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ALLIED REACTION FORCE

FOCUSED ON THE NEW REALITY

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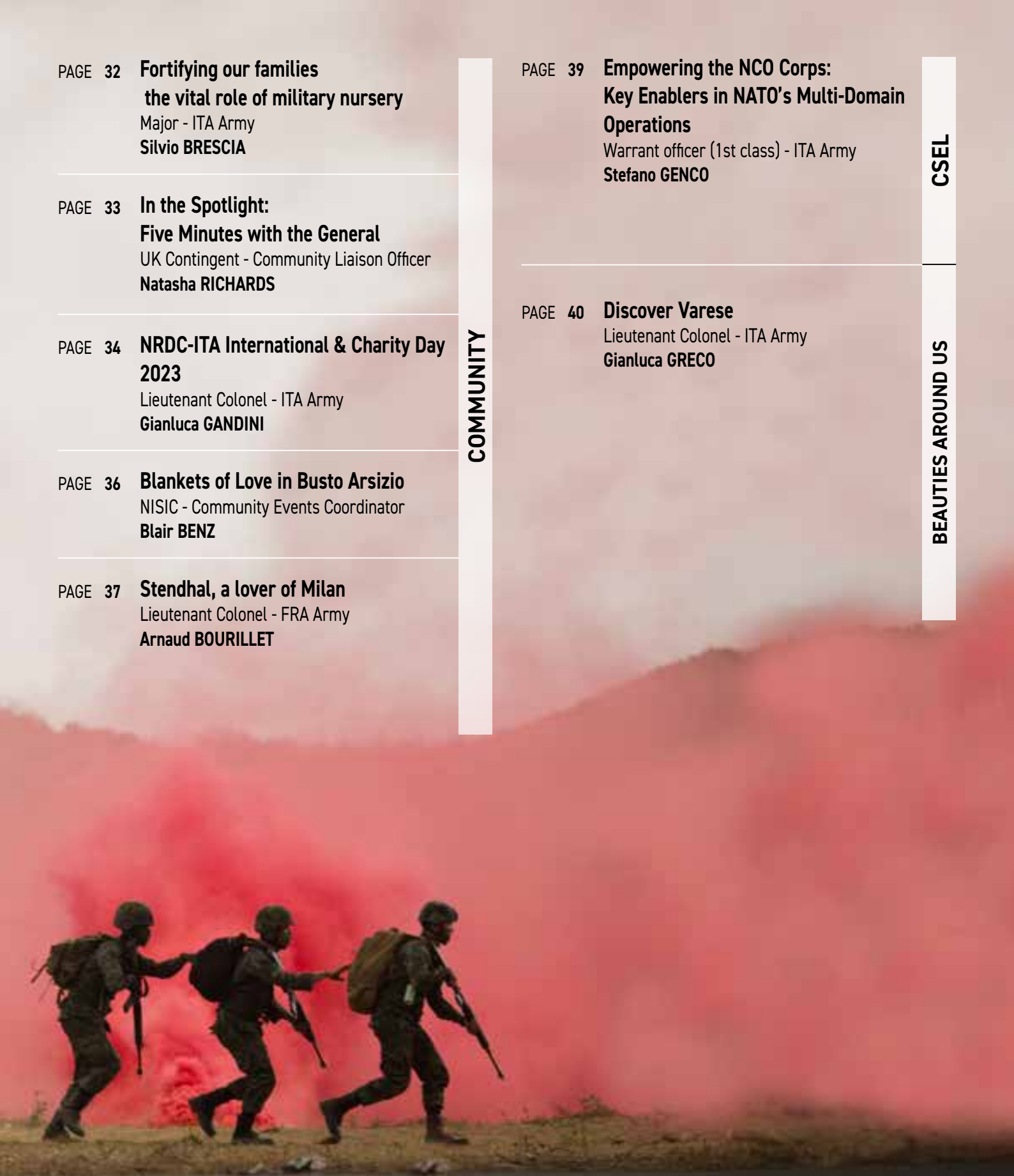
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BEAUTIES AROUND US



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FOREWORD by Deputy Commander NRDC-ITA



In the last edition, General Lorenzo D'Addario alluded to our new role as the 3 Star Allied Reaction Force (ARF) HQ. This is a mega exciting role, as it builds upon our experiences from the last 2 years as NATO's Joint Task Force for Land Heavy operations. The new ARF role is like a Joint Task Force on steroids – we will need to be more Joint, more Multi-Domain Operations capable, more ready, more clever, more focused – and also more agile. We will need to build better relationships with our stakeholders, especially with the Theatre Component Commands and the JFCs – so that we can support them in time of peace and know how they will support us in time of crisis.

The ARF role is incredibly exciting, and it will be really busy too – in fact we already see an increase in the tempo of the HQ, and an increase in our profile across the NATO community. So please communicate our new role, and our determination to build relationships to help achieve it to all those in your spheres of influence – and ask them to help us to think through the issues. This edition of ER is a perfect way to reinforce the message, and I commend the latest edition to you and to those who have an interest in the ARF. And if our Commander were writing this foreword, I suspect he would conclude by reminding us all of the value added by and sacrifices made by our partners and families. We are so grateful to them for all they do for us and we hope very much that you are (or were!) able to dedicate quality family time to them over the Christmas period, before we get back on the rollercoaster in January!



Focus on the ARF.

▶ What's the future of the Alliance's readiness forces?



Lieutenant Colonel
ITA Air Force
Stefano PAGANI

Introduction

One of the principle dilemmas which has always faced the signatories of the North Atlantic Treaty is the credibility of the deterrent. Would the whole power of the Allies be unleashed upon an aggressor who invaded a remote area of the NATO region?

The obligation accepted by the Parties is: *“to take forthwith individually and in concert with the other members such action, including the use of armed forces, as is deemed necessary by each Party”*.

Background

The necessity of visibly demonstrating the solidarity of the Allies and of their willingness to act together rapidly exercised the minds of the military members of the original Western European Union. Proposals were made for integrated European units, brigades and formations. Unfortunately, the practical difficulties seemed too great and ideas were abandoned. Once the NATO Treaty had been signed, headquarters were formed, but below that level, corps and divisions remained national.

In early 1960 General Lauris Norstad, then Supreme Commander Allied Powers Europe, decided to set up a working party to define the organization of an international headquarters and a multinational brigade-sized formation that would become SACEUR's own mobile task force.

The recommendations of this working party were accepted by SACEUR and the Military Council and so, in March 1960, the Allied Command Europe Mobile Force (AMF) came into being. Its purpose was to make clear to any actual or potential aggressor that an attack against one nation would constitute an attack against all members of the Alliance, demonstrating the unity of purpose upon which NATO is founded.

The NATO Force Structure (NFS) has changed substantially over the last 30 years.

In the Cold War it was characterized by a large standing force with smaller reaction forces configured for strategic confrontation and potential large-

scale conflict with the Soviet Union. In the post-Cold-War period, the NFS shifted to a pool of forces, at various levels of readiness, forces generated and organized in response to non-specific crises or conflicts. In such circumstances, it was envisaged that the NATO force would be organized, at the time of the crisis, to meet the agreed political and military objectives.

Following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent invocation of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty during the Prague Summit in 2002, NATO members endorsed a comprehensive set of measures. These measures were designed to enhance the Alliance's capacity to address security challenges affecting its forces, populations, and territory. The decisions taken aimed at providing NATO with well-balanced and effective capabilities, enabling the alliance to undertake a diverse range of missions and collectively respond to various threats, including terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Recognizing the importance of effective military forces as part of their overall political strategy, NATO members announced the establishment of the NATO Response Force (NRF). This force, comprising approximately 40,000 troops drawn from selected elements of Allies' force structures on a rotational basis, is required to be technologically advanced, flexible, deployable, interoperable, and sustainable, covering land, sea, and air components.



The NRF swiftly assumed a crucial role in various global events, demonstrating its versatility and effectiveness. In 2004, elements of the NRF contributed to securing the Summer Olympics in Athens and supported the Afghan presidential elections.

In 2005, NRF aircraft delivered relief supplies to the United States after Hurricane Katrina, demonstrating its capability for disaster response. Subsequently, from October 2005 to February 2006, the NRF was active in providing disaster relief in Pakistan following a severe earthquake, involving the transportation of supplies and deployment of personnel to assist in the relief efforts.

Since 2014 and following the Russian invasion of Crimea, with the Wales Summit, NATO has developed Graduated Response Plans (GRPs), which have led to an adjustment to the NRF structure. The GRPs also linked the NRF force package with specific advance plans for regional deployment within SACEUR's Area of Responsibility (AOR). During this period, Allies' national forces have also undergone significant change, characterized by: strengthening in-



place national forces; new deployments collectively by the Alliance and individually by Allies in support of national and regional defense; the modernization of equipment and forces; and the establishment of new NFS regional HQs.

The enhanced NRF (eNRF) further improved NATO's deterrence and defense posture by developing the original NRF model into three echelons of graduated readiness: the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), the Initial Follow-on Forces Group (IFFG) and the Follow-on Forces Group (FFG). The NATO Readiness Initiative (NRI), introduced in 2018, was developed to strengthen and improve readiness, by defining clear and ambitious readiness targets.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, NATO responded by deploying high-readiness elements of the NRF in a deterrence and defense role for the first time. Thousands of additional troops and diverse military assets were placed on high readiness within the NRF, ensuring its capability to defend NATO territory. This marks a significant transformation, as highlighted by the 2022 Strategic Concept stating, "The Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace." Inevitably, the conflict in Ukraine raises critical questions about NATO's purpose, specifically its ability to deter Russian aggression against Allies and its strategy for self-defense if necessary.

In response to these challenges, NATO Leaders, during the Madrid Summit in June 2022, reached a consensus on a fundamental shift in NATO's deterrence and defense approach. This involved the creation of a new NATO Force Model, set to replace the NRF, which will enable an Allied





posed by China, so that NATO can continue to act decisively in the future across the five operational domains in an orchestrated and synchronized manner.

Allied Reaction Force (ARF)

In 2023 at the Vilnius summit, the Concept for Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) was agreed. The DDA sets military activities and deterrence objectives in peacetime as well as military activities and defense objectives in crisis and conflict against the two main threats of Russia and Terror Groups.

In this framework the Allied Reaction Force (ARF) forms a critical component of the New NATO Force Model, which supports the DDA Concept. This is an entirely new concept which provides multi-domain forces from across the Alliance to produce effects at shorter notice than was previously possible. The creation of the ARF places forces at the disposal of SACEUR, allowing for a rapid response to emerging situations across the continuum of operations.

An ARF is capable of carrying out a full spectrum of missions. It can serve as a rapid deployable strategic reserve in crisis, it can be deployed to deter vertical/horizontal escalation, and it can also deploy rapidly in response to crises linked to other emerging situations.

Multinational by design, an ARF is a clear demonstration of Allied commitment, cohesion and resolve.

NRDC-ITA's role as an ARF Headquarters (HQ)

NRDC-ITA's role as an ARF HQ provides SACEUR with immediate capability to respond to crises while providing the time and space for the development of permanent ARF structures. NRDC-ITA will also be vital as a mechanism to provide ARF Proof of Concept, Experimentation and Lesson Learned for the future.

The decision to appoint NRDC-ITA is entirely in line with its ability and professional approach, and its recent certification as a JTF 2023 demonstrates its ability to operate across a myriad of mission profiles, including Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR), Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) and even combat operations.

Operating as an ARF HQ will require a change from the traditional role of High Readiness Force that operates within operational and tactical frameworks, to a role with greater strategic focus and responsibilities.

Throughout the remainder of 2023 and early 2024, NRDC-ITA will undergo a rigorous series of military exercises, academic studies and staff training, culminating with Exercise Steadfast Deterrence during which, in May 2024, it will receive validation as an ARF HQ, before taking on this role in July 2024.

The new role assigned to NRDC-ITA will strengthen already established relationships with partner nations, while also making it possible to work with new allies, sharing experience and demonstrating the best principles of cohesion and legitimacy.

The selection of NRDC-ITA is yet another demonstration of the commitment of Italy to the Alliance and its concept of Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area.

response on a larger scale and with heightened readiness. The upcoming NATO Force Model aims to provide a more extensive pool of forces, totaling 300,000 troops at varying levels of high readiness across land, maritime, air, and cyber domains. These forces will be pre-assigned to specific plans dedicated to the defense of Allies.

Why Change is Necessary: continuum of operations

Today, NATO operates in an age of constant competition, pervasive instability and strategic shocks that have changed the context for operations and how they are conducted. Alliance nations increasingly face threats from adversaries that are already competing across multiple domains, both covertly and overtly, to shape the operating environment to their own strengths.

Multi-faceted threats are found in all strategic directions in an increasingly complex, hyperactive, urbanized and connected battlespace with no geographical boundaries and where all domains are contested across all levels of operations. The ubiquitous information environment exacerbates this complexity, operating with bias and opposing sentiments that influence audiences rapidly and without regard for truth or accuracy. This new era of simultaneous shaping, contesting and fighting is increasingly dynamic and actors are intertwined in a complicated mix of political relationships and economic dependencies.

The basic requirement for heavy high-end forces across the Maritime, Land and Air domains remains essential. But, Cyberspace and Space are having an increasing impact on security and require a change to NATO's traditional military thinking, its organizations and its activities. Many capabilities in Land, Maritime and Air often depend on capabilities that operate in the Space and Cyberspace domains and therefore require some degree of cross-domain support. NATO must continue to adapt to a future battlespace that is persistent, simultaneous and boundless in order to deter/defeat adversaries across all domains and environments.

The Alliance must develop the capabilities and capacity to understand the projected multi-domain threats posed by Russia and Terror Groups, as well as the challenges

Road to Steadfast Deterrence 2024

Our commitment to readiness

Peace in the Euro-Atlantic area has been shattered and, as such, NATO is currently facing maybe the most dangerous and unforeseeable environment since the Cold War. For these reasons, the Alliance has reaffirmed its key purpose: ensure collective defence, based on a 360-degree approach. This approach can be explained, on the basis of the Strategic Concept 2022 and the topics from the Vilnius Summit (held on 11 and 12 July 2023), using three main core tasks: deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security. During the summit, NATO leaders met to address the most pressing challenge for the Alliance, namely further strengthening NATO's deterrence and defence.



"We have just concluded an historic NATO Summit. Over the past two days, we took major decisions to adapt our Alliance for the future. We agreed NATO's most detailed and robust defence plans since the Cold War. We strengthened our commitment to defence investment...", said NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, at the end of the Vilnius Summit.

