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## SERVING THE ALLIANCE SINCE 2001



The Magazine of the  
NATO Rapid Deployable Corps - Italy





## NATO Rapid Deployable Corps - Italy *Ubique Celere*

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**Front page picture:**  
Celebration of 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at the  
"Giardini Estensi" - Varese (October 2021)

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*Last year, NATO Rapid Deployable Corps - Italy committed to the celebrations for the twentieth anniversary of its constitution, a moment of important reflection for this Headquarters, which represented an occasion to examine our past, better understand contemporary challenges and prepare for future ones. We owe an essential part of what the NRDC-ITA is today to the various commanders over the years. With their direction, dedication and guidance, they have given shape to a cohesive and effective reality, capable of looking at the future with enthusiasm and passion and to effectively respond to the needs of the Alliance on the way to ensure peace and security of its members. We decided to dedicate this edition of the ER Magazine to the perspectives and stories of the old Commanders. They will guide us along the process that has brought us to be what we are and to relive the history and experiences of this Headquarters. So, I wish you a good reading, hoping that you may discover more about NRDC-ITA, find some food for thoughts and inspiration to cope with future challenges. Shaping the change!*

# FOREWORD



# Lieutenant General (retired) **Mauro Del Vecchio**, Italian Army

## NRDC-ITA and command of operation ISAF



Gen. Del Vecchio.

Twenty years have passed since the creation of NRDC-ITA in 2001. The multinational headquarters is based in Italy and includes personnel from 19 NATO nations.

Any celebration of this significant anniversary, especially when one considers NRDC-ITA's growth and activities, should focus one of its

consequential roles: assuming command of the International Security Force Assistance (ISAF) Operation in Afghanistan in 2005 and 2006.

Of the international crises during the last three decades, the Afghanistan crisis carried a global significance due to terrorist attacks in the United States in September 2001 and the scale of the military forces operating in Afghan territory. The mission in Afghanistan, in which NRDC-ITA served in a command role, was the international community's largest operational deployment in recent decades, with a military contingent in excess of 140,000 men and women from fifty nations. The operation included large-scale social, reconstruction, and economic initiatives in the country.

## The challenge and our preparations

From the moment when NRDC-ITA was designated to Command the ISAF Operation in 2005, the multinational staff stationed at Solbiate Olona, Italy were determined to succeed. All members of NRDC-ITA were acutely aware of the associated responsibilities of leading a professional military force from Kabul. Before the



Meeting between Gen. Del Vecchio and President Karzai - Summer 2005.

deployment the staff spent over a year diligently working in Italy to define and refine the operational planning required during the operation. By the spring 2005, when our command posts readiness was confirmed in Exercise Eagle Action, we were ready for our deployment.

## Impact, with country characteristics and the operational situation

Having assumed responsibility for the ISAF VIII on August 4, 2005 and being able to see situation on the ground, the NRDC-ITA staff quickly realized the value of our detailed preparations and the challenges of responding to the needs and concerns related to this difficult deployment.

Our immediate focus was to understand the nature of the Afghan human terrain, including the various ethnic subdivisions. The complexity and challenging socio-economic conditions of the population were clear. Poverty, illnesses, and conflict related injuries were common amongst the population of Afghanistan. Their feelings of suffering and resignation were palpable, due to thirty years of conflict related challenges. The inherent differences in the multiple ethnic groups and even the subdivisions within clans, languages and local dialects did not create a clean national identity and this was exacerbated by regular inter-tribal conflicts.

These difficult social, economic and ethnic conditions were often more challenging with the addition of religious extremism. The various Taliban movements took a fundamentalist approach to religion, for the purpose of political struggle and against the presence of international actors.

The country was also deeply impacted by drug trafficking. Opium production was and remains a tragic danger in Afghanistan and the market it feeds creates a genuine source of global concern. Organized criminal gangs operated in the country, producing and trafficking opium, and this negatively impacted the population and the economic progress. For the international forces

in Afghanistan, this drove the need to combat the criminality feeding this traffic, to check the opium fields, and potential refining sites. Our command, in concert with the Afghan Authorities, planned and executed activities to eradicate drug crops, with the subordinate Commands, to search and destroy operations for drug trafficking bases.

Additionally, we were also required to focus on terrorist threats and acts. Al Qaeda, with both Afghan and foreign members, with bases in parts of Afghanistan and in the inaccessible regions along the Pakistan border, formed an international terrorist network. Moreover, the terrorist group imported the tactic known as a suicide attack, which was unknown in the country before them. Such threats were difficult to combat and ISAF forces had to rapidly realize they were facing a complex enemy that was hard to identify and target.

In essence, the ISAF Operation occurred in a social and security context that was extraordinary complex.

Concurrently, it was clear that the process of attempting to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan also depended on internal factors as some of the fighting was fed by the interests of bordering nations, which had a major influence on some minority groups.

It was against this general backdrop that the UN Mandate sought for the international forces to support the central government that had been formed following the elections in 2004 and to consolidate its power across the country.

