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NATO RAPID DEPLOYABLE CORPS - ITALY**

# NRDC - ITA Exercice Eagle Tour 14: Impressions From A Military Study

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## Introduction

It is well known to all officers belonging to NATO armies that the training of the Officer Corps is one of the most demanding challenges trainers have to face. It is not only training but, more appropriately, education of minds and personalities. Military leaders have to be trained to analyse complex issues during situations where the level of uncertainty is high. They must quickly grasp the core aspects and take sound and swift decisions to seize and maintain the initiative. It is therefore universally recognized that the study of historical military campaigns and battles are an invaluable part of an officer's education.

The study of military history however, should not be consumed by researching the precise location of the units on the terrain, as this actually has little value.

"Those who believe that exactness is really important never have known war or must have forgotten it...for the issue of any operation of war is decided not by what the situation actually is, but what the rival commanders think it is".<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the study has to be conducted to draw useful contemporary lessons and to develop officers' ability to solve problems independently.

To that end, three types of different exercises have been developed: the battlefield tour, the staff ride and the Tactical Exercise Without Troops (TEWT).<sup>2</sup>

During the period from 15 - 21 June 2014, NRDC - ITA HQ conducted exercise EAGLE TOUR 14 (ET14), focusing on the study of the battle of Dieppe (1942) and the Normandy campaign (1944).

ET14 was aimed at senior staff officers of the Headquarters and desi-

gned to expose them to operational aspects of several battles (Operations "Jubilee", "Overlord", "Goodwood" and "Cobra") fought between the Germans and the Allies during WW2.

ET14 formed part of the participant's preparation for large scale operations and trained them in decision making. The battles that were studied varied in their degree of success; Operation Jubilee, a British and Canadian raid to the French coast, stands out as a significant failure in the history of amphibious warfare, while Overlord showed a tremendous improvement in the capacity to reach success with a large scale joint assault against a defended coastline.

## General Background

In keeping with other exercises from the EAGLE TOUR series, the Corps HQ relied on the support of a historian, and Dr. Jim Storr provided the staff with the required background for

Front page: picture of "Monument of the Knotted Gun - War Memorial of Caen, Normandy, France".

<sup>1</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart "Sherman, Soldier, Realist, American" Da Capo Press, 1994 p. xiv.

<sup>2</sup> For a complete analysis of the differences between battlefield tour, Staff ride and TEWT see Brig. R.A.M.S. Melvin "Contemporary Battlefield Tours and Staff Rides: A military practitioner's view. Defence Studies, Vol. 5 N.1 March 2005. p. 60 and 61.



fare, but whilst still conventionally led became battle hardened by 1944. The Germans had a well - trained army, with an increasing shortage of equipment, yet experienced leaders.

## Exercise Organisation

ET14 was conducted in two phases: A preliminary phase in NRDC - ITA home base and a deployed phase in Normandy. The preliminary phase consisted of a study day, tutored by the historian, in Solbiate Olona, during which the audience received the historical background and an overview of the Exercise Specifications. Importantly, analysis of the operation was conducted from the joint, land, maritime and air perspective. To enable the discussions during the second phase to focus on issues relevant to a JTFHQ, syndicates were then issued the following themes to enhance discussions:

### **Theme 1.** Shaping the environment: the role of Air and Navy Forces.

AIR "In addition to Operation Fortitude, some preparatory Operations, mainly air ones, were performed which led to the degradation of German capabilities. Taking into account the D-Day example and the fact that Gen. Eisenhower was given operational control of the Strategic Air Forces from April 14th, 1944 (D-Day on Jun 6th), given the role of Air Forces in shaping the operational and strategic environment, what would be the related concerns?"

NAVY "Ample air and maritime support was provided to the landing troops during D-Day by the Navy and the Air Force, but while tactical air support was decisive in blocking German reserves' freedom of movement, the naval gunfire

ET14. He set the scene, provided historical lectures on the development of the battle and drew command and leadership lessons from a variety of studies.

The training objectives of the exercise have been refined, modified and improved over the years to enhance understanding of warfare at strategic, operational and tactical level. In the early years (2004 - 2006), they started as battlefield tours<sup>3</sup> in the purest sense, and on one occasion (Crete, 2007) a TEWT was conducted.

As the approach to the exercise has increased in complexity, it has developed into a staff ride that provides the possibility to discuss specific topics at the strategic and operational levels.

The target audience for the exercise was composed of the Command Group (The Commander, Deputy Commander and Command Sergeant

Major), Deputy Chiefs of Staff and Assistant of Chiefs of Staff, in total about 30 officers. The Normandy and Dieppe campaigns were selected considering that the HQ continues to develop its expeditionary mentality. Having recently finished its NATO ISAF rotation, it is now engaged in the transformation to a Joint Task Force Headquarters (JTFHQ).

