, replacing Lieutenant General Fabrizio Castagnetti who was designated as Deputy Chief of Italian Defence Staff in Rome.

IT WAS A TOUGH CHALLENGE INDEED, A SORT OF "MISSION IMPOSSIBLE".

Lt Gen Castagnetti COMNRDC-IT

The event took place in unusual atmosphere and environment as all the region has been stormed by snow for a couple of days and everything was white coloured and the temperature was some degrees below zero. This, may be, contributed to keep the official speeches short but he has caused some organizational and transport problems for all the guests scheduled to join us in this ceremony. Despite the amount of fallen snow the Signal Brigade personnel did an excellent job by keeping clear all the ceremony area and the access road working hard all the night through.

The ceremony was presided by the Commander in Chief of Allied Forces Southern Europe, US Navy Admiral Gregory G. Johnson, by IT Army Lt Gen Cosimo D'Arrigo, Commander of Operational Forces and attended by various local and regional authorities as well by national and international high ranking officials and by national media.

"THERE WAS NOTHING AND NOW WE HAVE A VERY EFFICIENT HEADQUARTERS, EXCEEDING ANY ESTIMATE"

Admiral G. Johnson CINCSOUTH

All the invitees, after being cheered by the two Commanders, reached the main "palco" waiting for the parade to be formed. The first formation to enter the Flags square was the 3rd regiment Bersaglieri Fanfara, a military band that plays its instruments while running, followed by two coys of the Logistic and Support regiment, two coys of the 1st Signal regiment and by one Carabinieri (MP) platoon. Then the NATO flag together with the 11 contributing nations flags took their position in the center of the parade. At the end the War Flag of the 1st regiment join the parade accompanied by the Italian

national anthem.

The ceremony then proceeded with the official speeches of the Senior appointment holder and of the two Commanders and the most significant event: the hand over of the Corps Colours from Lt Gen Castagnetti to Lt Gen Del Vecchio.



A Senior NCO holds the CORPS colours.

Admiral Johnson praised the great goals achieved by the Italian Army and by General Castagnetti for creating the headquarters from almost "nothing" and stated that he was looking to work closely with NRDC-IT from July 04 on as part of NATO Responce Force 3.

Gen Castagnetti has been the first NRDC-IT Commander and during his command he achieved the qualification of the NRDC-IT

"NATO RESPONCE FORCE IS AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE NATO'S CENTER OF GRAVITY AND TO THIS EXTENT, THERE IS NO ROMM FOR FAILURE"

Lt Gen Castagnetti NRDC-IT COM

as a High Readiness Force (L) HQ at the end of 2002. In his address to the participants he briefly mentioned that history of the High readiness Forces Headquarters (HRF) project and the heavy commitments assumed by the Italian Army, but most of all by the multinational staff and by Signal Brigade personnel. He encouraged the staff to continue playing a proactive role in the creation of the NATO Response Force as NRDC-IT will play the Land Component Command role for NRF 3 from July 2004 to mid January 2005.

The creation of NRDC-IT headquarters is not just an operational Comand structure but "goes beyond the alliance interests, having the potential to become an icon, an example to follow for the new fully professional



Lt Gen Castagnetti and Lt Gen Del Vecchio cheer Adm Johnson upon his arrival in Solbiate Olona.



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Lt Gen Castagnetti's address.

Admiral Johnson, Lt Gen d'Arrigo, authorities, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the NRDC-IT and Signal Brigade personnel, thank you very much for honouring this change of command ceremony with your presence. A special thanks to the mayors, or their representatives, of the cities of Solbiate Olona, that hosts our base, Milan, Varese, Busto Arsizio and all other neighbouring local communities of the region of Lombardia.

You have extended your hand of friendship and displayed your hospitality to hundreds of military families, Italian and the other ten allied countries that form the NRDC-IT. These families have felt themselves at home from the very beginning; a further demonstration of the characters of friendship, hospitality and the warmth of the Italian people.

In 2001, when the project of the creation of a high readiness headquarters began, within the frame of the NATO force structure review, the proposal made by Italy to offer Solbiate Olona as the home of this new deployable headquarters, was received with skepticism. This was in large part due to the lack of specific experience at such a level of command, lack of equipment and Italian personnel trained in NATO operational procedures, insufficiency of infrastructural facilities and the vastity of resources needed. It was a tough challenge indeed, a sort of "mission impossible". Well, in December 2002, after an unprecedented deployment exercise of all the NRDC-IT group, the headquarters obtained full operational capability with the highest ratings achievable. The credit goes to the gigantic effort made by the Italian Army Staff, the Land Operational Forces HQ, and the hard work, great motivation, leadership and profound competence of hundreds of men and women of the Signal Brigade and the headquarters staff representing the countries of Italy, United Kingdom, United States of America, Hungary, Greece, Spain, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Turkey.

We had a clear objective to achieve, we main-

tained our focus, we had faith and trust, we worked as a team and we succeeded. To all of the officers, NCOs and soldiers of the NRDC-IT group, my deepest thanks, thanks also from Italy and NATO. Be proud of what you have achieved, NATO is a fundamental alliance for the security of the world and our headquarters is now an important part of its core.

While satisfied with these achievements, we all know that we are not yet at the end state; a lot more is still to be done, we have to complete the acquisition of the equipment, optimize the operational procedures, redefine the manning and manage the personnel rotation without any decrease of operational capability; also, we must review the functions of the staff to render them more efficient, responsive and coherent with the new tasks and threats.