An initial understanding of an emerging crisis is usually developed to include an accurate understanding of the nature of the problem and the potential implications for Allied countries. As part of this phase, in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, NATO is improving and evolving its deterrence and defence, including with Regional Defence Plans and a New Force Model with more troops at high readiness. In the High North region, Russia's ability to disrupt Allied reinforcement and freedom of navigation across the North Atlantic is a strategic challenge to the Alliance. NATO will continue to take necessary and coordinated action to address this, including by conducting exercises based on its plans.

The NATO Defence Planning Process plays a key role in the sharing of risks and responsibilities, reaffirming the commitment of Alliance members to provide their share of the capabilities required to fulfil the three core tasks, as per the

Captain
ITA Army
Mirko LEONE





main points from the summit. In addition, NATO intends to continue to strengthen, with regular exercises, its ability to reinforce any Ally that comes under threat. Fundamentally, exercises are a key way to demonstrate the Alliance's resolve and capability, adapting and streamlining the decision-making process in order to test and improve the effectiveness of Allied alert and response systems.

Collective defence planning must be fully consistent with force planning, posture management, capabilities and command and control. These plans must be prepared for high-intensity and multi-domain collective defence. In this regard, planning in a multi-domain environment presents challenges but it is necessary to develop appropriately detailed operational plans that address all relevant factors to conduct of an operation efficiently and successfully.

Under the new NATO Force Model, Allies are designating and delivering a pool of combat-capable forces, including high-readiness forces, to establish a new multinational and multi-domain Allied Reaction Force (ARF).

The NRDC-ITA has been selected as the headquarters for the ARF and will provide the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) with a reaction force capable of responding quickly to a crisis, while simultaneously providing an opportunity to develop an ARF permanent structure.

"I'm excited and honored to be able to serve the Alliance in such a crucial role. We will be training hard to provide NATO a ready force", said NRDC-ITA Commander Lieutenant General Lorenzo D'Addario.

This is a real responsibility for the Italian men and women of NRDC-ITA and it will test their ability to respond rapidly in areas threatened by different actors within a complex international scenario. They will have to explore the contemporary perspective, face the current situation and turn challenges into opportunities.

Another aspect to be highlighted is the changing nature of NRDC-ITA's relationships with International Organizations (IOs), SHAPE and other NATO Command Structure (NCS) actors, with a new liaison and coordination model. For the very first time NRDC-ITA will play a new role that depends directly on SACEUR, so it has to be ready to be act rapidly. The real change lies in how it will be used because NRDC-ITA was a NATO Force Structure (NFS) Organization until now.

A new type of exercise involves new collaborations and partnerships that are useful to face the challenges in the modern scenario. Today, more than in past exercises, new components are actively involved in planning, in Italy and abroad, using "wireless" forms of cooperation and drawing on the backgrounds of these new components. The mixing of such experiences can help achieve the Alliance's goals.

In this light, Steadfast Deterrence 2024 (STDC24) is the first iteration of the new Major Joint Exercise (MJX) series and it is aimed at training Strategic and Operational level HQs – through Command Post/Computer Assisted Exercises (CPX/CAX) – while conducting peacetime vigilance activities and the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) Family of Plans (FoP) against a peer adversary. This will be the first opportunity to exercise aspects of DDA at the strategic/operational level using the new NATO Force Model (NFM), thus challenging the Alliance in peace and crisis. Finally, it will set the benchmark for future ARF HQ training and certification.

The exercise requires close adherence to the potential situation in case of a real activation and following deployment. This readiness during planning is meant to test the reaction of staff within time constraints. This will require excellent organization and coordination, especially as the personnel come from different backgrounds. Doing this will require using the standard procedures consolidated in over 20 years of NRDC-ITA HQ experience.

The planning for 2023 includes a series of activities that NRDC-ITA will conduct, culminating with C-Block (former Crisis Response Planning – CRP). In early 2024, it will set up a series of activities leading to the execution phase that is named E-Block (EmployEx).

In addition to activities, such as Key Leader Training (KLT), seminars, staff rides and so on, the initial exercise will start with A-Block (Academics) to ensure a common understanding of the future mission and its execution. Subsequently, NRDC-ITA staff personnel will manage the key cross-functional areas and procedures to achieve a comprehensive understanding process.

Academics provide a useful opportunity for the staff to prepare for the exercise and the following C-Block, which will be held in the next step.

These training activities will ensure that NRDC-ITA continues to be at the forefront of operational capability, remaining constantly vigilant of potential threats to the Alliance. In doing so, NRDC-ITA remains credible and reinforces the core

During this phase, PPO will quickly be reviewed and adjusted through the Operational Plan Adjustment Process (OPAP) according to the current situation. Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) from all domains (covering both physical and virtual dimensions) will effectively support these planning phases in order to contribute to full-spectrum capability, providing flexibility, agility and sustainability for the whole organization and creating a liaison with the higher Commands.

Activities will be both in presence and virtually under the direction of NRDC-ITA staff. C-Block will ensure the adoption of a collaborative process involving the strategic, operational and tactical levels to develop effective planning and executable operational plans.

Finally, the Joint Operational Planning Group (JOPG) will improve its ability to conduct a liaison process with higher and lower echelons by deploying an ARF Liaison Reconnaissance Team (ALRT).

Accomplishing C-Block will mark another step forward towards Steadfast Deterrence 2024 (STDC24) validation.



NATO aim of deterrence and collective defence.

The following planning process will be performed in two linked phases: Prudent Pre-planned Option (PPO), for the potential deployment of the ARF package to an Allied portion of territory and C-Block. PPO will be conducted to prepare a set of executable options to keep on the shelf, related to the current international situation and threat assessment.

Subsequently, as part of essential preparation for STDC24, staff personnel and essential augmentees from the affiliated NATO HQs and units will conduct C-Block (former Crisis Response Planning – CRP). C-Block lays the foundation for Operational Plan (OPLAN) development, providing a great opportunity for the multinational staff to prepare for the upcoming exercise and to familiarize staff members with future exercise events.

At the conclusion of E-Block, which is designed to exercise the employment of forces through another CPX/CAX, the HQ will be validated as an ARF HQ, prior to taking on this role in summer 2024.

CONCLUSIONS

With the effort of STDC24, through enhancing the full-spectrum capabilities and establishing a new mind-set with a pioneering vision for this role, NRDC-ITA has reaffirmed its role as a training hub thanks to its structures and technologies.

In the current continuum of competition, NRDC-ITA represents the first example of a new model of rapid reaction force HQ, able to respond in a very short time wherever and whenever it is needed.

Fostering Unity and Strength in the Alps: Exercise Eagle Adventure 2023

NRDC-ITA's Pursuit of Cohesion, Skill Development, and Mountain Exploration

From 5 to 11 June 2023, NRDC-ITA returned to the Monte Bianco barracks in the wonderful surroundings of La Thuile and the Aosta valley to conduct Exercise Eagle Adventure. The goal of this exercise is to build cohesion and strengthen the 'esprit de corps' among NRDC-ITA staff through the development of military skills in a physically challenging mountain environment.

A total of 61 men and women of all ranks, representing 8 nations at NRDC-ITA and the Support Brigade, participated in a series of challenging military mountain skills activities in the mid-altitude mountainous terrain of Aosta, taking full advantage of this opportunity for professional and personnel development.

While the exercise was conducted over a week in June, to prepare individuals physically and ensure everyone got the most out of the experience, a specific fitness program was conducted over a 5-week period in May at the gym at UMB, with a choice of sessions so people could attend around their other daily work commitments. The overall success of the exercise was of course due to the quality of the early planning and coordination by the organizer and the small team from NRDC-ITA, which worked closely with the Support Brigade and Mountain

Colonel
GBR Army
Neil RICHARDSON



Training Centre in the preceding months. The logistical and technical support provided by the NRDC-ITA Support Brigade, Comando Truppe Alpine (Italian Army Mountain Troops HQ), Centro Addestramento Alpino (Italian Army Mountain Training Centre HQ) and the Monte Bianco barracks was crucial and greatly appreciated.

An advance party left the Ugo Mara Barracks in Solbiate Olona on 5 June to prepare for the arrival of the troops involved in the exercise on 6 June, ensuring they would be ready to help the troops settle into their accommodation, issue equipment, and deliver an afternoon of essential safety and technique briefings for moving in mountainous and hostile environments. The exercise started in





earnest on 7 June with basic skill sets in rock climbing, abseiling and 'Via Ferrata' taught and then practiced at Cantore Castle, the Mountain Training Centre Headquarters. These skills were taught by the tactics wing instructors, who were ably supported by our own Alpine members at NRDC-ITA. To round up Day 2, all participants were given a briefing and tour of the Mountain Training Centre Headquarters building. This was a unique and privileged opportunity to learn about both the history of the Alpine soldiers and the military fortifications in the area, such as "Colle della Croce" or "Piccolo San Bernardo".

We learned that these structures – including trenches, defensive positions, and shelters – have significant historical and strategic importance as they are situated on two mountain passes on the border between Italy and France. We were fortunate to visit "Colle della Croce," which is located at an altitude of approximately 1,774 meters. This location was the site of military conflicts during both World War I and World War II, as Italian and French forces clashed in this mountainous region. The military fortifications played a critical role in protecting the pass and preventing enemy forces from gaining access.

Similarly, "Piccolo San Bernardo," located at an altitude of around 2,188 meters, has a long history of military use. During the Napoleonic period, this pass was vital for Napoleon Bonaparte's military campaigns. Today, many of the fortifications have been restored and preserved as historic sites, contributing to the preservation of the memory of these strategically significant locations.

After learning techniques and building confidence on Day 2, Day 3 had personnel heading into Val di Rhêmes for a gentle introduction to the mountain environment to conduct a circular Via Ferrata route called 'Casimiro' (2046m), with an elevation gain of 300m before a hike back down to get on the buses and return to the Monte Bianco barracks in

La Thuile. Over the next two days, the participants tackled more challenging mountain hikes, and one-way routes, firstly to the Bertune Hut (2000m), ascending a total of 750m in the Courmeyer/Betone/Val Ferret area, and then either on to Mont Chetif (2343m) ascending 1100m in the Courmeyer/Mont Chetif/Val Veny region or to an alternative route with a smaller ascent of 700m in the La Thuile/Pta Croce region from Col San Carlo to Punta Croce (2461m). The latter being dynamically planned and offered for those who felt less able or for whom the physical challenge of the previous days had taken its toll. Our final day of activity on 10 June was a trip up the Skyway to Punta Helbronner on the Mont Blanc Massif (3536m). This was a particular highlight of the trip for many, with spectacular views across the glacier and an opportunity to feel the tranquility so high up in the Alps and to connect to nature. Watching many ski tourers and mountaineers roped together traversing the glacier will have stimulated a desire in many to rise to such a challenge themselves.

As we look to the future and our responsibilities as the ARF HQ in the coming years, we must strive to ensure Exercise Eagle Adventure remains an annual event. It provides an opportunity for important personal and professional military development, building individual confidence and fitness in a physically challenging and positive stress environment. Our location here in Varese province, in Northern Italy, and the HQ being a popular posting for many of Alpine Regiment origin, provides a unique opportunity we must continue to exploit to build teams and foster an esprit de corps, breaking down the barriers that can so easily and unintentionally develop between staff branches in the peacetime barracks routine. Beyond this familiarity, personal and team experience in such arduous and mountainous environments will better prepare the HQ staff for potential planning and deployment activity across the Alliance's territory.

Eagle Mercurius 2023: Uncovering the lessons of Crete's WWII battle

Exploring Leadership Insights in the Heart of History

"Always remember, however sure you are that you can easily win, that there would not be a war if the other man did not think he also had a chance....." (Winston Churchill in My Early Life).

Lieutenant Colonel
ITA Army
Roberto DESSÍ



Staff rides are a unique and powerful way for today's leaders to gain insight and wisdom from the past for present-day application. In the process of absorbing those gains, staff ride participants exercise and improve their critical thinking skills, essential creativity, and decision-making capabilities.

With this insight in mind, NRDC-ITA's senior leaders conducted the Eagle Mercurius 2023 exercise on the island of Crete from 1 to 6 October 2023 in order to examine and analyse Operation Merkur in the Greek Campaign.

This event proved beneficial in understanding the implications for all the scheduled ARF activities, such as training and employments.

The Greek campaign, codenamed 'Operation Marita' by the Germans, commenced on 6 April 1941, when the Germans simultaneously attacked Greece through Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.

As early as November 1940, the British had established their main refuelling base in the Mediterranean on Crete. As long as the British held the island, they were able to maintain naval and air superiority in the eastern Mediterranean.

The Battle of Crete (Operation Merkur)

The capture of Crete by the Germans between 20 May and 1 June 1941 was the first major military operation that was carried out by airborne forces acting independently of regular ground forces. Having achieved air superiority, the





attacking force was able to land a strong ground combat force that eventually defeated the numerically superior garrison defending the island. With its overwhelmingly superior naval forces, the British Royal Navy intercepted seaborne convoys that attempted to land supporting elements, equipment, and supplies. During the decisive phase of the operation, however, the Luftwaffe's air superiority resulted in the Royal Navy's loss of daylight freedom of manoeuvre, thereby isolating the island garrison.

On 20 April, after a conference with General Student, Hitler decided to invade Crete instead of Malta, and five days later Directive no. 28 was issued, with the codename Merkur. Göring was to assume overall command and the XI Air Corps, designated the Airborne Corps, was to conduct the operation with the support of the other air forces already in the Mediterranean. The Army was to provide suitable units to reinforce the Airborne Corps. The Navy was to be responsible for securing the sea lanes and was to contact the Italian Navy for this purpose as well as for the procurement of the necessary shipping space. Finally, anti-aircraft units under the Twelfth Army were to provide anti-aircraft protection for the German troops in Greece and Crete.

The Attack Forces

General Löhr, Commander of the Fourth Air Force, was put in charge of executing Operation Merkur. His task force consisted of the following units:

1. VIII Air Corps, commanded by General von Richthofen.
2. XI Air Corps, commanded by General Student.
3. One bombardment group, which was to lay mines in the Suez Canal area.
4. One naval patrol group and one air-sea rescue squadron.

The Defence Forces

Churchill was determined to hold the island for both strategic and political reasons, and he appointed General Freyberg to overall command of what came to be called 'Creforce'. Freyberg was a brave soldier, popular with his men, and an old friend of Churchill's.