In pursuit of this goal, the area of responsibility for the ISAF Mission was extended from the Kabul area to the entire country, which was divided into regional zones with an assigned division / brigade level Command. The first area to the north, with the HQ in Kunduz, was under German control. The second, to the west with the HQ in Herat, was assigned to Italy. The third, to the south and centered on Kandahar, was under British guidance and the fourth, to the east, was under US control with the HQ in Bagram. The capital remained under Italian command.

## Training security forces and supporting the population

The international forces' operational tasks were not limited solely to controlling territory and supporting Afghan institutions. The mandate from the United Nations focused on supporting reforms that were essential for the democratic progress. This meant that in addition to traditional military operations (kinetic actions), it was necessary to conduct other activities (non-kinetic actions) that were equally important for operational success.



A column close to Kabul - Summer 2005.

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Gen. Del Vecchio and an orphan - Summer 2006

One of the key reforms was to increase the operational capability of Afghan security forces. It was no simple task to train the Army and the Police as the “new” Afghan security structures who were rebuilt from practically nothing in 2002. To successfully achieve this task, it was necessary to use trainers who had been prepared and were supplied by the contributing nations. Operational Command quickly formed the first international units for this purpose, the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams, to train the army and the policing units so they could train their Afghan counterparts.

Additionally, the ISAF Command also had to take into account another part of the mandate: bringing stability to areas devastated by conflict by rebuilding infrastructure and supporting the populace. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) were special units for reconstructing local social structures that sought to synergically use the potential of military and civilian organizations. Such teams were the operational key points used by the ISAF Operation to provide tangible reconstruction aid. In practical terms, this translated into building schools, roads, wells, and other infrastructure based on the needs of the local communities.

In terms of supporting the local people, the ISAF Command promoted cooperation initiatives and optimized the use of foreign aid, especially from Italy. In particular, in December 2005, a liaison team between Italy and Afghanistan, based at the ISAF Command in Kabul and the HQ in Solbiate Olona encouraged governmental and non-governmental organizations to provide aid from our country. Families, companies, schools, associations and institutions generously donated to the Afghan people. The items collected were stored, checked, and sent to Afghanistan where they were distributed according based on clear priorities schools.

## Conclusions on Italian involvement in Afghanistan

In conclusion, I think is fair to say, that when NRDC-ITA assumed command of the ISAF Operation that it was one of the most difficult missions conducted by NATO. Our efforts raised the prominence and international image of the Corps and its personnel.

Perhaps the best example is to note that the security provided by the ISAF Forces made it possible to hold parliamentary elections, which was an especially significant event in Afghan history. These elections meant the country had its first democratically elected parliament in over thirty years.

I also firmly believe that, within the role assigned by NATO, NRDC-ITA had a substantially positive influence on how the Operation was conducted, with the incredible efforts of men and women from about fifty different countries involved.

The operations were guided by the directives from the HQ in Solbiate Olona and characterized by an extremely specific, balanced “approach” to the delicate task of bringing stability. The approach also stood out for the enormous attention given to the culture of the host nation, its traditions and, above all, respecting the dignity of the people. In practice, this “approach” also resulted in recognition for the staff from the 15 NATO nations that formed that participated in the HQ at the time.

These characteristics were evident in the accomplishments of the NRDC-ITA staff in Kabul, as part of the ISAF Command. Our results were due to their exceptional preparation, significant operational capability, and true balance. The diligence and dedication to mission were also visible in the subordinate Commands and in the specialist units involved in training Afghan security forces. Especially those organizing and developing reconstruction initiatives and in providing support for the local population. I am deeply grateful for the efforts of NRDC-ITA during this challenging operation and I am filled with satisfaction and pride when I reflect on our efforts.





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#WEARENATO / 7

# Lieutenant General (retired) **Marco Chiarini**, Italian Army

## My Experiences as the NRDC-ITA Chief of Staff and Commander



Warrant Officer Club Opening - December 2010.

My initial memory from my arrival at NRDC-ITA, is the image of my Chief Logistics officer welcoming me. He was cordial and friendly, but he was not a model of military man that I expected. It appeared to me that the officer had just completed difficult manual labor. He looked at me and said: "Chief, there is not very much here! We have to start from the beginning!"

I had just completed a 6-month tour in Kosovo and I was recently promoted to the rank of Brigade General. I was supposed to take command of the "Ariete Brigade" and I considered that appointment a significant honor. Accordingly, I was not that enthusiastic about the idea of the Army General Staff to place me as the Chief of Staff to build a new Rapid Reaction HQ.

The new HQ was supposed to be ready in a year and the declaration of readiness was to be certified by a detailed external NATO exam. Moreover, the Chief of Staff of this new unit was to be a Major General and I was just promoted to Brigade General! These thoughts ran through my mind as I was traveling to Solbiate and the meeting with my Chief Logistics officer was proverbial icing on the cake.