As you have done thus far, I encourage you to continue playing a proactive role in the creation of the NATO Response Force. The NATO Response Force is and will continue to be NATO's center of gravity and to this extent, there is no room for failure; because failure may cause the Alliance itself to become irrelevant.

Admiral Johnson, be assured that this headquarters has shifted its full potential and strength toward achieving success with the NATO Response Force.

We will be proactive, visionary and determined to make the NATO response force a fundamental turning point of NATO. The full operational capability and now the NATO Response Force were not the only two tasks we had. This base, as you know, was home to a logistics battalion and so we were faced with another important task; to transform this battalion level barracks into a base for a multinational, joint corps headquarters. Also in this area, the amount of resources put to bear by the Italian Army Staff and Operational forces, Geniodife, the Army and the Air Force Territorial Engineers and the garrison headquarters, have been huge.

A master plan has been drafted and approved, financial resources committed, some projects

have been completed, and others are underway while others will begin shortly. To mention just a few: a new entrance, full renovation of the temporary staff headquarters (to my rear), the officer's club, brand new headquarters for the signal brigade and the national support elements, a summer garden with a military "foresteria", the "starship" building (to my right) almost ready to be inaugurated, a parking lot for 600 vehicles, also almost ready, a new perimeter security fence, a second parking lot outside and finally the jewel, still to be initiated, a village with 200 independent houses, a commercial center, sports facilities, a couple of schools, a cinema. When fully realized this accomplishment will have an importance that goes beyond the alliance interests, having the potential to become an icon, an example to follow for the new fully professional Italian Army.

I am sorry to leave Solbiate half way through this process, but the new job in Rome, deputy of Joint Defence staff, will allow me not only to work for the good of NATO, but also to continue to follow and support in every way possible this great headquarters. I am leaving the command to a friend, to a very capable man who will continue the job.

Dear Mauro, my best wishes for you to improve the operational capabilities of this headquarters, to make this base a great place to work and live, and I hope you may lead this headquarters to a real operation in the near future.

Officers, NCOs, Carabinieri, soldiers and civilians of the NRDC-IT group, my two past years as your commander have been an exciting experience, an adventure of which I am proud, enriched by success. All this would not have been possible without your unlimited support, dedication, competence, determination, and friendship.

You, you most of all, deserve the credit of what has been achieved and, I am sure, the future will see you act brilliantly as always. Thanks very much. I will never forget you. Take care. All the best to you and your families.



Members of the bersaglieri fanfare with their typical hat.



A view of the formation and of the Contributing Nation Flags ready for the parade.



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Lt Gen Del Vecchio address his speech after assuming command.

Italian Army" Castagnetti said.

A new concept of a military Italian base where soldiers and their families can live together, go to school, play sports and go shopping. So far many projects have been completed and others will come soon, among those the 200 independent houses village represents the most ambitious and important.

NATO CAN RELY UPON A COMMAND STRUCTURE OF HIGH OPERATIONAL READINESS, FULLY DEPLOYABLE ON OPERATIONS ABROAD WITH MINIMAL WARNING, AND ABLE TO CONTROL CORPS LEVEL FORCES AND ABOVE.

Lt Gen Del Vecchio NRDC-IT COM

Lieutenant General Del Vecchio possesses an extraordinary operational experience as Commander of Multinational units in the Balkans area of operation such as Bosnia in 1997 and FYROM and KOSOVO in 1999 where, in particular, he was the Commander of the Italian contingent when NATO entered KOSOVO after the air campaign. His operational vision and expertise will greatly contribute to the preparation and training of the whole staff as it is entering the NRF roster.

The event was concluded with a small reception at the Officer Club where all the guest had the chance to warm themselves and raise their glasses for a toast for the two Commnaders. Afterwards the incoming and outgoing Commander met the local and regional media and released some statements.



Adm Johnson, CINCSOUTH, and Lt Gen D'Arrigo, COM IT HQLAND reviewing the formation.



Admiral US NAVY G. Johnson CINCSOUTH.

Lt Gen Mauro Del Vecchio's adress

Admiral Johnson, Lieutenant General D'Arrigo, authorities, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the NATO Rapid Deployable Corps, I am very proud today to assume command of this great unit, with a full knowledge of the responsibility entrusted in me. The achievements since the constitution of this head quarters have been most significant. Today, here in Solbiate Olona, NATO can rely upon a command structure of high operational readiness, fully deployable on operations abroad with minimal warning, and able to control corps level forces and above. The Italian Army Staff and the Land Operational Forces headquarters have expended a great deal of effort to reach this objective. Moreover, the personnel of the Corps staff and of the Signal Brigade have contributed valuable and determined efforts enabling the corps to attain a full operational capability. I am fully aware of their exceptional efforts. For this reason, I express my gratitude to the members of the chain of command who have entrusted me with the duties of Corps commander.

Furthermore, I express my sin-

cere appreciation to the men and women of the Corps headquarters and the Signal brigade who have, with high professionalism and strong motivation, carried this command to a high operational level.

To Lieutenant General Castagnetti, who has been the primary architect of the corps' accomplishments, and is destined for duties of even greater responsibility within the Italian Armed Forces, I express my sincere admiration and respect. Fabrizio, my friend, you leave a great, lasting legacy upon the corps. All of the personnel within the Corps headquarters and the Signal Brigade will follow, I'm convinced, the road that you have forged, seeking always to finish, for the better, the work that you have done so well.

Admiral Johnson, Lieutenant General D'Arrigo, authorities, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen, and members of the command, it is with these sentiments of gratitude, admiration, and humility, that I assume command of the corps and I endeavour to respond adequately to the expectations of the Italian Armed Forces as well as those of the NATO chain of command.