At the beginning of the German invasion of Crete, the island garrison had about 27,500 British and Imperial troops and 14,000 Greeks. The original garrison, numbering approximately 5,000 men, was fully equipped, whereas the

troops evacuated from Greece were tired, disorganised, and equipped only with the small arms they had saved during the retreat. There was a general shortage of heavy equipment, transport and supplies. The artillery consisted of some captured Italian guns with a limited supply of ammunition, ten 3.7-inch howitzers, and a few anti-aircraft batteries. The construction of fortifications was not intensified until the Greek campaign took a turn for the worse.

The first day: Initial Airborne Landings (20 May 1941)

Some 15,000 combat troops were to be landed by air and 7,000 troops, by sea. At 08:00 the first gliders, each carrying twelve men, landed near the airfield and on the beaches at Chania. At the same time approximately 2,000 paratroopers jumped in waves of 200 each at fifteen-minute intervals. Two of every three parachutes in each wave carried containers with weapons and supplies. At Maleme, the paratroopers jumped into heavy enemy fire from infantry weapons in positions built into the hills south of the airfield. Many of the paratroopers were killed during the descent or shortly after landing. Due to enemy fire most of the men were unable to recover the weapons containers and had to rely on the pistol, four hand grenades, and large knife they carried.



First wave of the 7th Division in action

The success of the Maleme operation depended on the rapid capture of the airfield, so that reinforcements could be landed without delay. Despite heavy resistance and devastating fire from British anti-aircraft guns near the airfield, the attackers captured the northern and north-western edges of the airfield and advanced up the northern slope of Hill 107. The German command in Greece assumed that the operation was going according to plan as all but seven of the troop carriers returned to their bases.

On this assumption, which was only proven to be erroneous several hours later, the troop carriers were readied for the afternoon landings at Heraklion and Rethymno. Under very heavy British fire, the paratroopers suffered even more casualties than at Maleme and failed to capture the airfields, towns or harbours. By the evening of 20 May, not a single airfield was securely held by the Germans.

The Seaborne Invasion (20-22 May)

At dawn on 21 May, German planes sighted British ships and subjected them to heavy air attacks. One destroyer was sunk and two cruisers damaged. At 09:00 the waters north of Crete were cleared of British ships.

During the exchange of fire about 800 German soldiers and two Italian seamen died in action, as well as two British sailors on HMS Orion.

The battle between the Luftwaffe and the Royal Navy ended in victory for German air power, which from then on dominated the air and water north of Crete.



Cretan Partisan with MP-40 and German K-98 and 7.92mm rifles

The Continuation of the Struggle (21 May - 1 June)

British artillery fire prevented any landing on airfields. As such, it was decided to drop additional parachute troops behind the enemy positions that dominated the airfields. In the early afternoon four companies of paratroopers jumped from low altitudes above the vineyards near Maleme.

The airdrop was effectively supported by tactical air strikes on enemy defences. Low-flying planes kept the defenders' fire to a minimum and the landings proceeded without major losses. From that point on, reinforcements and supplies kept pouring in and the fate of Crete was sealed. On 22 May, Generalmajor (Brigadier General) Julius Ringel, Commander of the 5th Mountain Division, assumed command of all the German forces in the Maleme airhead.

On D+5, the mountain troops outflanked the British positions east of Maleme, and on the next day they entered Chania, the capital of Crete, and occupied Suda Bay after a forced march across the mountains. After regrouping his forces during the night, the German commander at Heraklion, set out to capture the town and the airfield early on the next morning.

Not a shot was fired. British naval vessels had evacuated

the Heraklion garrison during the preceding night. By that time British resistance had crumbled everywhere. German supplies and equipment were landed at Suda Bay without interference from enemy naval or air units.

The Allied withdrawal

The Command in London decided the cause was hopeless after General Wavell informed the Prime Minister at 08:42 on 27 May that the battle was lost, and an evacuation was ordered. Major-General Freyberg concurrently ordered his troops to begin withdrawing to the south coast to be evacuated.

The cities of Heraklion and Rethymno were taken in the following days by the Germans. By 1 June, the island of Crete was under German control.

After the Battle

The Battle for Crete was a German victory but a costly one. Out of an assault force of just over 22,000 men, the Germans suffered some 5,500 casualties, of which 3,600 were killed or missing in action. The Allies suffered almost 3,500 casualties and almost 12,000 were taken prisoner. As a result of the huge losses suffered by the Fallschirmjäger in Crete, Hitler forbade them mounting any large-scale operations in the future and, apart from a few small-scale operations, they mainly served as elite infantry for the rest of the war.

In conclusion, in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, the island of Crete was a perfect location to develop a deep understanding of multi-domain operations by examining World War Two campaigns.

Stunning views filled with history alongside an easy going working environment gave NRDC-ITA's senior leaders the chance to conduct a complete analysis of historical events and to learn lessons from these events within the paradigm of a modern approach mainly focused on the future challenges facing the Alliance.

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▶ The Joint Support and Enabling Command

A NATO's Strategic Hub for Reinforcement and Sustainment

The Joint Support and Enabling Command (JSEC) is the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's (SACEUR) dedicated headquarters for Enablement, Reinforcement by Forces and Sustainment. It was established in 2018 and it is located in Ulm, Germany.

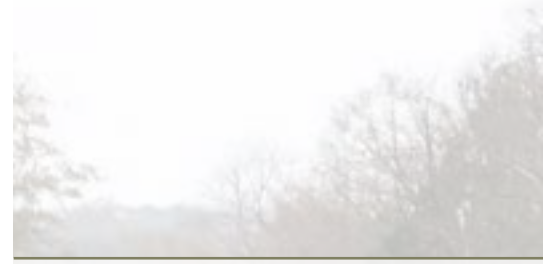
In peacetime, JSEC's mission is to contribute to the Enablement of the theatre and help the Alliance set the conditions for Reinforcement by Forces, if and when required. During crisis and conflict, JSEC coordinates Reinforcement by Forces, and the subsequent Sustainment flow to support the deployed troops. JSEC sits at the operational-level and falls under NATO's strategic-level headquarters, SHAPE, in Mons, Belgium.



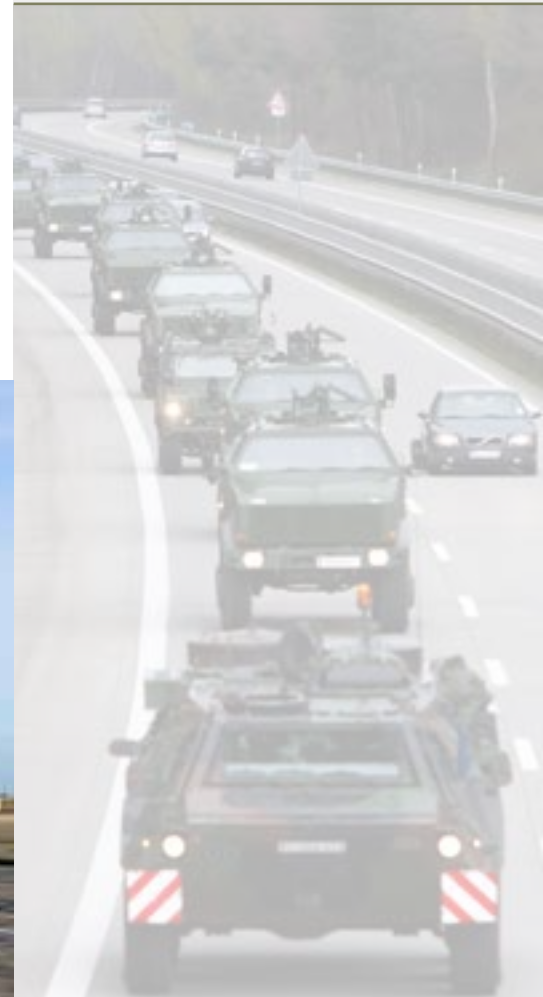
JSEC: US Army material is shipped to Europe
(Photo by Carl Schulze)

Thus, it cooperates closely with the other operational-level headquarters such as those with geographic responsibility – the Joint Force Commands – and the theatre component commands, leading one of NATO's five operational domains (the operational domains are land, air, sea, cyber and space). In NATO parlance, JSEC has a 360-degree approach – meaning it is ready to address threats from any direction – and the headquarters cover the entire SACEUR Area of Responsibility (AOR).

As a functional command, JSEC's responsibilities are complex, blending a multitude of connections that span different command and control layers on the tactical, operational and strategic levels. Standing relationships include all NATO headquarters, the Allied nations themselves, and other international and



Public Affairs Office
NATO JSEC



Reinforcement by Forces - A German military convoy during Exercise Joint Derby
(Photo by R. Alpers)



Current operational picture – JSEC's Joint Operation Centre (Photo by Bastian Suepple)

governmental organisations, such as EU institutions. The Commander of JSEC is the functional advisor to SACEUR for Reinforcement and Sustainment Flow.

Reinforcement by Forces

Reinforcement by Forces (RbyFo) is the deployment of forces across SACEUR's Area of Responsibility. Successful deterrence requires the capability to deploy forces to the right place, at speed and especially at scale. The number of troops and the amount of equipment that could be required to move during a crisis will dwarf the deployments of the past thirty years. After all, NATO is refocusing from out-of-area operations like Afghanistan (although the capability to deploy for these kinds of operations remains important), to deterrence and defense of the Alliance. The actual organisation and transport of troops remains the responsibility of the nations, but JSEC will need to coordinate and synchronise efforts and resources.

Sustainment Flow

Effective deterrence requires the ready availability of stocks, such as ammunition, fuel and spare parts. These must be already prepositioned according to operational needs. The capability to sustain a large-scale fight provides the credibility needed for successful deterrence. Sustaining forces is a national responsibility and covers the full spectrum of support, including the provision of personnel, logistics and medical support, military engineering, finance and the contract support necessary for Alliance operations and missions. JSEC coordinates and deconflicts appropriate requirements through the relevant stakeholders in close coordination with the Joint Force Commands, the Theatre Component Commands and the Nations so as to have end-to-end sustainment flow.

Enablement

Enablement is a key precondition for the executability of plans and ensuring the Reinforcement by Forces and Sustainment in crises and conflict. Enablement is a peacetime effort. It includes national governmental, civil, military and commercial dimensions and requires a whole of government approach. Enabling stakeholders have to prepare the required logistics functions, capabilities and infrastructure in order to prepare for any increase in threat or a potential crisis. Operationally, JSEC is the coordinating HQ for these functions. It coordinates with NATO commands, agencies and stakeholders, as well as nations and non-military actors, via national points of contact, ensuring a functioning Reinforcement and Sustainment Network (RSN) is created in peacetime.

JSEC's Approach Reinforcement and Sustainment Network

The RSN is an Area of Responsibility-wide strategic construct. It consists of physical elements, where harbours, staging bases and reception zones are connected through robust and resilient corridors, and functional elements, with a set of regulations that do not hamper military operations in crises and conflicts.

While the RSN concept has been designed and created by JSEC, the respective elements of it are in many cases already operated and maintained by the nations themselves. In some cases, civilian infrastructure might need to be adapted to military requirements, and JSEC will play a role in coordinating this. The RSN has a physical layer – comprising infrastructure such as ports, roads and railways – as well as a functional layer, which consists of all the legal, administrative processes, business contracts and governance constructs that make the RSN work.



Multinational soldiers of the Joint Support and Enabling Command in a meeting during an exercise (Photo by Bastian Suepple)

Current Thoughts

Enablement is high on NATO’s priority list, and the topic was included in the Communique of the Vilnius Summit, held in July 2023. Nations recognize that effective deterrence and defense requires an Enabled theatre—an area that has been prepared for large-scale reinforcement efforts. Enabled forces are also necessary so that combat power is sufficiently supported by transport and logistics capabilities and can move to where it is needed rapidly. After many years of defense cuts in Europe, this is an area where investment is particularly needed. At the same time, border crossing procedures must be simplified. In the European Schengen zone civilians can drive across national frontiers without any passport checks or controls. Military convoys, however, face a mountain of bureaucracy and often have to wait hours or days for permission to transit. Munitions and oversized cargo are even more complicated to transport through different countries.

While other regions in Europe have implemented similar corridors already, a project in central Europe in this regard is to create a central European Corridor, through the Netherlands, Germany and Poland, in which the same regulations for military movements apply in case of crises. JSEC has initiated this initiative in order to implement

a framework as a role model for other nations to join. It could serve as the founding project of a “Military Schengen Agreement”. Clearly, the required decision has to be taken on the political level, but the operational requirements for this initiative have been identified. It can “simply” be executed.

Summary

JSEC has been established to make a significant contribution to NATO’s response in a dramatically changing security environment. The HQ is designed to facilitate the rapid movement of forces across national borders in Europe to ensure SACEUR’s objectives are met. Setting the conditions in peacetime to enable SACEUR’s Area of Responsibility during a crisis is vital. It requires JSEC and nations to develop tools that are ‘fit for purpose’ and that allow the flow of forces and sustainment at the required speed of relevance.

The Alliance’s ability to successfully project and sustain forces into, across and from SACEUR’s Area of Responsibility ultimately relies on a fully coordinated approach to engagement, cooperation, and teamwork, delivered by JSEC according to its motto:

JSEC Effective – Efficient – Enablement = E³



Commander of Joint Support and Enabling Command and Commander of Multinational Joint Headquarters Ulm, Lieutenant General Alexander Sollfrank (Photo by Gina Seegert)

NRDC-ITA's Multinational Internship Program

Enhancing transatlantic collaboration and preparing future leaders

NRDC-ITA takes advantage of the contribution made by universities, with which a framework agreement has been established, by running a training internship for students selected by their respective universities. The added value in terms of reciprocity is inherent in inter-institutional collaboration, providing students with a multidisciplinary and multinational context that can stimulate their respective future professional ambitions. Creating a system means allowing current generations of university students to believe in and want to follow a path of growth within the multinationalism of the Atlantic Alliance.



As part of the cooperation established with the academic world in general and certain specific universities in particular through a 'Memorandum of Cooperation', NRDC-ITA has planned and run an internship for university students. Such activities were put on hold due to pandemic restrictions but, they are usually organised yearly. The 2023 internship was organised in two phases:

- a 'remote phase' (28 March to 4 May), which was 'based' at the students' universities. Under the direction of NRDC-ITA, some professors were appointed as tutors to follow the students work, with the constant support of NRDC-ITA organisers and selected tutors;
- a 'residential phase' (8 to 19 May) which took place at the "Ugo Mara" barracks in ad-hoc training rooms with the students under the direct guidance of NRDC-ITA staff.