I realized quite soon that my Chief Logistics officer was correct and that we were facing multiple challenges. The new HQ was supposed to transform from the former 3° Corpo d'Armata located in Milan. Meaning the HQ was exclusively national with little capabilities to link with units of different nations. Second, the language skills were problematic. Specifically, few people were fluent in English or were ready to take lessons to improve their language skills. Additionally, the infrastructure was quite different than the contemporary buildings. For example, the new HQ building did not exist and was to be completed in the next few years. So, we temporarily worked in a battalion barracks that required repairs, especially to the roof. Finally, the most important challenges were our organizational culture. The previous HQ only had a national Command and Control Structure, was only able to operate in a national environment with all the required national logistics support and adhered to national administrative and operational rules. These challenges meant that we did not have the skills or knowledge to deploy the headquarters, manage subordinate units from different nations, and establish logistics links into a distant operational area.

With all these challenges in front of me, I quickly realized one important positive aspect. All of the officers and personnel assigned to this new HQ were outstanding, probably the best the Army could provide. The high quality of these staff officers was central to better understand and overcome our challenges.

When I arrived I reported to the Commander, Lt Gen Viva, to receive my orders. He was cordial, but he told me: "I cannot tell you very much, because I am leaving soon. The next Commander will be Lt Gen Castagnetti who is coming from Germany, where he is the Deputy Commander of the ARRC". I then asked our future Deputy Commander and I was told that MG Munro, a British general, would arrive soon. The commander added that MG Munro may be unhappy since he supposed to go to Verona in LAND-SOUTH. "Now, with the NATO restructuring he has been redirected to Solbiate!" With this additional information, the picture was complete. I understood that it was time to move on from my questions and to identify future objectives





Gen. Chiarini hosts JFC Naples Chief of Staff, Major General (Airforce) De Vincenti Leandro.

and to get to work. When the new Commander and Deputy arrived and I immediately realized that we could form a cohesive Command Group, ready for the big challenges in front of us.

I asked for and received the complete support of the Italian Army General Staff. The first major tasks were to find and source our HQ personnel, materials and equipment. On this aspect, I am glad to say that we received whatever we asked for, including new and modern material.

I asked the Army Staff to check and confirm our capabilities, well before the NATO inspection, to have time to address the eventual gaps. This intermediate check was to be completed by a professional organization outside the Italian Army: the "Warrior Preparation Center" in Ramstein, Germany. I was happy about this choice, because the professional rigor and quality of this Center was widely known in NATO. The exercise in Ramstein had the name "SPEARHEAD" and it immediately became our intermediate objective.

We immediately started with all aspects of training: physical, language, individual, and staff procedures in a combat environment. Before this point the old HQ had exercises, like MAPEXs or CPXs, that were based on the defense of Italy from the Soviet and Warsaw Pact threats. We no longer needed to launch a counterattack in the Padana Plain to counter a penetration in the Gorizia Gap! We needed to be ready to act in an unknown scenario, with different maps and while working with units from different alliance nations. To improve our skills, I found it helpful to utilize simulations. Every week we had a simulation session with all the key elements of the staff. These efforts produced positive results.

The language skills were not a significant challenge for the key staff officers, as all had experience in previous assignments and missions abroad. It was also not a problem for the junior officers as well. Most of them were able to sustain conversation in English and complete routine staff actions. We did identify significant language problems among the NCOs and the soldiers. So we organized language courses for them to improve their language skills.

When the multinational members of our staff arrived in Solbiate, we also had to manage housing challenges. Because in the area around our HQ we did not have the experience to resource housing contracts with foreign officers. Our newly established housing office quickly learned how to solve this issue for our multinational partners.

The last challenge was the need for a Brigade level support unit. The Army General Staff decided to constitute this support unit in the same location. The new Brigade included a signal regiment with two battalions, already in Milan and a support regiment based on the two battalions located in Solbiate. However, there were no buildings available for the Brigade HQ and they needed this resource soon. The decision was made to build a new structure with light prefabricated modules. This solution was sound and in a short time we had our Support Brigade ready to conduct a host of different tasks.

As we identified and worked hard to address these challenges, the most poignant memory was our pioneer spirit. We were conscious that we were the cutting edge of a new NATO capability. Everybody perceived that we were a large machine that just started to run. The profession-



alism and teamwork of our Allied personnel was essential to our success.

The test in Ramstein, with the Spearhead Exercise, was difficult, especially at the start. I am proud to say that the staff performed well and our results were positive. A few months later, we had the NATO test (CPX) in Civitavecchia with the name of EAGLE START. The results were really positive and we were rated as among the best NRDC's in NATO. This was a wonderful recognition of our collective efforts.

As I was leaving NRDC-ITA to take command of a multinational Brigade in southern Bosnia, Brigade Salamander, one memory comes to mind. I remember leaving my office, the first walls of the building for the new HQ were just starting to grow. They were grey against the sky with a host of workers around them, but they were growing. We were planting a deep seed that grew into the future location of NRDC-ITA.

