

## Exercise EAGLE ACTION 2008

by Major Chris Sargent

The NRDC-ITA annual Corps level exercise was conducted from the 10<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> June 2008 at Caserma Ugo Mara, Solbiate Olona. The aim of the exercise was to rehearse and test the Headquarters and subordinate units in security and stabilisation operations within the contemporary operating environment. The exercise followed on from Exercise EAGLE RECCE conducted earlier in the year when the Recce Group, Early Entry team and Rear Support Command were exercised using a similar scenario. The Headquarters was fortunate enough to be able to call on the assistance of a number of external agencies which allowed for a more realistic and effective exercise structure. The Italian General Staff, Italian Staff College and personnel from the ARRC all made invaluable contributions and without their efforts the exercise would not have been possible. Additional support at HICON and LOCON made for a realistic and demanding exercise for all members of the Headquarters and the Support Brigade. The sheer scale of Exercise EAGLE ACTION was impressive and served to demonstrate the capability of the NRDC-ITA in field conditions, both in terms of command and control and the all important support infrastructure. The scenario that was employed as the bedrock of the planning and execution processes was designed to reflect the challenges that may face a Headquarters when deployed on NATO led operations in either Iraq or Afghanistan. The G7 department was careful to ensure that the scenario reflected the current operational climate but also allowed the Principal Training Audience freedom of action and room for original thought.



It is vital that the Headquarters is able to train and to prepare for "a war, not the war". The exercise started with a series of detailed briefings which allowed the Headquarters to commence the training with a detailed background to the scenario and procedures that would be used throughout the training. The first week saw departments testing their own SOPs and identifying where and how they could improve output and execution. A Mini CAX conducted on the Thursday and Friday of the first week served to set the scene and allow the OPSCEN and the various components within the Headquarters to test their systems and the exercise database. The DCOS TRADOC and Exercise Director, Brigadier General Scollo, was keen to ensure that not only was the Headquarters correctly tested and trained but that lessons and ways to improve were identified. "It is not acceptable to setup an exercise and then not have systems and procedures in place to capture the all important lessons learned. As DCOS TRADOC my job is to ensure that the Headquarters is correctly trained for every conceivable mission that maybe placed upon us. Without the ability to gather, assess and disseminate evidence and statistics regarding performance we cannot improve and progress.

It was clear that we needed to be able to evaluate our collective performance and to scrutinise all areas of our planning processes. With that in mind, my division was given clear direction as to the importance of rigorous and searching evaluation, therefore an evaluation team led by ACOS CDD, Colonel John Rouse was established. Throughout the exercise we sought





to establish the areas where our performance needed improvement and to recognise where procedures were working well. This we achieved and the After Action Reviews and feedback that we have received as a result of this evaluation will be essential in developing our capabilities across the Headquarters." The main phase of the exercise saw the Headquarters tested in all phases of the operational planning process. The tempo and complexity of the scenario served to highlight to all concerned, how important a joined up and rehearsed Headquarters must be to achieve an effective and robust battle rhythm. Lieutenant Colonel John Wright, SO1 G3 Current Ops: "In my opinion, Exercise Eagle Action was one of the best training events that the Headquarters has completed in the recent past. I can say that all the training objectives were met and hopefully the scenario began placing everyone in the proper mindset for the upcoming ISAF deployment." A further dimension to the exercise was added with the inclusion of SIMPRESS in the form of Crown Media under the command of EXCON. This allowed the Headquarters to receive training and practise in dealing with the media. Given the international media interest in all theatres where NATO are deployed this was vital in ensuring the ability of the Headquarters to address the question of influence and media operations, whilst maintaining the integrity of the operation as a whole. The Public Affairs Office was well tested throughout the training and put under pressure from a hostile and insightful media audience. Members of the Headquarters were given media training to enhance the ability of the Headquarters when dealing with this facet of the current operational environment. Several personnel from within the Headquarters gave interviews to the media and as a result gained an invaluable insight into the modus operandi of the world's

media at both the regional and international level. Lance Corporal La Rosa who was interviewed on camera found the experience invaluable. "This is not the normal training that we are used to and something that we need to do more of. I found it both interesting testing, when dealing with the media one has to recognise that they have their own agenda, at my level you gain an understanding of the idea of the "strategic corporal", I could say something on camera that could be twisted into something that could not only have an impact on the operation, but also the political and diplomatic relations that are so important to NATO as a whole. It was fun but at the same time, put me under a lot of pressure." The exercise also provided the opportunity for the Headquarters to demonstrate it's capability to the national community as a whole. A very successful Distinguished Visitors Day was held on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> June where the Headquarters hosted local and national dignitaries from both the military and civilian sectors, with media coverage from the Italian press. Exercise Eagle Action was a challenge to all involved, from the Principal Training Audience, EXCON and the Support Brigade. The logistical demands that are required to conduct training of this scale are huge. Without the efforts of all those involved the exercise would not have been possible. The exercise was a great success and served to increase and improve the Headquarters ability to exercise command and control over the battle space and to enhance its operational capability. Lessons have been learnt and Exercise Eagle Action has further enhanced the capabilities of the NRDC-ITA and will allow the Headquarters to meet the challenges of the future with renewed vigour and better prepared to contribute to multi-national operations, wherever they might be.