The internship falls within the scope of NRDC-ITA Commander's intent to inform, circulate and spread knowledge and information about current issues and topics of critical importance for NRDC-ITA and NATO.

The overall purpose of the 2023 internship was to expand knowledge and understanding of a potential crisis area, the North Africa region (Morocco,

Warrant officer (1st class)
ITA Army
Carminé DI GENNARO





Algeria, Tunisia and Libya). In particular, for students, the main objectives were to:

- develop an understanding of NATO's comprehensive approach to crisis response;
- develop an understating of the PMESII (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure and Information domains) system used to analyse a potential crisis area;
- acquire capabilities to carry out focused open source research and scenario analysis;
- develop or re-inforce critical thinking and analytical skills.

From NRDC-ITA's point of view, the internship provided the staff with a period to study the North Africa region while consolidating interaction with academic institutions. It was a training opportunity not only for the students but also for the staff because it meant the analysts could update the current picture of the political, economic and social domains for which NRDC-ITA does not have permanent expertise. For the students, such activities are, by definition, 'training on the job' and, as such, they enrich their curricula and even provide an opportunity to earn credits, provided their universities agreed (and most did).

The internship consisted of lectures, practical research and presentations focused on a crisis area – the North Africa region – characterized by complexity, asymmetries and the presence of hybrid threats. The analysis of the North Africa region was carried out through a multidimensional/comprehensive approach utilizing the PMESII domains in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the dynamics and interactions of the different area-related systems and their subsystems (System of Systems Analysis – SOSA).

The universities were very selective and sent high profile students. Additionally, requiring that only senior students who already had a bachelor's degree/undergraduate degree (and so were studying for a Master's Degree) could take part in the internship proved to be the right choice because it resulted in high-quality content given the greater proficiency of the students. The same requirement will be kept in place for the next internship, along with the English proficiency requirement.

The 32 participants¹, divided into four groups under the guidance of NRDC-ITA tutors, analysed the political, economic and social domains of four North Africa countries

(Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya) and developed a SoSA for each country. The internship was contextualised in the first phase of the Crisis Response Planning process during which situational awareness about the crisis area has to be developed or improved.

The final results were presented to NRDC-ITA staff on 19 May 2023, the last day of the internship. For this specific activity, for training purposes, the interns were given strict timeframes to present the results of their work to get used to speaking to an international audience in a concise and 'straight to the point' manner.

The students showed a very high level of commitment and motivation and the final products were of a very high quality. Especially during the residential phase, the pace of the internship was very intense but the students, after an initial warm-up phase, adapted perfectly and responded superbly to all tasks. The interns' language products (presentations, final papers and summaries) were shared with the staff to increase knowledge and awareness of the Sahel region.

At the end of the residential phase, the participants were given a feedback form to be filled in. Overall, the feedback was very positive and most students spoke enthusiastically about their experience when they got back to their universities. Following the activity, J2 Knowledge Development had to fill in evaluation reports for each student on the online university platforms. Depending on their study plans, for participating in the internship, the students received between 4 and 8 university credits—this decision was up to the universities.

Overall, organising the internship was challenging, especially because of the necessary coordination with the universities before and after the activity, but it was definitely worth it both in terms of visibility for NRDC-ITA and the learning experience for the staff and students. The internship was a three-way learning experience because the interns learned from the staff, from one another and the staff learnt from the participants. According to the feedback from students, the internship was a truly empowering experience because at their respective universities they do most of their activities individually and they are not used to working in a team. During the internship they experienced teamwork and the importance of team spirit as well as presenting work results to a large international audience.

¹ LUISS Guido Carli University (Rome) (7), University of Parma (5), University of the Sacred Heart (Milan) (5), University l'Orientale (Naples) (4), LIUC Carlo Cattaneo University (Castellanza, VA) (3), UAO CEU (Barcelona - Spain) (2), SSML P.M. Loira (Milan) (2), University of Salento (Lecce) (2), University of Udine (1), LIMEC (Milan) (1).

African Lion 23:

Strengthening global partnerships and security cooperation

A look into the U.S. Africa Command's largest annual exercise in Morocco

Major
ITA Army
Dario SOLAZZO

African Lion is U.S. Africa Command's largest and most important annual exercise. The exercise bolsters interoperability among partner nations and supports U.S. military strategic readiness to respond to crises and contingencies in Africa and around the world. As Maj. Gen. Joel Tyler (U.S. Africa Command Chief of Staff) said "African Lion is the centrepiece of the AFRICOM exercise strategy, and one of the greatest U.S. exercises across the globe."

"African Lion 23" was hosted from 13 May through 16 June 2023 concurrently by Morocco, Ghana, Senegal, and Tunisia. In particular, Morocco has hosted African Lion for 19 years. This edition of African Lion was organized by the Morocco Royal Armed Forces (FAR) and the U.S. Armed Forces. This year there were over 8,000 participants from NRDC-ITA and 18 nations, in addition to military observers from thirty African and international countries, that trained together in a variety of disciplines with a focus on enhancing the readiness of U.S. and partner-nation forces, strengthening shared defence capabilities, and increasing interoperability. Under the leadership of DCOS Plans, Brig. Gen. Giannuzzi, NRDC-ITA participated in the third year of the exercise with a total of 11 Officers. U.S. participants came from across the joint force as well as the Reserves and National Guard.

The exercise provided an excellent opportunity to conduct realistic, dynamic, and collaborative readiness training in an austere environment that intersects multiple geographic and functional combatant commands including U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), U.S. European Command (EUCOM), and U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), as well as strategic maritime choke points¹. U.S. Army Southern European Task Force-Africa (SETAF-AF) established the exercise's Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) headquarters, integrating AFRICOM components and international partners to provide mission command across the training enterprise. This effort also involved strengthening the shared defence capabilities of Morocco, the U.S. and allied partners to counter transnational threats and violent extremist organizations, which is a common goal for the African partner nations.

The planning phase of the exercise involved a series of events conducted in Agadir, Morocco. The execution phase of the exercise was divided into three parts: Host Nation (HN) Academics, STAFFEX, and LIVEX.

¹ A chokepoint refers to the point of natural congestion along two broader and more critical navigable passages. Maritime choke points are naturally narrow shipping channels with high traffic because of their strategic locations.



The HN Academics cycle of training, held in the Moroccan Army Signal School (Agadir) from 22 May to 2 June 2023, was launched just before the STAFFEX and LIVEX for the benefit of the Morocco FAR and multinational personnel. The Academic cycle focused on the Joint Planning Process (JPP). In particular, the first week was dedicated to classroom instruction to build the foundation for executing the JPP. The second week was directed at developing the Mission Analysis Briefing. Instruction included a mix of plenary sessions, small group classroom instruction, and practical exercises. The JPP, along with specific focused classes, was delivered in a plenary group with all planners/students present. The Joint Warfighting Specific classes were given at separate, dedicated times in the instruction schedule.

The STAFFEX was dedicated to producing an OPORD brief and an OPORD for coalition partners and senior leaders. These products will be used during the African Lion 24 Command Post Exercise (CPX). NRDC-ITA and SETAF-AF, after receiving the Mission Analysis Briefing (MAB) prepared during the HN Academics, conducted the JPP, culminating with the delivery of the OPORD briefing. The majority of the Staff Exercise took place in the Southern Zone Headquarters (SZHQ) from 4 to 16 June where the Combined Joint Task Force Headquarters (primary training audience) and the Joint Exercise Control Group accomplished the assigned tasks.

The LIVEX was held in different locations and included Joint Reception Staging Onward Movement and Integration (JRSOI), an Air Training exercise (ATX), a Maritime Training Exercise (MTX), Special Operation Force (SOF) integration, a Medical Readiness Exercise (MEDREX), Humanitarian Civic Assistance (HCA) and multiple Field Training Exercises (FTXs) focused on strategic engagement, readiness, coalition interoperability, and security cooperation. This year's LIVEX featured multiple combined arms live fire exercises, a maritime exercise, an air exercise with a U.S. C-130J Super Hercules, KC-135 Stratotankers, F-16 Fighting Falcons, and bomber aircraft, a joint forcible entry with paratroopers into a field training exercise, two chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear response exercises, and three HCA operations. It culminated with a Distinguished Visitors (DV) Day demonstration, consisting of a combined joint live fire including a global strike, close air support, artillery, airborne operation, and ground tactical operations.

NRDC-ITA personnel were located in Agadir in the SZHQ. In particular, nine of them were located in the Combined Joint Task Force Headquarters Staff Branches, one was employed during the Academics phase to provide lectures on the Joint Planning Process, and one was used to support the EXCON, providing coordination and logistics support.

These challenging appointments gave our personnel the opportunity to demonstrate the high qualities of NRDC-ITA's members in terms of adaptability and flexibility.

NRDC-ITA has many reasons to participate in such an exercise. First, because multinational exercises are the most concrete and visible expression of NRDC-ITA's capabilities and commitment to fulfilling its core tasks. Exercises such as African Lion 23 provide an opportunity





to demonstrate NRDC-ITA's commitment, readiness and effectiveness to assume any role at tactical and operational levels, and create an important level of cohesion. As NRDC-ITA begins the transition to an Allied Reaction Force (ARF) role and seeks to improve its ability to operate as a joint, multi-domain force in exercises, it is evident that participation in African Lion 23 was crucial to refining concepts and procedures in these areas.

Through its regular participation in African Lion, NRDC-ITA has established mechanisms to maintain and enhance cooperation with higher and sister headquarters, the Troop Contributing Nations, NATO agencies, subordinate and affiliated units. In particular, the partnership established with the United States Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (USASETAF-AF) has enhanced jointness and interoperability, while developing a comprehensive approach and interagency mindset for the benefit of overall security. In the framework of partnerships and cooperation between international partners, NRDC-ITA continues to invest in mutual training support. The purpose of this training is to bring like-minded nations together for a complex exercise such as African Lion 23. Partnerships and cooperation improve mutual understanding, situational awareness and interoperability but also help

to identify lessons, best practices, and improve doctrines and procedures.

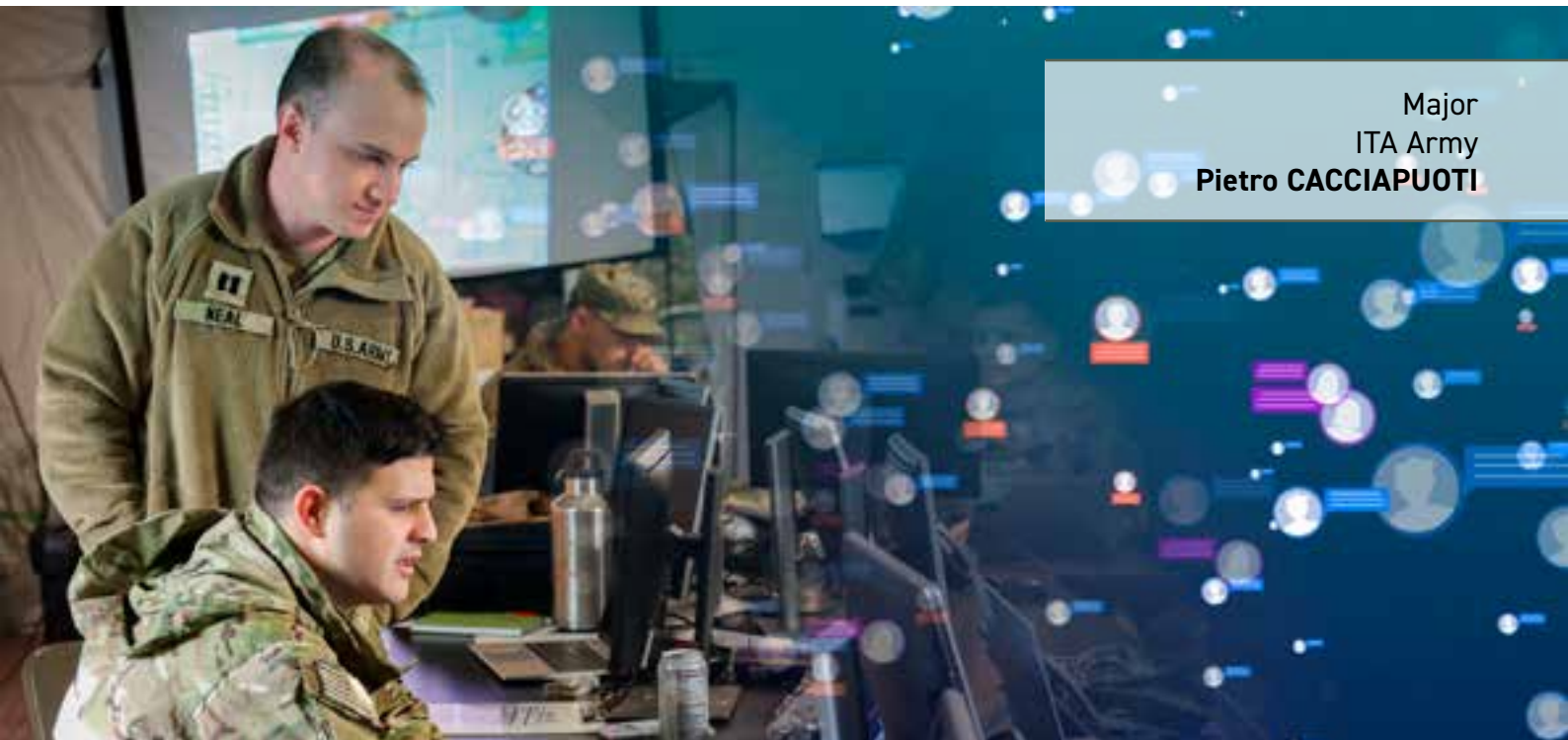
The ability to provide collective defence and to project stability is only possible through a robust capability to anticipate, detect, and respond to crises as they arise. NRDC-ITA has expertise on the threats emerging from the NATO Strategic Direction South due to its geographical location and maintaining close collaboration mechanisms dedicated to information sharing and situation awareness.

By participating in African Lion 23, NRDC-ITA achieved the planned training objectives and demonstrated its commitment and its capabilities. This professionalism was recognised by the SETAF-AF Command Group that expressed real appreciation for the support that NRDC-ITA provided this year. The cooperation between NRDC-ITA and SETAF-AF is paramount to implement mutual training support, to reach common training objectives, to improve professional knowledge and enhance the expertise of the Allies. Moreover, given the common interest in training in the Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) environment, it is highly desirable that our HQ continues to participate in the African Lion series over the next few years. In conclusion, participation in African Lion provided an opportunity to demonstrate NRDC-ITA's values and capabilities.