## My Experiences as the NRDC-ITA Commander

In 2007 I was in Rheindahlen, Germany, as the Deputy Commander of the ARRC. During a visit, Gen Castagnetti, Chief of Staff of the Italian Army, told me: "you have to go back to Solbiate as the Commander, as soon as possible, and I want you to reconstitute the spirit of team we created together".

Actually, at the time I was not enthusiastic about this idea. Since my departure from Solbiate I had performed a mission in Bosnia as the Com-

mander of the Salamander Brigade, a mission in IRAQ as Commander of Ariete Brigade and another mission in Bosnia as the Commander of ALTHEA mission. I had only served for a few months in Germany as the ARRC Deputy and in that short time I had developed a good relationship with the Commander LTGEN Sherif. Moreover, I was still Major General, so I did not have the proper rank to command a Corps. Regardless, Gen Castagnetti confirmed my new future path.

When I first returned to NRDC-ITA, I was impressed by the new infrastructure. The main HQ building was functional and one of the support battalion barracks was finished and offered comfortable accommodation for privates and junior NCOs. However, work continued on the second battalion barracks and the NCO club.

Oddly, my perception was that there was something strange in the general attitude and atmosphere in the organization. So, with the help of the senior NCO's I decided to organize, some fun activities to like bringing our team together for a beer and a hamburger. All the staff answered in an enthusiastic way to this new activity and the improvements in the relationships were evident. I remembered Gen Castagnetti's guidance to "reconstitute the spirit of team we created together!"

A group of staff personnel were ready to go to Kosovo with the previous Commander and the main part was again deploying to Afghanistan for another mission. Additionally, the next tour of duty was just around the corner. We did a CPX in autumn, to finalize the preparations and in early December we went to the NATO Preparation Center in Stavanger, Norway, to test our



Interview to the NRDC-ITA Commander, Gen. Chiarini - June 2009.



capabilities. During a visit I was impressed by our progress and I now felt that our team was ready for the mission. Later, they went to Kabul and during a visit I was happy to see that we were becoming a functional headquarters.

Of note, one element that probably was neglected during the process of forming NRDC-ITA was the Protection Team within the support battalion. I was convinced that the team who defended us every day should be ready to execute the same mission while we were maneuvering units in combat. I worked closely with the Brigade and the battalion Commanders to train the protection soldiers. It was a mixed team of men and women who were expected to meet and exceed the same set of standards. The battalion commander implemented a training plan that included a patrol exercise, a priority channel for the shooting range in Bellinzago and close combat instructors. The results were really very good and parts of this team were asked to deploy to Kabul to fill an operational gap. They excelled and served with honor!

I also realized that another way to maintain and improve morale was to implement deployment exercises. This was important to eliminate the rust in our procedures, to confirm our confidence in our equipment, and to bring both the HQ Staff and the Support Brigade together while working toward a command objective. The first deployment was in Civitavecchia and it was an unmitigated success in terms of military but also social achievements! The subsequent year we performed other exercises, but the most important one was another DEPLOYEX in the range of Torre Veneri, Lecce (Quite distant from Solbiate).

Quite soon, we faced another significant challenge. The NATO HQ, SHAPE, decided to test the capabilities of all of the Rapid Deployment HQs in to assess their capability after 10 years of existence. Our test occurred in December and it was challenging. We had a diverse team of monitors, including personnel from SHAPE, senior officers from NGOs with previous experience in operations and university professors. Moreover, we overcame a difficult medical challenge, a virus that infected many in the command, and passed the test with an excellent score. We departed for the Christmas holiday with our heads held high!

The following year, my second tour of duty at NRDC-ITA ended and I was sent to another job in Brussels, Belgium. When I reflected on my last three years in Solbiate I was content and grateful. During these three difficult and turbulent years, I we had three Chief of Staffs and two Deputies and I remember all of them with gratitude, because they were always part our team. My gratitude extends beyond the staff of the NRDC-ITA HQ and the Support Brigade, because the results belong to all of us and not just

to a single person.

In June 2011, I left for the second time NRDC-ITA but now it was without any possibility of return. I was ready for another job!

## Conclusions

Transforming a national unit into a multinational Rapid Reaction Corps was a challenge for us and the entire Army. It represented a change in our military culture and an evolution of our perception of military life. For example, when I was a young officer it was rare to have the opportunity to work in a multinational environment. This shift became normal and we fully embraced the normality of working in a multinational environment.

Now NRDC-ITA is the only Corps left in the Italian military inventory and is a concentration of capabilities and military skills. This unit is ready to perform a range of National and/or NATO missions on short notice. All the military personnel who have served in this HQ have done so with commitment and dedication.

The only potential eventually that could limit the effectiveness of NRDC-ITA is sending the unit into theater piecemeal. Maximizing the effectiveness of NRDC-ITA requires the whole organization being employed together. If a unit is broken in different parts, most of the training benefit is lost. That said, I am confident that NRDC-ITA will continue to serve with distinction and honor as one of the premier NATO headquarters! As a retired officer and I can only remember the wonderful times during my service with NRDC-ITA.







