



ISAF DEPLOYMENT

ONE MONTH ON

■ by COL GBR A John ROUSE

The one hundred and sixty two soldiers that deployed to ISAF from NRDC-ITA have now been in theatre for a month, so it is perhaps time to reflect on the first few weeks here.

The Deployment

The force deployed in two chawks, one in mid January, and one at the end of January. The first chalk was delayed by 12 hours in its deployment, but the second arrived on time. In this respect we were lucky as aircraft into and out of Kabul are often delayed at this time of the year due to the inclement weather.

The Reception

Reception for both chawks in Kabul airport, and induction into the HQ ISAF, went surprisingly well, due to the detailed plan-

ning undertaken by the four man Transition Team that had arrived some days earlier to arrange for the arrival of the two main bodies. However, NRDC-ITA staff did arrive at a period when the camp was rather full, so many spent a couple of weeks in transit accommodation until their final billets became available.

The Relief in Place

In general, most of the 162 personnel from NRDC-ITA took over appointments from members of NRDC Turkey, who had been the Standing HQ (SHQ) supporting HQ ISAF for the preceding six months. But, because HQ ISAF was undergoing a significant restructuring when we arrived a number of NRDC-ITA found themselves filling appointments that were either new, or for which they were not specifically prepared. However, with a very few exceptions,

which were soon sorted out, everyone settled into their new appointments with ease. The last of our Turkish comrades flew out on 4 February. NRDC-ITA had arrived.

The Integration

HQ ISAF is used to a rapid turn around of staff as most staff below the rank of OF 5 are on 6 month tours. Therefore, we were quickly integrated into the life of the HQ, both professionally and socially. In this respect, the robust training that staff had undertaken in the six months preceding deployment meant that most were familiar with how HQ ISAF operates, and were able to take up their responsibilities with ease. Most agree that the most valuable parts of the training were EAGLE FOCUS 2 and 3, and the Mission Rehearsal Training in Stavanger. Of course, the arrival of NRDC-ITA personnel, with other non NRDC-ITA Italians already in the HQ, coinciding with the arrival of an Italian Chief of Staff, means that the number of Italians in the HQ is now well over two hundred, which has meant that the atmosphere of the HQ has changed. At the very least the quality of the coffee has improved!

NRDC-ITA Deployed Structure

HQ NRDC-ITA personnel are deployed across the HQ. As such it is difficult to keep everyone of the Corps in touch with what is going on that is of general concern to all those from the Corps. Therefore, a loose structure, with a chain of command, has been set up with a view to facilitating the smooth passage of information between Kabul and Solbiate Olona. With easy access of emails, it is easy to short cut this chain, but we are very much encouraging people to use the chain, so that we can avoid misunderstanding and the spreading of harmful rumours.

Early Lessons

It is undoubtedly too early in the tour to make firm suggestions about lessons learned, but even at this stage a couple of points are worthy of note:

- good robust pre deployment training leads to flexibility in undertaking ap-

pointments that have changed from the published job specifications;

- a small reserve of soldiers and staff officers needs to be trained alongside the deploying force so that last minute unforeseen changes to the deployment roster can be accommodated;
- a good in depth assessment by the Fact Finding Team that deploys a few weeks before the main force is invaluable in ensuring that surprises are kept to a minimum.

The Future

Although we have only been here a month our tour end does not seem far off. Time has flown by. We now look forward in the next few weeks to the arrival of the recce team from the GER/NLD Corps, our successors as the SHQ element. And of course, we are anticipating with much enthusiasm the arrival of the Commander of NRDC-ITA who will soon deploy to visit his team.