▶ Adapting to the digital battlefield: NATO's evolution in the Information Environment

Exploring the role of digital media in shaping modern conflict and NATO's strategies for effective engagement



Major
ITA Army
Pietro CACCIAPUOTI

The Atlantic Alliance's doctrine defines the Information Environment as the set of information, individuals, organizations and systems that receive, process and convey information in cognitive, virtual and physical space.

In this sense, the development of technology in the information field has significantly changed the nature of conflicts and in this context the Atlantic Alliance works carefully by analyzing the non-kinetic aspects linked to military operations. One of the factors that has most broadened the range of elements to be assessed in modern conflicts is the ease of access to the virtual world. It follows that the new media and virtual context has erased geographical, social and moral boundaries, such that content can indiscriminately influence users' attitudes and beliefs, with evident repercussions in both the real and cognitive fields. The key elements of NATO's change in approach to this new dimension have led to an overhaul of how planning, acting and evaluating scenarios is done by the specialists who support military operations.

To stem these effects, in recent years, the Alliance has increasingly committed itself to studying media-related phenomena. It is still developing suitable tools to manage these more effectively, but it is fully committed to improving its analysis of the areas of operation that are always complex and characterized by a constantly evolving information environment. The study and evaluation of new media dynamics affecting the effectiveness of operational

actions has led to the need to consider elements that, in the past, were not seen as sufficiently significant to modify the management approaches used for operations (plans, conduct, evaluation of operational results etc.).

This new ease with which the virtual world can be accessed has created a new and indeterminable situation that provides fertile ground for developing new techniques for so-called hybrid conflict. Indeed, hybrid warfare is a tool that, together with symmetric and/or asymmetric kinetic actions, is an increasingly significant threat in theaters of operation. Untrue or fake news is an example of this. This information environment phenomenon, which fuels hybrid warfare, is used with the support of cyber warfare and can be rapidly disseminated on digital media through automated programs. As NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, pointed out in an interview: "This historical period is characterized by unpredictability and greater difficulties for the Alliance, because many threats coexist at the same time."

Accessibility, speed and the absence of geographical borders are just some of the characteristics of digital media (websites, blogs, etc.). These characteristics are increasingly used in hybrid warfare, making the reference scenarios and the management of new multifaceted threats more complex. This requires an increasingly incisive and specialized effort by the Alliance. As already mentioned, what increases the difficulty of managing crises and/or operations is the

spread of false news, structured to influence users' beliefs and attitudes. This media phenomenon, which leverages the emotions aroused by news, creates the conditions in which verifying the reliability of the news itself is considered an aspect of secondary importance. The fact that news is widely shared means that every single user can contribute, even unconsciously, to fueling the spread of fake news on websites and digital media. In particular, in recent years, users have gone from simple spectators to an integral part of the process of sharing news and media content, which can thus be altered.

In fact, the news shared can generate multiple contextualizations of the contents, depending on the manner, the time and the sources cited by the user. In such a context, digital media is a versatile tool that allows us to understand the dynamics of the social fabric in a short period, especially when significant media events occur. This key to understanding the Information Environment allows us to grasp the development of a network's communication processes, associating contents with cultural and social dynamics.

In June 2018, the NRDC-ITA organized a conference to analyze the use of social media in operations, with the participation of numerous experts and professionals from the communications sector. The conference, held in Milan, dealt with the key elements of communication and how it takes shape on digital media. We also discussed what solutions can be adopted to adapt to changing future operational scenarios and, at the same time, identify the requirements that would enhance NATO's capabilities in this specific sector.

In recent years, the use of digital media has increasingly become a true extension of the social fabric, both because of their use and the type and frequency of interactions in the virtual domain. In such an information environment, it remains essential to be able to plan, in a flexible manner, the most suitable strategies for conveying communication. To correctly structure a communication strategy, it must be developed from the very early stages of operational planning, encouraging the progressive development of the operational media campaign.

For a military contingent, it thus becomes crucial to be able to communicate effectively and rapidly in order to impact the general conduct of operations and deal with the spread of any content aimed at discrediting the work of the personnel of the military units in the areas in which they operate.

In this regard, it seems useful to mention a simulated event during a command post exercise. The circumstance was a Release Other Than Attack (ROTA) type event, i.e. an event that determines the accidental release of toxic chemicals into the environment, thus representing a serious threat to the civilian population. As a consequence, the publication of content on digital media attributing responsibility for the incident to the allied military contingent was simulated, with the aim of triggering a hostile reaction against it. In this circumstance, it emerged that the most useful element for mitigating the negative effects remains the speed with which the media event becomes known on digital media. Another important element is the internal coordination

necessary to quickly develop an adequate response to mitigate the negative effects. Staff that work specifically on digital media can support public information staff in developing adequate responses to clarify the incident, while military personnel employed in operations in contact with the population can use dedicated communication channels to provide the population with initial guidelines for dealing with the incident. It is also important to pay attention to the effects of problems related to integrating the gender perspective into the operational context. In this context, digital media can contribute to damaging the operations of the military force in the field. In such a delicate area, it can have a negative impact on the conduct of operations and cause long-lasting damage.

In this context, the most appropriate military and cultural approach and the determining factor for a Commander of a military unit remains that of being able to understand and analyze in a short time the changes in attitude, perception and approach of the local population with which one often interacts in contact (adapt gender analysis to the media context).

A range of fit-for-purpose tools

There is a large number of tools on the public market that can help in understanding the information environment such as Brandwatch, NetBase Quid, Sprinklr, Talkwalker, etc. These instruments are able to collect data that can be used for analysis, supporting the real-time understanding of the impact of events in the information domain.

Cognitive approach

This cognitive approach promotes a greater understanding of the Information Environment and in some cases increases the ability to predict events that may prove important for the success of the mission.

In conclusion, to operate more effectively in such a complex scenario, specific technical resources and an organization capable of centralizing and coordinating resources to work on behaviors and attitudes of actors are necessary. In this sense, NATO is adopting the grouping of non-kinetic capabilities dedicated to communication to enable a more accurate and rapid awareness of the development of the Information Environment and effective management of complex media events.

Along this line, during the conduct of operations, it is important to implement cooperation and coordination of capabilities such as cyber defence, public information and operational communications, allowing cyber defence and the implementation of communication strategies in a synergistic manner.

As digital media continues to evolve, the military instrument capable of operating in this environment must be flexible enough to adapt to it. Understanding digital media is an ambitious and demanding goal and today it remains a decidedly complex challenge. Working with an enterprising spirit in this sector makes it possible to keep pace with the major, regular changes in communication and media.

Teamwork: the most efficient weapon of NRDC-ITA HQ staff

What is exactly teamwork? Why is it important? What does it mean to be a good team member? What is the effectiveness of a team and how can it be measured or built-up? What are those behaviours that challenge teamwork and what are those conditions that enable it? These are some of the questions that are the foundation of this article. I will try to answer them not from the point of view of an expert psychologist, which I am not, but from the point of view of an amateur psychology student who has spent many years asking himself the aforementioned questions and has been exercising his great curiosity on the matter, by observing situations, people, behaviours, working environments and activities that facilitate or slow down teamwork.



In an increasingly complicated and challenging world, military staffs are confronted with situations, missions and tasks which are becoming more complex, less time-bound, and global in scope and which cannot be tackled by individuals. The NRDC-ITA Headquarters, like every other staff, needs to implement successful teamwork, probably more than any other working procedure. This is at the same time the greatest challenge the staff face every day and the most fruitful attribute that would allow everybody to be well, while working less and more efficiently; this in turn will allow the Commander to know what he needs to know at the right time and with the right level of complexity. A team is a group of people that is much more than a so-called working group. In our daily routine, we tend to confuse the two things, but they are very different: a working group is a group of people that simply work together in the same office space, do not share a common goal and work in isolation from

Lieutenant Colonel
ITA Army
Gennaro BALZANO

each other on individual problems and solutions; a team is a group of people who give up some of their personal aspirations, individual needs and inclinations, and modify or optimize the way they interact with their colleagues because they believe in the importance of a common goal that the team has and that only the team can achieve. Team members personally and strongly believe that what they can achieve alone cannot be compared with the more complex, challenging and inspiring goals that can only be set and achieved by a team.

How can a group of people become a team?

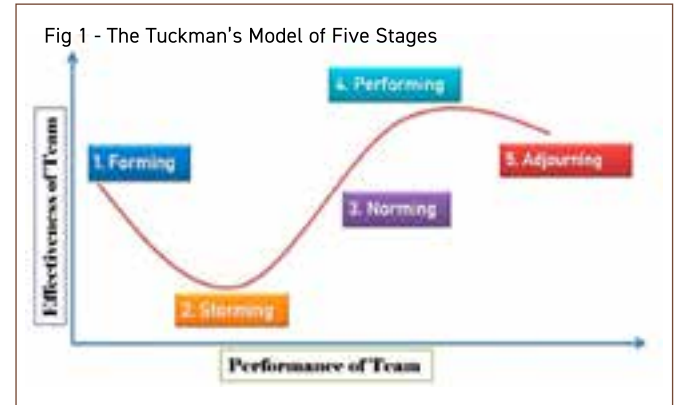
So, this is the question that naturally arises. It is a combination of individual behaviours and external conditions that have to happen to allow a group of people – not in a matter of days, weeks or even months – to become a team. It is a challenging and lengthy transition that, overall, needs the most important condition: everyone has to be aware that the output of work in a working environment is not the only thing that counts; it is far more important to deep dive and assess how people work together. My own personal observation of almost every staff I have belonged to is unfortunately that we overwhelmingly tend to talk about the actual work we have to do – “what we have to do” – and we almost never or at least not as often as we should ask ourselves or discuss “how” we should work and how we could improve interaction among ourselves.

What conditions enable a group of people to work as a team and how can a team be more effective?

Over the years, I have observed that many people in the military think or are inclined to think that the effectiveness of a team and the creation of the team depends almost exclusively on the leadership. The leadership is definitely a factor that facilitates the work of a staff, but it certainly does not bear the entire burden of creating and implementing a

team. The leadership is responsible for putting in place a series of conditions that, although they pave the way for making the jump in quality from a working group to a real team, do not constitute the entire spectrum of things that need to happen to have an effective team. You will never have a group of people working as a team if the leadership is not supported by individuals who are aware of the importance of how they interact with colleagues.

Over time, many scientists have studied teams and teamwork, trying to conceptualize how a team is born, and how it can improve its performance or avoid trouble. The first theory that is worth mentioning is probably the most famous: Tuckman's theory. This was proposed by psychologist Bruce Tuckman in 1965 (Fig. 1).

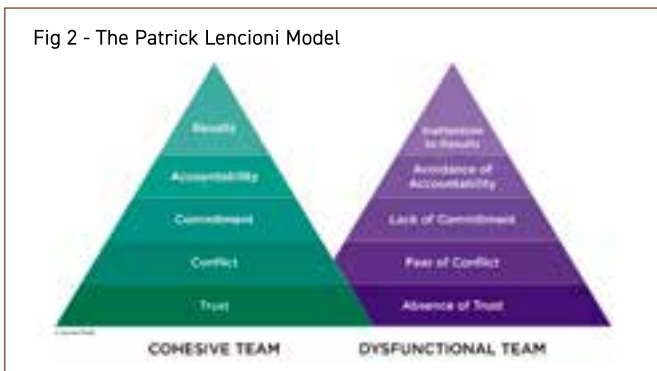


It stated that teams would go through 5 stages of development: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. These stages supposedly start when the group first meets and last until the project ends. Each of these rhyming stages plays a significant role in building a highly functioning business team. Tuckman's theory gives a solid idea of what most teams go through. Building a team and even more a high-performing team takes time and effort,



along a difficult and bumpy track. Team success and cohesion will always fluctuate, storming is unavoidable and finally, in the longer term, adjourning should be considered as the real objective of an organization working with teams: if they have reached the performing stage, then there could be a sense of mourning if they have grown close. This is the best thing that might happen within a staff.

Patrick Lencioni, author of "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team" (2002), created a team effectiveness model (Fig. 2) designed around the causes of team dysfunction and conflict. This model makes it easier to focus on areas in a team that need work, better focus and improvement. He divides these dysfunctions into five layers, which you can visually present in a pyramid structure. The bottom layer is the largest dysfunction, and the top layer, inattention to results, is the smallest.



Lencioni's elements of a dysfunctional team are: absence of trust, which is when team members are afraid to ask for help; fear of conflict is when team members don't feel comfortable speaking up; lack of commitment is when team members don't know how to follow through; avoidance of accountability is when team members don't set standards or don't understand the standards that have been set; finally inattention to results is when team members don't focus on their performance. Lencioni explains that these dysfunctions are what effective teams should avoid most. On the other hand, Lencioni thinks that effective teams practice the opposite of these dysfunctions, like trust, conflict resolution, commitment, accountability, and attention to results.

Five years ago, Google started to focus on building the perfect team. The company's top executives long believed that building the best teams meant combining the best people. They embraced other bits of conventional wisdom as well, like "Teams are more effective when everyone is friends away from work." In 2012, the company embarked on an initiative, code-named Project Aristotle, to study hundreds of Google's teams and figure out why some of them were highly effective while others were not working properly. After looking at over a hundred groups for more than a year, Project Aristotle researchers concluded that understanding and influencing group norms were the keys to improving Google's teams. Over two years, under the leadership of Julia Rozovsky, the lead researcher, the people operations department discovered that a team's success didn't depend on who was in it; it depended on how the employees felt as team members. "Psychological Safety" is a state of being. It's the feeling (Fig. 3) team members have when they believe they can take risks without feeling insecure or embarrassed.



They feel safe to be vulnerable in front of one another.

After having mentioned the three top tools for understanding teams and teamwork, let me give my personal view on the individual behaviours that need to be minimized to make it possible to achieve that jump in quality from a working group to a real team and start teamwork.