# Lieutenant General (retired) **Giorgio Battisti**, Italian Army

## NRDC-Italy, a dynamic multinational organization at the spearhead of NATO

I had the honor and privilege to command NRDC-Italy from June 30, 2011 to November 24, 2014.

From the first day I assumed command, I realized that I was leading a dynamic, multinational organization. Our team of socially and culturally diverse men and women operated daily with a collaborative effort and an innovative spirit. They demonstrated a consistent sense of duty and dedication to the cause with high morale and an outstanding esprit de corps.

My job as commander of this diverse unit was challenging but I enormously benefited from the hard work of all of those who preceded me in this unique appointment. Each member of our multinational team earned my trust and has my enduring gratitude.

During my tenure, I witnessed three and a half years of intense commitment and professionalism. In addition to the usual training and operational activities envisaged for the community of NATO rapidly deployable commands, the Alliance set for us two important simultaneous challenges:

the NATO Response Force (Joint Task Force) validation, in the spring 2015 in Stavanger, Norway (EXE Trident Jaguar), preceded by the national validation in October 2014 in Torre Veneri Training Area (EXE Eagle Joker);

a one-year tour of duty in Afghanistan supporting ISAF, from January 2013 to February 2014. This was the third time NRDC-Italy deployed to Afghanistan, previously in 2005-2006 and 2009.

To start our tour of duty at full speed, NRDC-Italy personnel underwent a yearlong and intense period of training, during which NRDC-Italy personnel studied not only NATO and ISAF staff procedures, but also local customs and traditions.

Throughout 2012, NRDC-Italy staff conducted a series of coordinated and complimentary training events to prepare to deploy in January 2013. The training program was aligned with specific NATO documents and was based on three pillars: Individual Training and Cultural Awareness, Collective Role Competency, Hands-on Training and Real-World Exercises.

Specific programs were created and scheduled



Gen. Battisti meets Chief of Defence Staff (Italy) - Admiral Luigi Binelli Mantelli - April 2014.

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Gen. Battisti in ISAF 2013.

to allow our specialized personnel to prepare for our complex tasks. New processes and procedures were implemented for NRDC-Italy personnel to increase our capabilities.

After a long and intense preparation period, in January 2013 NRDC-Italy personnel arrived in Kabul. From the outset, we started at a high tempo, both in the military multinational Commands and in the civilian headquarters. In fact, upon arrival, approximately 400 men and women from NRDC-Italy were dispatched to the respective working locations at ISAF HQs, International

Joint Command (IJC) and at NATO Training Mission Afghanistan (NTM-A). We supporting both the strategic and the operational levels of command in the Combined Joint Area of Operations (CJOA).

The deployment experience, six months for some and a twelve months' others, represented an incredible opportunity to professionally and personally develop. We spent the year supporting and helping our Afghan comrades. Our aim was to set the conditions to facilitate Afghan political and military organizations to assume national responsibilities.



Gen. Battisti welcomes the Italian Prime Minister, Enrico Letta - ISAF 2013.

sponsibilities and lead operations to ensure a safe and secure environment in country. We wanted to help create a sovereign state from the rich human tapestry within Afghanistan.

We faced a long and challenging period, with complex and evolving circumstances as we wrote our story in the history of the Corps. It was a unique experience, and realized that the lessons learned during our long preparation were important and valuable. We started by crawling and then slowly learned to walk and then run as a staff.

In Afghanistan we were tasked to implement the results of the NATO Heads of State and Government meeting at the Chicago Summit on May 20, 2012. The Summit set out a strategy for concluding the transition of security responsibility to Afghan forces by the end of 2014, and delivered a strong commitment to supporting Afghan forces. Chicago was the largest ever gathering at a NATO Summit, including the President of Afghanistan and the UN Secretary General. It was a testament to a united commitment to the Afghan people and the future of the country.

We gained many memories in Afghanistan, a country that is distant and culturally different from Italy. As part of our history, this experience has become unique and sui generis for serving under extraordinary conditions and in an intense atmosphere that still today signifies the main effort of the Alliance.

Our contribution to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan is to be considered as another important piece of the history of NRDC-Italy. As such, it

was recognized by SACEUR with the award of the prestigious Allied Command Operations Pennant to the colors of NRDC-Italy.

NRDC-Italy's activities, however, were not limited to Afghanistan! NRDC-Italy continued the re-configuration phase indicated in the "Deployable Joint Command and Control Capability (JC2C-D)", which sealed the structure of the Corps in a Joint Command, to fully respond to the new demands that NATO identified to be even more capable of facing the future challenges: a broader commitment that required the active participation of the command staff and his support units!

This required NRDC-Italy to transform from a single-service HQ, with the sole responsibility of conducting land forces, to a Joint Headquarters able to manage a multidimensional scenario and to direct land, air, maritime and special forces operations for the Alliance.

In conclusion, I want to offer a special 'thank you' to our families, who represent an essential element in our daily lives and are an indispensable support. They allow us serve the Country, especially in times of difficulty and distance while giving us strength to operate at the best possible, with loyalty, self-sacrifice and courage.