In my experience, there are essentially three individual behaviours that compromise the leadership effort and can be defined as "deviant" in relation to the focus on creating an effective working environment where teams and not working groups can operate. The first is that individual, at times unstoppable tendency we all have, to promote ourselves, leading to the hidden message of "I am the one that deserves more attention than others". This unstoppable tendency probably comes from far away and dates to when, during childhood, we were constantly looking for attention and needed approval or recognition for our efforts as part of growing older and becoming more mature. The second is that behaviour that I like defining simply as "passivity". Such conduct is typical of people that adopt a "passive" attitude towards work and their group of co-workers. Such "passivity" can express itself in several ways: I tend to think and continuously spread negative messages around me, like "everything is a mess here", "why should we work hard to try to make the machine run?" Another way of expressing passivity is when someone simply abstracts themselves from the workplace and tends to avoid any type of interaction. The last way of expressing passivity is when someone constantly spreads only positive messages like "everything is interesting and important", all products are "wonderful and well done", or everybody deserves recognition, even only for their normal business achievements. The third behaviour, which I have probably observed most often and which is the most challenging for teamwork, is the irrepressible tendency that many people have to desire and work hard to manipulate situations and colleagues. They want others to pave the way for their open or hidden success, whether in achieving recognition or avoiding unwanted burdens or complaints. This behaviour is pretty different from the first (self-promotion). In this case, the focus is not primarily on appearing, but on overtly or covertly convincing others to do what I want them to do. In conclusion, teamwork remains the key achievement that every staff should work for and in difficult times like those we are living in, this aspect becomes particularly crucial. All members of staff must be vigilant about avoiding negative behaviour and encouraging enabling conditions.

Eagle Light 2023: NATO Support Brigade Regiments excel in complex deployment exercise

A test of interoperability, readiness and logistic support



Lieutenant
ITA Army
Luca DI CICCIO

In this combined training exercise involving NRDC-ITA units, two command posts were set up using both standard inflatable and mixed-size modular tents at the Solbiate Olona HQ, which has a massive training area known as the ‘Conigliera’ (or Rabbit Hutch), and the La Comina training area in Pordenone. The 33rd Tactical and Logistics Support Regiment “Ambrosiano” provided not only what was required to ensure the success of the exercise, but also the management of it so that the Commander of the Support Brigade, General B. Giuseppe Scuderi, could constantly monitor the deployment and redeployment of the Forward Command Post, from a situation room specifically set up for this purpose. During the exercise, the organisational units involved tested their operational readiness as part of ensuring they are properly prepared for any of the tasks typically required of them.

In this exercise, the deployment of the Forward Command Post began on 12 June at the La Comina training area, thus marking the start of the key stage of the exercise. On that day, the companies of the 33rd Regiment “Ambrosiano” and the 1st Signal Regiment worked in synergy to move all the equipment needed to set up two autonomous command posts: the main one in Solbiate Olona, with a reduced service area, and a forward one in La Comina, with a reinforced service area that could accommodate staff and provide 500 meals per hour. The exercise used simulated realistic settings (in permissive environments) and demonstrated the units are ready and able to provide the effective tactical and logistics support needed for the NRDC-ITA.

Looking in more detail, the exercise included:

- Setting up a Forward Command Post in the designated training area at the La Comina Army Sports Centre. During the deployment and redeployment phase, many heavy assets from the regiments were used, mainly from the Transport Company, which travelled about 10,000 km in total over several cycles transporting material (roughly 70 containers) from the permanent site to the exercise area and back.
- Setting up a Main Command Post using G&G tents at the Conigliera training area. This involved the deployment of a major deployable point of presence (DPOP) by the 1st Signal Regiment, responsible for ICT services, and

a co-located Command Post comprising the situation room and Forward Command Post, where the same regiment deployed a minor DPOP for the Command Post.

On the sidelines, but at the same time, other activities linked to Eagle Light 2023 were conducted including:

- A live-fire exercise carried out by the 3rd Bersaglieri Company "Celere", which, in addition to the normal active and passive defence of the Command Post, carried out several activities, including a squad and platoon attack at the Rivoli Bianchi firing range in Venzone (province of Udine), using Light Tactical Multi-Purpose Vehicles (LMVs), also firing the unit's weapons from the vehicle's weapon station. A tactical driving qualification course for new LMV drivers was held to increase the company's operational capability.
- A convoy and convoy escort exercise managed by the Transport Company, which transported the required drinking water for the canteen and other services throughout the duration of the operation, totalling approximately 40,000 litres. The hazardous materials transport team also provided approximately 80,000 litres of fuel to ensure the various vehicles could be re-fuelled as needed and to provide power to the two camps and the Command Post.
- An exercise focusing on work on the battlefield by the Deployment Support Company, which - in addition to overseeing the assembly of the Command Posts and the service areas - arranged for the terrain to be levelled around the Command Post and the creation of access routes.
- Creating a field kitchen, which was active for about 3 days at the Conigliera training area. This was done by the so-called the Commissariato Company, which was able to ensure - and this was no small feat - both the canteen at the Ugo Mara barracks and the field canteen at the Forward Command Post near Pordenone were operational.
- An exercise for the CPT team, using a helicopter (UH 90), to simulate escorting the NRDC-ITA Commander from the Ugo Mara barracks to the theatre of operations.

- An exercise by the 1st Signal Regiment, which tested a solar panel system to provide emergency power for its systems, the use of a high-capacity radio relay to test connectivity between different parts of a Command Post, and an activity to improve NATO systems integration with EINET for national support and the deployment.

The goal of the exercise was to have interoperability of procedures and assets between the participating regiments, to verify the limits of the communication network, to promote the training and integration of extremely heterogeneous companies and to systematise the logistics support arrangements. In addition, the opportunity was taken to test the Motorola monitoring system as many transport activities were undertaken.

As is known, two regiments rely on the Support Brigade:

- The 33rd Tactical and Logistics Support Regiment "Ambrosiano", an atypical, multi-armed unit (it has a company of Bersaglieri, drivers, engineers and suppliers - supported by a Command Company and Logistics Support - that carries out every activity in unison) that meets the specific needs of logistics support and being part of the permanent and security HQ of the NRDC-ITA. This unit, which takes forward the historical and military legacy of the 33rd Logistics Manoeuvre Regiment "Ambrosiano", has been involved in numerous peacekeeping missions in Italy and abroad and it has received important awards, including the Bronze Medal of Merit from the Italian Red Cross and the Army's Silver Cross of Merit for its efforts in the fight against the spread of COVID-19.
- The 1st Signal Regiment, which is responsible for ICT support for the HQ both when deployed and not. The unit, which takes forward the historical and military legacy of the 3rd Engineer Telegraph Regiment and the 1st Engineer Radio Telegraph Regiment, has been involved in numerous peacekeeping missions in Italy and abroad and it has received important awards, including the Army's Silver Cross of Merit for its efforts in the fight against the spread of COVID-19.



Fortifying our families: the vital role of the military nursery

In the vast network of services that support military personnel and their families, a nursery school or kindergarten often acts an anchor of stability and support in times of great uncertainty. Nursery schools play a vital role in the lives of military families, offering a safe environment for children and emotional support for active duty parents. As such, they actually play a key role in the lives of military families, contributing to their resilience and well-being.



Major
ITA Army
Silvio BRESCIA

A haven of support and solidarity in the heart of NRDC-ITA

Being in the military and part of the armed forces of a NATO nation brings with it a unique set of challenges. Military personnel are often called upon to sacrifice the comforts of home to serve their nation in distant lands, putting considerable pressure on themselves and their families. Intensive training periods, overseas deployments and frequent transfers are just a few of the troubles they have to deal with. Such periods of separation can be particularly stressful for military families. Constantly worrying about the safety of a spouse or parent, as well as adjusting to a life on the move, can have a major impact on mental health and emotional well-being.

The nursery school at the Ugo Mara Barracks is a valuable resource for military families, providing a safe and stable environment for their children during periods of training and deployment. This nursery school is specifically designed to also meet the unique needs of children from military families, with staff experienced in dealing with sensitive situations and understanding the challenges these children may face. One of the main benefits of our nursery school is continuity. Unlike traditional schools, this nursery school follows a flexible schedule, allowing children to enrol for short or long periods, depending on a family's needs. As such, a child can remain in the same nursery school even when the family is transferred to another military base or destination.

Aside from creating a welcoming environment for the children, the nursery school also provides key support for active duty parents. Knowing that their children are

safe and well cared for during their service can ease some of the emotional burden that is inherent in the life of military personnel. The centre also has workshop days and support groups for parents, giving them a place and opportunity to share their concerns and fears with other people in similar situations. These services promote a sense of community among military families, which helps them feel less lonely during times of separation.

One really cannot underestimate the importance of the NRDC-ITA Community Nursery School in sustaining the resilience of military families. The ability to cope with and overcome the challenges of military service requires adequate support, and nursery schools for a soldier's children play an essential role in this process. When parents know their children are in good hands, they can really concentrate on their responsibilities and feel more confident in their abilities. This, in turn, contributes to their effectiveness as military personnel and the overall well-being of their families.

In the military, child welfare services play a crucial role in supporting soldiers and their families, offering a haven of support and solidarity in times of uncertainty. A dedicated nursery school provides a safe environment for children and emotional support for active duty parents.

It is important to recognise the value of such resources and ensure they continue to receive the support they need to do their important work. NATO military families deserve our unconditional support and respect, and military nursery schools are an essential element of such support.

In the Spotlight: Five Minutes with the General

A candid conversation revealing personal tidbits and aspirations

I met up with the NRDC-ITA Deputy Commander, Major General Jez Bennett, over the leave period in a segment called "5 minutes with the General..." and this is what he told me when we spoke.

1. What are two things still on your bucket list? *Heli skiing and the ABBA Hologram thing.*
2. What is your go-to board game? *I enjoy playing Monopoly as I played this a lot as a child. I also enjoy Uno, although Gracie (my daughter) usually cheats.*
3. When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up? *Ha ha ha.... I really wanted to be an RAF Pilot but then my eyesight fell apart!*
4. What was your lockdown "thing"? *We had recently lost our dog and so just before lockdown we drove 5 hours to Wales to collect our new chocolate Labrador called George. We also had what we called Friday Physz.... Every Friday at 6, I'd meet up with Sara and Gracie online or in person to do some sort of exercise.*
5. TV Series you've binged watched? *Breaking Bad, Peaky Blinders and Succession.*
6. What movie or film needs a sequel? *Star Wars - you can't get enough of Star Wars!*
7. You are stranded on a desert island, which three people (dead or alive) are you bringing with you? *Johnny Black as he is very knowledgeable on survival things. Sara my wife as she would stop me getting annoyed with Johnny when the IT didn't work, and my sister Carrie because she is so funny.*
8. What is the best gift you have ever received? *It would have to be the Alfa Romeo car that I received from my parents on my 21st birthday. Which I then wrote off shortly afterwards.*
9. Simple pleasure that you cannot live without (prefer not to live without)? *My strawberry chewing gum which helps me in the morning as I don't eat breakfast!*
10. Something that you are surprisingly good at? *Loading the dishwasher.*
11. A meal that you can cook well from scratch? *I am not a good cook but have learned to prepare a spicy soup by Ottolenghi which I now enjoy making.*
12. What book are you currently reading? *The Invisible Bridge by Julie Orringer, and I just finished Crossroads by Johnathan Franzen.*
13. If you were a superhero, what powers would you want to have? *Maybe the ability to know what people are thinking. ...but then again, I may not like it so...*
14. What are you most proud of about yourself? *At the risk of sounding very cheesy it would have to be my marriage of nearly 30 years to Sara.*
15. What are you still hoping to accomplish? *I'm constantly hoping that I'm adding value to the militar.*
16. When did you mess up and nobody knew? *I cannot possibly say! What I can say is according to a quote from an Italian guidebook is "know where you are and look good".*



UK Contingent
Community Liaison Officer
Natasha RICHARDS

It is important to achieve at least 1 of the 2.

17. What toppings do you like on your pizza? *Mushroom and ham.*
18. What is something that you're self-conscious about? *I try to separate my position and 'me', in other words I know that people are nice to me because of my position but I try to make them want to be nice to me.*
19. What wrong perceptions do people have of you? *People's perception are their own and I cannot change them. I would hope that they don't confuse my position with my personality.*
20. What song do you have to sing when you hear it? *Angels by Robbie Williams.*
21. What is your karaoke song? *I don't enjoy karaoke but probably Angels!*
22. Which snacks are your must-haves for a road trip? *Werther's Originals.*
23. What would you like to be remembered for? *I would like to be remembered for being fun to work with, having good values and for having a good sense of humour!*

▶ NRDC-ITA International & Charity Day 2023

A joyous celebration of unity and solidarity

Lieutenant Colonel
ITA Army
Gianluca GANDINI



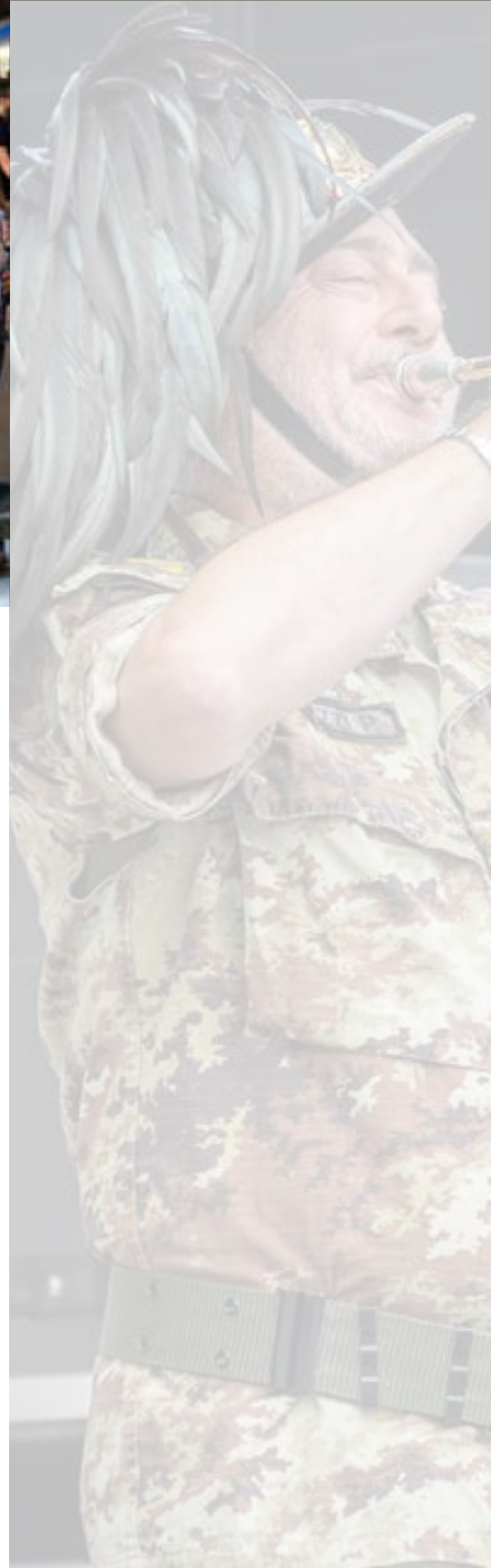
Among the many traditions that serve as common ground for the NATO community, International & Charity Day is one that is definitely significant for both Command and Force Structures.