I will always hold dearly many memories of this fascinating country, but most of all, in my memory will remain etched the endless landscapes, the eyes of children and the face and the names of our Soldiers who did not return. Their sacrifice was not in vain since it was in the service of others.



Italian Army Reconnaissance Patrol - ISAF 2013.



# Lieutenant General (retired) **Riccardo Marchiò**, Italian Army

## My Experiences as the NRDC-ITA Commander

In mid-November 2014, when I assumed command of NRDC-ITA, the multinational HQ was transforming to achieve the capability to operate in a joint environment. The process was completed in April 2015, after testing and assessments to obtain Full Operational Capability (FOC) as a Joint Task Force Headquarters (Land).

The impetus for our transformation was the results of NATO Summit in Lisbon, which significantly reduced the NATO Command Structure (NCS) and also created the requirement for additional skills and responsibilities in the NATO Force Structure (NFS) commands. In essence, the end state was to perform the traditional Land roles (Corps or Land Component), and also to gain the structure and capability for the Command and Control (C2) of a Small Joint Land Centric Operation.

This process was undertaken shortly after NRDC-ITA returned from its Afghanistan mission in 2013, under my predecessor, the Chief of the General Staff of the Army Giorgio Battisti. When I arrived at Solbiate, the Command and the Support Brigade, with their logistics and communication assets, had recently concluded

the EAGLE JOKER 14 exercise, which tested NRDC-ITA's capability to deploy and operate off-site in a Joint and Combined environment. This exercise, involved dispersed operations with the HQ based at the Torre Veneri range in Puglia, the Joint Logistic Support Group (JLSG) at the military airport in Brindisi, and JFACC at Poggio Renatico, marked the final phase of national validation.

The final step of this progression was planning, organizing, and conducting exercise TRIDENT JAGUAR 2015, at the NATO Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) in Stavanger, Norway.

The first challenge to overcome was with a lack of a relevant doctrine for this level of operations. At that point NATO did have extensive Joint doctrinal information, but it focused on defining situations, structures and processes for the JFCs at the NCS level. However, our goal was clearly not to replicate a JFC conducting a Major Joint Operation (MJO) or a Major Joint Operation Plus (MJO+), but to have our Army Corps achieve the necessary organization and capabilities to operate as an Operations Command reporting directly to SACEUR.



Plenary Meeting 2015 - Welcome speech by Gen. Marchiò.

In this light, the assessment process explored the following areas: Deployability, Capability, Staff Functions, Processes, and HQ Structure. In turn, for each area, Leadership, Policy, Facilities, Organization, Doctrine and Personnel were also examined. The final report highlighted 194 elements requiring action, which led to creating 286 SOPs and SOIs that would enable the Command to operate.

In February 2015, backed by a NATO assessment team, we started working with JWC staff to identify the events and incidents for use during the Trident Jaguar exercise to test the full training audience and to achieve required training levels. This stage and the subsequent exercises highlighted another decisive aspect. Because the current arrangement of NRDC-ITA as a Joint Task Force (JTF) did not have a subordinate division-level Land command. As such, it had to operate on two distinct levels: (i) operational, since it was Operations Command, and (ii) tactical, as it represented the Land Component Command (LCC) for the land assets reporting directly to it. This made it necessary to simultaneously generate the two capabilities while the operation was being conducted, to develop the two planning processes and the related drafting of the Joint Coordination Orders (JCOs) and the Fragmentary Orders (FRAGOs).

The solution was to focus the tactical level on the Command's Operational Centre (OPCEN), assigning the Deputy Chief of Staff (DCOS) Ops as the Tactical Commander. The idea worked, even if DCOS Ops at that time, General Scopigno, and his staff had to maintain a hectic, two level battle rhythm that he almost required psychiatric treatment after the exercise!

However, the solutions to satisfy the numerous criteria defined during the evaluation process, albeit still experimental, produced positive results. Even though the staff was not only perfectly integrated with the augmentees, it arrived for the Stavanger exercise in excellent shape.

My goal is not only to only describe our exercises. The two weeks at JWC provided clear evidence that the detailed and excellent work to prepare for Trident Jaguar proved the effectiveness of the formula adopted to assume the new Command and Joint Control capability.

This validation of NRDC ITA was a substantial achievement in our capacity to support the Alliance in various scenarios. Concurrently, it was also only the starting point for a new approach to organizing and maintaining a credible level of operational readiness within the NFS.

NRDC-ITA achieved this target just six months before the NATO Summit in Wales, during which the Alliance acknowledged the increased threat in the East and new hybrid threats with the Readiness Action Plan. This included revitalizing the NATO Response Force (enhanced NRF), which provides high readiness, and credible, agile capabilities, especially through the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), a joint asset that can be deployed rapidly.