Although it might be differently named, depending on the given Headquarters where it takes place (for instance, if you are serving at SHAPE HQ in Mons, Belgium, you would be able to enjoy the SHAPE Fest), the main purpose of International Day is to strengthen the esprit de corp that unites all Nations in the Alliance and especially the NATO entity that hosts this incredible social event.

For us, as the NRDC-ITA, International & Charity Day focuses on the soldiers and their families from the 20 Nations represented at the Headquarters. The aim is to foster the bonds of friendship and increase cohesion by sharing the cultures of our Nations by displaying typical traditions and customs of the participating countries.

This year in particular, the event also included the Newcomers' Family Orientation Day, so as to help the families of newly assigned personnel to integrate into our community. International & Charity Day 2023 was a unique opportunity to underline the common values that have guided men and women serving here in Solbiate Olona under the NRDC-ITA insignia since 2001 and to demonstrate, through specific NISIC initiatives, practical solidarity with those experiencing difficulties.

A cheerful feeling of expectation heralded the run-up to the 2023 edition, as for the very first time since the Covid-19 pandemic shook the world, all preventive measures and restrictions were to be lifted, allowing participants and guests to enjoy the experience to the full.



The organizers, working shoulder to shoulder with all the Senior National Representatives, went about arranging a long line of stands that would offer curious guests a warm-hearted welcome and exclusive insight into every Nation's folklore and cultural heritage, including the opportunity to taste mouth-watering delicacies from their traditional cuisines.

Sponsors, invited and helpfully assisted by the Moral & Welfare Agency, were eager to showcase their assorted range of products and services, from local gourmet food and beverages to schooling and housing advice.

The Moral & Welfare Agency also prepared a special surprise for children of all ages, inviting a group of Star Wars themed cosplayers – yes, we were to have Darth Vader himself walking through the crowd, tempting innocent passers-by to join the Dark Side!

Shiny, fancy sports motorbikes and state-of-the-art full hybrid cars were also to be lined up, ready to grab the attention of wandering participants.

Our ever-active NISIC members, a cheerful team of super committed ladies, worked their fingers to the bone in raising money for charitable causes, generously helping those in need.

Adding some spice to an already awesome parade of attractions, three groups of enthusiastic owners agreed to join the event with a spectacular array of Ferrari supercars, classic oldies but goldies Alfa Romeos and vintage military vehicles (hooray for the indestructible Willys jeep!)

Last but not the least, the members our famed "Eagle Band" spent several hours rehearsing their medley of rock songs and ballads so as to be ready to entertain guests with a fantastic concert.

With such intriguing premises, the event seemed to be gallantly marching towards success, but... there is always something sinister lurking just around the corner! This year, it took the menacing shape of dark, stormy clouds, which battered the area with torrential rain from the early hours of Saturday morning...

Miraculously, the almighty Zeus decided to have a little mercy for the soaking wet men and women of the 33rd "Ambrosiano" Regiment, who were tirelessly fighting the dreadful weather while adding the final touches to International & Charity Day 2023. At the very last minute, when everybody was in gloomy despair, a pale sun started to break through the clouds, timidly at first and then with

confident warmth and light, thus reversing an unfortunate course of events!

With renewed vigour and determination, the brave soldiers of the 33rd "Ambrosiano" Regiment completed setting everything up so the event was ready for the arrival of the guests, who happily started to enter the gates of the "Ugo Mara" Barracks in the afternoon of 16 September past.

In the end, the event lived up to its promise! Smiling faces queued up at the various national stands, anxious to grab a taste of Hungarian Gulyás, Spanish paella or American hot dogs! Children elbowed their way to take a picture with Darth Vader and his minion Stormtroopers, while adults, with the same expectant look in their eyes, lined up at the display of Ferraris!

NRDC-ITA Commander, Lieutenant General Lorenzo D'Addario, warmly welcomed all participants and then happily joined the crowd, enjoying a sip of excellent Slovenian wine, shaking hands and patting shoulders (the cheering crowd actually kept him away from a very promising gourmet tasting experience – poor Commander!)

International & Charity Day 2023 proved to be a joyous, happy, bonding event and participants (both servicemembers and their guests) merrily enjoyed themselves: the president of the charity "Progetti Fantasia", Mrs. Lamperti, who received the donations collected by NISIC, remained speechless when Mrs. Mastronardi and Mrs. Delgado from NISIC handed her a big check, symbolizing the actual funds raised. That is the most valuable acknowledgment of the generosity of the NRDC-ITA Community!

Unfortunately, Zeus grew jealous of such happiness and later in the evening abruptly decided to put an end to International Day 2023, by once again amassing thunderous clouds and pelting rain! Participants quickly exited, heading for their cars, and the very few remaining people took cover from the pouring rain, content to enjoy each other's company.

When the lights went off for the 2023 edition of NRDC-ITA's International & Charity Day, it was more like a promise of an even more entertaining and sparkling appointment next year: the clock is already counting down to 2024!

Still, the event was an opportunity to bring together all the families and Nations that are part of our Headquarters, fostering unity and cohesion. It really helped to heal the losses that we have experienced as a Community.



Blankets of Love in Busto Arsizio

NISIC
Community Events Coordinator
Blair BENZ

I have eaten many great meals here in Italy. Not just Italian food, mind you. One of my favorite memories is of sitting around the table of my Romanian friend, Maria, begging her to tell me the secret to creating such delicious dishes. She confided, "Food tastes better when it is made with love."

If love has a taste, then surely it has the look and feel of a warm blanket, carefully knit by hand in service to others. On October 22, 2023, 'Viva Vittoria' and 'Lega Italiana per la Lotta Contro i Tumori' (LILT) lovingly transformed Piazza San Giovanni in Busto Arsizio into a work of art. Volunteers from organizations across the area – schools, cultural organizations, community groups, and individuals – donated more than 2000 handknit "granny squares". Organizers from Viva Vittoria and LILT then assembled the squares into blankets. Our own NISIC volunteers dedicated their time and talent to crafting several beautiful blankets.

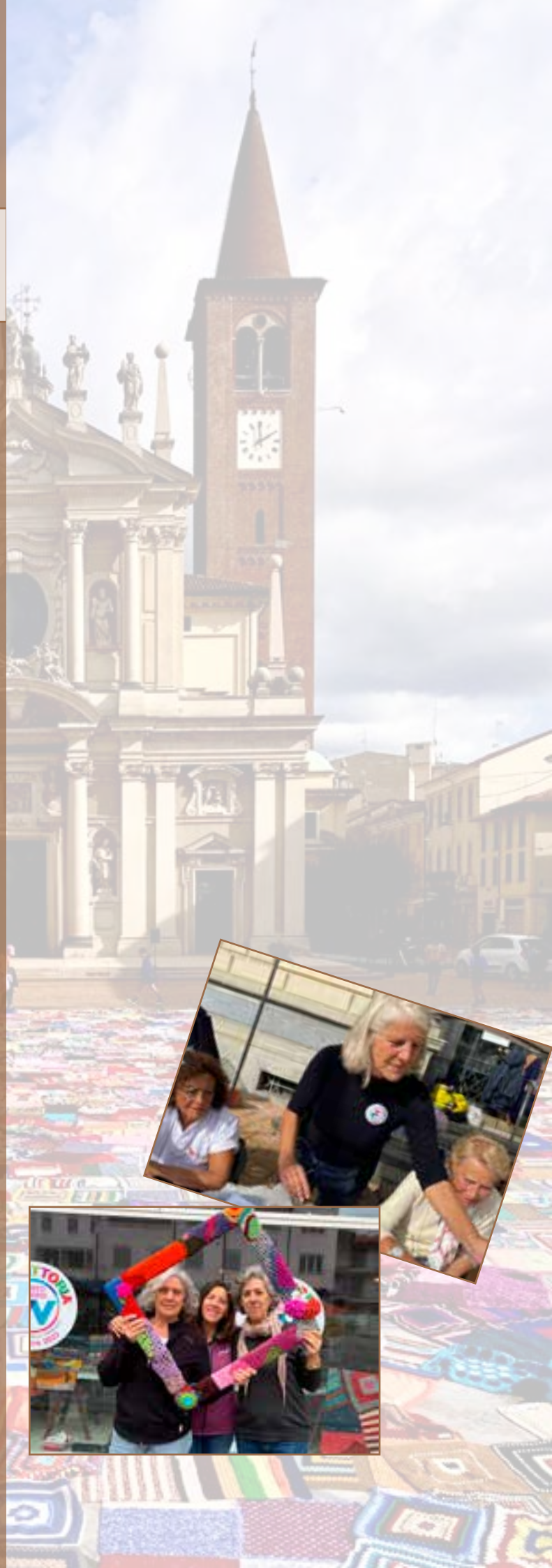
On the morning of the 22nd, more than 800 blankets adorned the square in front of the church while volunteers helped shoppers select and purchase blankets. LILT used the proceeds from the sales to purchase equipment for the detection and diagnosis of breast cancer.

"It is a great honor to partner with Viva Vittoria," said Stefania, the LILT volunteer who organized the Busto Arsizio project.

Viva Vittoria is a national organization that uses knitting and handicrafts as a medium to unite and empower women. Viva Vittoria partners with local community groups, such as LILT, to support and collaborate on a one-time project. Stefania and a team from LILT traveled to the Viva Vittoria headquarters in Brescia to present their idea for covering the piazza in the colorful textiles.

LILT has a local outpatient clinic that provides treatment and support services for cancer patients. Volunteers, like Stefania, assist with everything from arranging patient transportation to fundraising. "If there is a need at the clinic," said Stefania, "then we meet the need."

It is a remarkable grassroots effort that paid off not just in donations but in the joy it brought to the community throughout the day. Even the weather seemed to lift and brighten as the blankets were assembled on the piazza in front of the church. The gray wet morning gave way to a bright sunny afternoon in a show of appreciation for such a spectacular display.



Stendhal, a lover of Milan



Lieutenant Colonel
FRA Army
Arnaud BOURILLET

Exploring the French writer's affection for the Italian city that inspired his works

Italy has long been an important stop on the "Grand Tour". Initiated in the 16th century for cultured travelers – it would be too early to use the word tourists– the peninsula provided an opportunity to study examples of Roman glory and a lot of Renaissance masterpieces. It first attracted French authors like Montaigne, Rabelais and Montesquieu, but in the wake of Chateaubriand, it attracted a new generation of Romantic writers who had a great affinity to the poetry of ruins. Rome, Florence and Naples were the favoured destinations, but it was Henri Beyle – better known as Stendhal (1783 - 1842) – who provided a marvelled vision of Milan in his autobiographical writings.

Stendhal arrived in Milan – where the NRDC-ITA HQ is located – in 1800 for the first time to join the French Army as an officer in the military administration. *"This city became for me the most beautiful place on earth. I do not feel at all the charm of my homeland; for the place where I was born, I have a repugnance that goes as far as physical disgust."* Milan soon became for him *"the place where I constantly wanted to live. I spent a few months there in 1800; it was the best time of my life. I returned there for as long as I could in 1801 and 1802, being stationed at Brescia and Bergamo, and finally I lived there by choice from 1815 to 1821."* For Stendhal – in short – everything was wonderful in Milan: the city, the arts, the Milanese and of course the Milanese women. *"I had no wish to make. May this life last forever."* Rather uncomfortable with descriptions, he testified to his love for the city through reflections and anecdotes on life in Milan.

He admired Milanese architecture right from the beginning of his time there. Emblematic of the city, the cathedral (that Chateaubriand disdained on the rather amazing pretext that the Gothic style fitted poorly with the Italian sun) deeply moved him. He contemplated it in the moonlight, on the advice of a Milanese countess: *"I found the most beautiful silence. These pyramids of white marble, so Gothic and so thin, soaring in the air and standing out against the dark blue of a southern sky with its twinkling stars, form a unique spectacle in the world."* He was no less sensitive to the glory of aristocratic palaces with their courtyards filled with decoration: *"the column is to architecture what the song is to music"*. He walked along the old walls and canals or near Villa Belgioiso and Palazzo Regio. It should be noted that if he did not mention Palazzo Cusani (location of the NRDC-ITA HQ),

he admired the sumptuous villa that this family had in Desio. Always enthusiastic, he praised the role of the "Di Ornato Commission", which governed Milanese urban planning: *"Among these people born for the beautiful (...), the degree of beauty of the facade of a new house is dealt with for a month."*

Seeing Milan as the capital of music, he devoted many pages to La Scala. He felt it was the *"living room of the city"* and the *"leading theatre in the world"*, both for the quality of the performances and for the charm of the conversations on stage: *"My trip was worth it. My exhausted organs had almost completely lost the ability to perceive pleasure. Tonight I saw everything that even the most oriental imagination could dream off, but more striking, richer in architectural beauty, all that can be represented in brilliant draperies, in characters who not only have the clothes, but also the physiognomy and the gestures of the countries where the action takes place"* He discovered Cimarosa, Rossini and Verdi. *"It's impossible to imagine anything bigger, more magnificent, more imposing, newer..."* And to conclude: *"here I am condemned to an eternal disgust for our theatres, and this is the real disadvantage of a trip to Italy."*

In Milan, Stendhal also sought love and this great enthusiast was amazed by the beauty of the women. His writings often return to his view of the *"twelve most beautiful women of Milan"*, many of whom he met at La Scala. He wrote: *"Strolling like this, I got an idea of Lombard beauty, which is among the most captivating, but that no painter has immortalized in his work, as Correggio did for the beauty of Romagna, and Andrea del Sarto for Florentine beauty."*



La Scala opera house in the 19th century



An example of Lombard columns (here Palazzo Brera) that Stendhal so loved, behind a statue of Napoleon that he admired too

In his *“hunt for happiness”*, he was particularly struck by two women: the pretty Angela Pietragua and the inaccessible Mathilde Visconti, in whom he saw *“the very incarnation of Lombard beauty, as Leonardo da Vinci portrayed it in his paintings”*. The latter would be at the origin of his essay *De l’amour* (About love) in which he conceptualized the path of passion. And with these two charming Milanese women, it turned out to be a successful essay.