Soon after being certified as a JTFHQ but still in standby for this role, NRDC-ITA commenced preparations to be certified as a Land Component of the eNRF in 2018. Concurrently, we assumed the role of coordinating all the necessary actions to create and prepare the VJTF (L) with the Armored "Ariete" Brigade. The latter was facilitated by two command levels belonging to the same framework nation and it allowed the



Gen. Marchiò during Trident Jaguar 2015 Exercise.



Land Component to proceed in parallel with the Command of the designated Brigade at all preparatory stages.

I left NRDC-ITA at the end of September 2016 and I was unable to complete our preparations for this new role. Yet, my experience with the Corps was not entirely over. Indeed, only a few weeks after it was certified as the Land Component for NRF in the wake of the glowing outcome of the 2017 Brilliant Ledger exercise (taking on that role in January of that year), I became the Commander of Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFCBS), the Operational Command responsible for the NRF for 2018!

Given this new opportunity, less than a year after my departure, I once again was in charge of its capacity as the Land Component of the eNRF. I found immense satisfaction to see “my men and women from Solbiate” at work at the Joint Force Training Centre (JFTC) in Bydgoszcz, Poland for the Brilliant Joust exercise in March 2018. The demanding exercise tested the interaction between the operational level and the Command Components and demonstrated our high level of preparedness.

That experience reminded me of my first experience with the Army Corps. At that time, the 2002 Lightship exercise - organized by the General Staff of the Army and the Operational Land Forces Command - was conducted in December to test the FOC of the newly formed NRDC-ITA. As the Head of Exercise Control (EXCON), I was the Operational Commander. I vividly remember those VTCs with the late General Castagnetti during which, to add realism to the simulation, wearing the “four star” stripes, I used an informal tone and called him “Fabrizio”.

Since then, with a string of success, NRDC-ITA has continued to grow and prove its worth to the alliance. It is known within NATO as a reliable and responsive Command. At the same time, it remains a focal point for training personnel from other NATO units and national units from NATO. It truly is an exceptional “training ground” to acquire new knowledge and professional skills.

I am certain of the value of our efforts. The contemporary geo-strategic context, with evolving security threats and risks, is complex. We face an increasing number of domains in which the Armed Forces will be required to operate. We cannot succeed in this environment with rigid formulas and mindsets. Our most powerful tool is our collective mental agility and flexibility to understand and address challenges. In such a context, staff training, readiness focused exercises, and maintaining the capability to quickly integrate into complex command and control structures is the best means to ensure the viability of NATO’s Command capability and structures.



Closing remarks for Eagle Eye 2016 by Gen. Marchiò.



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# Lieutenant General **Roberto Perretti**, Italian Army

## My Experiences as the NRDC-ITA Commander



Gen. Perretti.

On September 29, 2016, I had the great honor to assume the command of NATO Rapid Deployable Corps - Italy. The Corps had been committed to a demanding period of activities while facing a second year in the role of a Joint Task Force (JTF) HQ and contributing to fulfill the Alliance's Level of Ambition (LoA).

From the outset I traced a striving path to make NRDC-ITA capable of operating across the full spectrum of operations and executing NATO's core tasks.

The main effort was focused on changing approaches and mindsets in a short timeframe for the different NATO roles (JTF HQs, LCC HQs, Corps HQs) that NRDC-ITA might be called upon by the alliance.

Thus, while still being in the JTF HQs stand-by period, I directed the staff to refine and maintain the acquired Joint capabilities and in parallel to effectively manage the complex transition process to set the conditions for NRDC-ITA to undergo the certification process for the enhanced NATO Response Force (eNRF) Land Component Command (LCC) HQs beginning from January 2018.

In this context, the goal we successfully reached was to deliver a trained and proven HQ, interoperable with higher echelons, subordinate units, sister components and enablers. The most significant challenge was to shift doctrine, procedures,

tactics, techniques, skills and overall approaches from the operation level to the tactical level.

Our training programs strengthened and consolidated the tactical professional capabilities of the staff, at changed mindsets and approaches and adopted different procedures to face the role of eNRF LCC.

Concurrently, I realized the importance of simultaneously focusing our attention on supervising the preparation and the training activities of the Italian ARIETE armoured brigade that was serving as the land multinational unit of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF-L). In this regard, substantial efforts were made by the HQs to enhance the brigades training and ability to be interoperable with multinational forces. Our common goal was to be ready for a short notice deployment to preserve peace and stability around the world.

Exercise BRILLIANT LEDGER 2017 was the final training event and the evaluation venue, before assuming the command and control of the land NATO response forces in 2018. This was the opportunity to demonstrate a high level of readiness, effectiveness and interoperability as well as the capability to plan, prepare, deploy, and sustain forces during a high intensity warfighting operation. Thanks to this, NRDC-ITA was evaluated and certified as Combat Ready and was the



NRDC-ITA Change of Command - December 2019.

first Corps within the Alliance to receive the top scores in the evaluation conducted by the NATO Land Commands.

But our mission did not end with our certification. During our year as the stand-by headquarters we had to be ready to deploy and conduct operations for NATO. Whatever the mission, we were required to be quickly react and deploy and to carry out our mission as ordered. Readiness was the key word for the NRDC-ITA HQ and to this end, we conducted deliberate training, tests and exercises, intelligence preparation work, and horizon scanning.