Stendhal spent a third of his life in Italy. He loved the peninsula so much that he chose it as the setting for some of his major works: *The Chartreuse of Parma* and especially *The Italian Chronicles*: *“I will never leave (...) if I listened to my inclination. I would use all my leave in Milan. I have never met a people that suits my soul so well. When I am with the Milanese, and I speak Milanese, I forget that men are wicked, and the whole evil part of my soul falls asleep at once.”* A well-known writer, he nostalgically confided, through one of his characters, Count Mosca addressing

Countess Pietranera at La Scala: *“I wanted to occupy one of the first places; I managed to do so: but my happiest days are always those that from time to time I can come to Milan.”*

We can still see today the epitaph which he himself composed for his tombstone at the Montmartre cemetery in Paris: *“Arrigo Beyle, milanese, scrisse, amò, visse”* (Henri Beyle. Milanese. He wrote. He loved. He lived) and that Romain Column, his cousin and childhood friend, had engraved.

In 1990, the French high school of Milan – one of the six in Italy to be directly supervised by the agency for the education abroad officially and founded in 1959 via Laveno – was named after Stendhal.

Following in the footsteps of the great writer, Col. Faubladièr, senior national representative, and the French contingent serving at NRDC-ITA would like to take advantage of this article to express their admiration for Milan and for the wonderful Italian culture.

About Stendhal’s Life

Stendhal, born Marie-Henri Beyle on January 23, 1783, in Grenoble, France, was a prominent French writer deeply enamored with Milan, Italy. He passed away on March 23, 1842, in Paris, leaving behind a rich literary legacy.

Stendhal’s life was marked by a profound passion for both literature and the enchanting city of Milan. He initially pursued a military career, serving as a sub-lieutenant in Napoleon’s army during the Italian campaigns. It was in Milan, during this period, that he developed a deep and abiding love for the city, which would play a significant role in his literary works.

Stendhal’s writings often delved into themes of love, desire, and ambition, portraying the intricate nuances of human emotions and social structures. His renowned novel, *“The Red and the Black”* (*Le Rouge et le Noir*), for instance, reflects the influence of his experiences in Milan, exploring the complex interplay of personal ambition against the backdrop of the city’s vibrant culture.

Throughout his life, Stendhal remained a perceptive observer of society, and his love for Milan was apparent in his detailed descriptions of the city’s streets, people, and ambiance. His writing style was characterized by its realism and psychological depth, reflecting his deep connection to Milan and the Italian culture.

Although Stendhal’s literary achievements were not widely recognized during his lifetime, his portrayal of Milan and its influence on his work would eventually contribute to his reputation as a pioneer of psychological fiction. In the latter half of the 19th century, his works gained widespread acclaim, and they continue to be appreciated for their literary and psychological contributions to the world of literature, with Milan serving as a central muse in his creative journey.



Portrait of Stendhal, Silvestro Valeri (1836)

Empowering the NCO Corps: Key Enablers in NATO's Multi-Domain Operations

It is a very exciting and demanding period at NRDC-ITA as we have recently been appointed as an Allied Reaction Force for NATO. This will give the NCO Corps a lot of opportunities to increase our knowledge and expertise. In particular, we must work in a very demanding Multi-Domain Operations environment. Thus, the role of the NCO¹ Corps needs to be further enhanced and focus on the importance of the professionalization, empowerment, and education of the NCOs in the MDO environment, with its new challenges and opportunities.

Current and future crisis scenarios and conflicts are no longer confined to the traditional domains of land, air and sea. The complexity of innovative technologies and the speed of relevance require highly specialized and competent personnel. Thus, to tackle new challenges and, at the same time, seize new opportunities to boost their capabilities, the role of NCOs must be reassessed and enhanced by fostering further improvement of their core competencies to become key enablers and effectively contribute to maintaining the strategic advantage in an MDO environment.

NCOs are widely acknowledged as the "Backbone" of the Armed Forces.

The MDO environment entails developing, training and employing new tools to converge capabilities across multiple domains. The expansion of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, autonomous systems and cyber capabilities requires highly professional and specialized personnel who are fully qualified to work in a complex and very dynamic environment. Although technologies play a central role, education is to be fit for purpose—it is necessary to identify the gaps and develop a clear MDO mentality in all the personnel. A leadership's mind-set change in the context of a multinational environment can foster the empowerment of NCOs and maximize their outputs. With proactive and adaptive training programs, the NCO Corps can not only overcome these hurdles, but also emerge as leaders able to navigate the complexities of multi-domain operations.

By becoming more specialized, better trained, prepared and empowered, NCOs can act as a force multiplier, enhancing military capabilities, interoperability, and efficiently contributing to the effectiveness of NRDC-ITA. NATO members should invest in the professionalization of the NCO Corps. Additionally, NATO personnel should understand the importance of empowerment and the delegation of responsibility to NCOs.

Let me conclude my paper with an example from the ACT website: *"Imagine NATO forces identify a Time-Sensitive Target that poses a direct threat to NATO personnel and/or Alliance citizens. The commander of the NATO forces requires a positive identification to act and defend personnel and NATO interests. Through interconnectivity with a commercial supplier of Space Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance, the NATO decision-makers can access near real-time data and information that allows intelligence to confirm positive identification and track the target. The target is then engaged, and the commercial supplier remains connected to support any further activity. This interconnectivity allows NATO the agility to take advantage of opportunities quickly and have credible, actionable information."*

The Commander will make the final decision, but this is mostly NCO business so, for the success of the mission, NCOs must be well trained, empowered and professional.

Warrant officer (1st class)
ITA Army
Stefano GENCO

1 STANAG 2116 refers to the NCO as OR5-9, but for this article, the term NCO will refer to Other Ranks 1-9.

▶ Exploring Varese: the enchanted “Garden City” of Italy

While you are stationed at Solbiate Olona, your next adventure doesn't have to be far away. Varese, with its rich history and natural beauty, offers a perfect getaway for people seeking a change of scenery and a taste of Italian culture. In this article, we'll take you on a journey through the enchanting city of Varese, highlighting its beauties and attractions, all within the city's limits.

Lieutenant Colonel
ITA Army
Gianluca GRECO



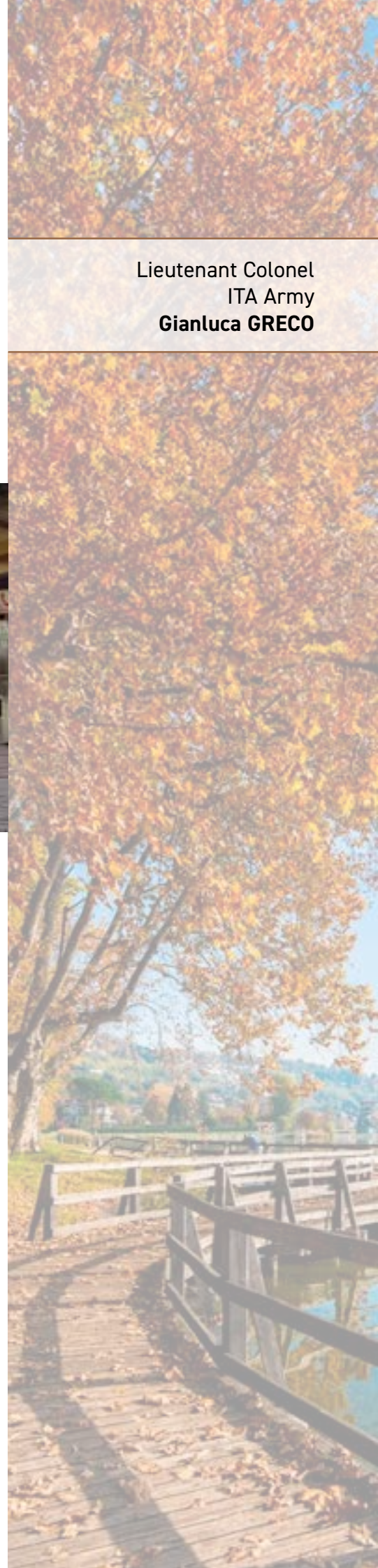
Varese is a lively city nestled on the winding curves of a hilly terrain, surrounded by rivers and lakes, at the foot of the Campo dei Fiori massif. Varese Garden City is the epithet that perfectly describes the blend of art and nature that has characterized the soul of the city for several centuries. The scenic, architectural, and artistic riches had found fame as early as the 18th century when the city became a holiday destination. Stendhal called Varese the 'Versailles of Milan.' Then, at the beginning of the 20th century, with the proliferation of famous Liberty-style villas and hotels in the area, entrepreneurial genius joined artistic creativity, blending seamlessly into a harmonious and thrilling landscape.

A Glimpse into Varese's History

Before diving into Varese's contemporary charms, it's essential to understand the historical context that has shaped this enchanting city. Varese's past is interwoven with the broader history of Lombardy and Italy, and its roots can be traced back to ancient times. The city's name has been linked to "Varesium" or "Varensium" in Latin, revealing its Roman origins.

The history of Varese is marked by a series of conquests and influences. It has been under the dominion of various powers, including the Romans, the Lombards, and the Visconti family. However, it was during the Renaissance that Varese flourished as a cultural and artistic center. The city's numerous palaces, churches, and gardens bear witness to this rich heritage.

Today, Varese is a dynamic and vibrant city that has preserved its historical heritage while embracing modernity. It offers a unique blend of old-world charm and contemporary allure that will captivate your senses.



The Estensi Palace and Gardens

The Estensi Palace and Gardens are in the heart of Varese. In 1766, Duke Francesco III d'Este of Modena, who served as the Captain General and Governor of Austrian Lombardy, acquired a residence on the outskirts of Varese for his leisure time. Civil and judicial powers for Varese had been granted to him by Maria Teresa of Austria in 1765. After the acquisition of the palace, he expanded the property through renovations and construction from 1766 to 1773, completing the garden in 1771. Architect Giuseppe Antonio Bianchi led the project, which included flattening the hilly Castellazzo for the gardens. The palace consists of a central core with two lateral wings connected by a lower colonnade. The interior is a masterpiece of Teresian Baroque with the Hall of Honor featuring frescoes by

Lodovico Bosellini and a central medallion by Giovan Battista Ronchelli.

The Estensi Gardens, designed to rival Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna, date from 1766 and were created with the active involvement of Francesco III and architect Bianchi. They featured a central avenue, circular pool, radiating pathways, and a nymphaeum. In the 19th century, after the death of the Duke, the Gardens' evolution shifted towards a Romantic English-style landscape.

FOR MORE INFO ABOUT
THE GARDENS SCAN HERE



The City's Historic Centre

The old part of the city of Varese is quite distinctive with ancient porticoes and galleries where the city's traders have plied their wares since time immemorial. Strolling along the vibrant Corso Matteotti, you'll experience the heart and soul of Varese's city life. This bustling avenue is a hub for shopping, dining, and soaking up the local culture. The street is lined with boutique shops, cafes, and restaurants, where you can savor delectable Italian cuisine and shop for unique souvenirs. As you walk along Corso Matteotti, you'll find yourself amidst the energy of Varese, immersing yourself in the daily life of the city's residents. Along the Corso, you'll discover the charming Piazza del Podestà, a square characterized by a picturesque setting surrounded by historic buildings and adorned with a

delightful fountain. The Arco Mera, a triumphal arch, stands proudly at the entrance to the square. This archway, built in the 16th century, is a testament to Varese's rich history and architectural prowess.

As you delve deeper into Varese's historical charm, you encounter the Cortile del Broletto and Palazzo Biumi. The Cortile del Broletto is a charming courtyard surrounded by elegant arcades and historical buildings. Nearby, Palazzo Biumi, with its stunning architecture, adds to the grandeur of the square.

Your journey through the old center concludes at Casa Perabò, a hidden gem that offers a glimpse of the city's artistic and cultural heritage. The house, which was once the residence of artist Piero Brolis, is now a museum that showcases his works and provides a unique insight into the creative spirit of Varese.

The Ancient Monastery of Sant'Antonino



FOR MORE INFO ABOUT
THE MONASTERY SCAN HERE



A short trip from the city center takes you to the Sant'Antonino Monastery, an ancient monastery that has witnessed centuries of history. This tranquil oasis is nestled in a lush forest, providing a serene escape from the hustle and bustle of the city. The monastery's cloisters, chapels, and gardens exude an atmosphere of calm and contemplation. It's a place where time seems to stand still, allowing visitors to connect with Varese's spiritual heritage.

The Sant'Antonino Monastery, part of the Casa Veratti complex in Varese's historic center, has a rich history. Construction began in the late 16th century when Cardinal Carlo Borromeo ordered the transfer of Benedictine nuns from Luvinata in compliance with the Council of Trent's decrees. The consuls and rulers of Varese pledged support for the new convent. In 1599, the refectory, now Sala Veratti, was built, followed by the cloister, still standing today.

In 1789, the monastery was dissolved, and Pietro Veratti acquired the complex, converting it into a residence with shops. In 1986, the Varese Municipality took over the former refectory, using it for exhibitions. A preservation decree in 1987 led the Veratti family to restore the monastery, maintaining its architectural and historical significance, a testament to Varese's development.

Basilica of San Vittore

The Basilica of San Vittore, along with the bell tower and Baptistery of San Giovanni, forms Varese's religious center. The present structure is the result of several phases of development. The first was the building of a deep presbytery in the early 16th century. This was followed by the main hall, with a nave and twin aisles, that replaced the former, perhaps Romanesque, church. This newer structure, graced with a splendid lantern designed by Giuseppe Bernasconi, was erected between 1589 and 1625. Finally, a neoclassical façade was created between 1788 and 1791, using a design by Leopoldo Pollack. The interior features a polygonal apse with a Bramantesque influence, though it underwent alterations from the late 17th century on. One of the most notable elements is the Baroque altar designed by Bartolomeo Bolla between 1734 and 1742. In 1991, following the new approach adopted after the Second Vatican Council, the presbytery was rearranged, with the construction of the altar, ambo, president's chair and processional cross, all designed by Floriano Bodini in memory of Pope Paul VI.



FOR MORE INFO ABOUT
THE BASILICA SCAN HERE



FOR MORE INFO ABOUT
THE LAKE SCAN HERE



Lake Varese

For those who yearn for some waterfront relaxation, Lago di Varese, or Lake Varese, offers the perfect setting. Just a short drive from the city, this picturesque lake is surrounded by lush greenery and provides ample opportunities for outdoor activities.

The lake's shores are dotted with charming towns and villages, each with its own unique character. You can rent a boat, go fishing, or simply enjoy a leisurely stroll along the promenade – it is also ideal on a bicycle – while admiring the beautiful lake and the Alpine peaks in the distance. It's an ideal destination for a day of relaxation and outdoor recreation.

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