In this context, the deployable Command Post (CP) required particular attention. A lighter, more agile and more effective Command Post was necessary to better face the emerging challenges and contemporary battlefield vulnerabilities. After several deliberate tests, specifically the EAGLE LIGHT exercise series, a new dispersed CP configuration was created. The new CP concept included was more mobile and survivable on the battlefield. Survivability became the second key word for NRDC-ITA and we were recognized as a pioneer within the NATO land environment in this domain.

As we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Alliance in 2019 we began a new demanding period. New threats and long forgotten challenges reemerged in the Eastern border of the Alliance and reminded us the importance of NATO's founding principle: Collective Defence. In this regard, NRDC-ITA focused its efforts on revisiting and adapting Corps capabilities to further refine being an effective instrument for an Art. 5 operation. These preparations required a return to a warfare mindset that the Alliance faced during the cold war against a near-peer competitor. Addi-

tionally, a significant effort was made to re-focus on a wide variety of areas. Effectiveness could be achieved by maximizing our warfighting capabilities, investing time and energy to increase our knowledge of 360 degrees, being "aggressive" in terms of personal commitment and motivation, innovation and demanding training which had to be focused on time critical, complex, and high tempo operations. Thus, Effectiveness became the third key word for NRDC-ITA HQ.

Exercise EAGLE METEOR was built to test and verify the HQ's capability to operate as a warfighting Corps in multiple scenarios, such as a high intensity and hybrid warfighting against a near-peer adversary, in a degraded environment. The exercise included over 1800 soldiers from 18 NATO countries deployed to multiple locations in Italy and abroad. This complex field deployment of affiliated and subordinate formations under the command and control of HQ NRDC-ITA represented one of the most significant tests for the final validation of the distributed command post concept in this type of scenario. The most significant challenge was to shape the mentality of the HQ to win the deep fight, manage the complex battle space during close operations and control rear operations to facilitate sustainment. In this context, we were the first Corps to have developed such demanding and comprehensive exercises amongst the Land High Readiness Forces.

During the closing months of 2019, also my waning days as the Commander, the HQ focused on fixing and consolidating our experiences and capacities gained to effectively operate in the different roles, including the emerging Multi-Corps Land Component Command.

Continuity became the fourth key word for our multinational team. All capabilities, exercises and

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lessons developed during the years in the different roles and functions had to be identified, saved and stored for the future commitments of NRDC-ITA. Importantly we also invested significant time and energy to share our experiences with sister NATO HQs and national forces. An electronic “toolbox” on our share portal provided structured access to identified/learned, training/exercises experiences and practical knowledge. We wanted to share our experiences so that others could avoid repeating our mistakes and to help others develop best practices. Furthermore, this tool remains a key point of reference for the entire staff during the planning, preparation and execution phase of all future exercises and operations.

Moreover, while focusing on providing a robust, ready and interoperable HQ for Alliance missions of assurance and deterrence on its eastern flank, NRDC-ITA continued to support the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) that was formalized during the Wales Summit of 2014. Along with other mandates, our headquarters continued to analyze the evolving requirements needed to face the growing challenges and threats emanating from NATO’s Southern Flank. In this regard, NRDC-ITA remained, and still continues to be, a key NATO resource within Italy and in the broader NATO community for awareness of security concerns in the Mediterranean region.

This gave a strong impulse for the HQ to implement various organizational and pragmatic solutions. Of note, the HQ conducted the EAGLE EYE exercises. This exercise series consisted of a series of conferences and seminars that connected experts from across academia, government and NATO military forces military to address the NATO Strategic Direction South in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the Mediter-

anean areas. Additionally, the implementation of the Knowledge Development (KD) concept reinforced the HQ’s capability to support the decision-making process by contributing to the development of a holistic situational understanding of the relevant crisis areas. This included covering all Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure and Information (PMESII) domains by forecasting the relevant PMESII systems. Once again, NRDC-ITA demonstrated the capability to embody the primary role in analyzing current and future scenarios and developing appropriate concepts.

Moreover, to create momentum to this specific area NRDC-ITA signed a series of Memorandums of Cooperation with multiple Italian Universities to leverage the depth of experience of professors, researchers and selected students. These experts supported our Knowledge Development (KD) team in analyzing events and trends in the MENA region, to ensure that I had the informed perspective during operational decision making.

Due to the efforts of our multinational team of high-quality professionals, NRDC-ITA became a role model and a point of reference within the Alliance, especially in the land community with LANDCOM and the other sister HQs.

We faced and overcame several difficult challenges. Importantly, we excelled due to the dedication and perseverance of our national and multinational staff and the cooperation of NATO Commands and sister HQs. We built a collaborative and supportive team that was focused on collective success while providing exceptional support to our families.

Readiness, Survivability, Effectiveness and Continuity

Ubique Celere!



Gen. Perretti during Eagle Meteor 2019 Exercise.



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