The study of Dieppe's Raid and D-Day on ET14 provided a wonderful opportunity to appreciate these campaigns from a joint perspective.

This allowed NRDC staff to relate them to their experiences in expeditionary and joint planning that they gained during JTFHQ validation exercises.

The study highlighted two different approaches to the conduct of operations: from the Allied side, an overconfident, excellently trained and lavishly equipped army in 1942 was not initially experienced in joint war-

<sup>3</sup> The terms "battlefield tour", "staff ride" and "tactical exercise without troops" (TEWT) are often interchanged. Yet they each have different functions. A battlefield tour is concerned with looking at past operations for general interest. A staff ride consists of preliminary study of a selected campaign, an extensive visit to the actual associated sites, and an opportunity to integrate the lessons from each. It envisions maximum student involvement before arrival at the site to guarantee thought, analysis and discussion.

A staff ride thus links historical event, preliminary study and terrain to produce battle analysis in three dimensions. It consists of different phases: preliminary study, field study and integration in an after action review.

A TEWT involves an historical scenario and terrain on which an exercise is conducted with contemporary operational art, tactics, techniques and procedures.

effectiveness was controversial. Taking into account that today's warships have much less firepower than WW2 ones, what would be a more appropriate role of maritime forces in a current scenario?"

**Theme 2.** Command and Control: factors to be mitigated. "Because it was a combined joint operation, Command and Control aspects of Operation Overlord were complicated by personalities, service loyalties and national interests.

These factors affected Command and Control by aggravating lines of authority, allowing public opinion to influence critical command decisions and affecting the manner in which key Commanders interacted with one another.

Based on the lessons identified during the Normandy Campaign, what could be mitigating measures to be implemented in order to overcome, in today's environment, the aforementioned issues?

**Theme 3.** Operation Fortitude and Deception plan: challenges for 21st century scenarios

"The failure of the Raid in Dieppe led the Allied HQ to plan and execute a complex



deception plan (Operation Fortitude) to mislead the Germans about the real location of the D-Day invasion.

They were able to construct two artificial (Mulberry) harbours with the capacity to sustain the invasion without the seizure of a harbour in the early weeks of the campaign and Operational Security was maintained long enough to ensure the success of the plans.

How could this be achievable in our "information era" with the Information Technology (IT) available to every single soldier and civilian in the area of operations? Discuss the implications of cyber and IT deception in the 21st Century scenarios".

**Theme 4.** Logistic challenges during the preparation and conduct of D-Day: possible solutions.

Lack of continuity in Logistic Command (Four different General Officers held Theatre Command from Feb '43 to Feb '44), rigid logistic plans, landing craft availability and the high sustainment rate required for the force in early days all could have led the invasion to be a failure without Cherbourg being captured.

With the success of Overlord logistics issues and challenges, what lessons/best practices were due to the ingenuity and dedication of logistic personnel adapting to the battlefield circumstances? Predicated on the D-Day logistics issues and challenges, what lessons/best practices could be identified in the framework of a modern Combined Joint Campaign required to prepare such an assault?

**Theme 5.** D-Day and collateral damage: other options / approaches for the Allies in the scenario. The follow-on battles in the "bocage"<sup>4</sup> were costly in terms of casualties and destruction not only for the belligerents but also for the local population and communities.

The area of Caen was heavily destroyed and it took years for the French government to ensure its reconstruction and for the local population to return to a normal life.

What were the plans the Allies had to mitigate this, and what would be



<sup>4</sup> The French name for the typical Normandy landscape with big thick hedgerows surrounding the fields.

an acceptable approach in a current scenario in order to win the peace and not only the war?

## The Conduct of ET 14

The location in Dieppe enabled the training audience to study the terrain of Dieppe City and the Pourville, and St Martin (former Petit Berneval) areas where the initial engagements took place and where, in the end, the outcome of the battle was decided. The second day was dedicated to Operation Overlord with visits to Pegasus Bridge, the British - Canadian beaches, Ouistreham where the French Commandos saw action, Arromanche's artificial harbour and the US Memorial at Omaha beach. The Third day was spent seeing the Pointe du Hoc, St. Mere Eglise, and then the battlefield of the Operation "Cobra" breakthrough at Percy.

On the fifth day, participants appreciated the battlefield of Operation "Goodwood" close to Bourguebus (south east of Caen) and finally the Polish Memorial in Mt Ormel, one of the places where the fighting to close the Falaise pocket took place.

At each stand, the historian provided detailed information about the events and pointed out the reasons that were behind them. There was then a question and answer period to develop a deeper understanding amongst the training audience. Some interesting lessons can be drawn from Dieppe's operation; firstly the need for joint planning and synchronization could not be more forcefully underlined. Operation Jubilee was fought by the three different components (Maritime, Air and Land) with little coordination between them. At the tactical level other lessons were identified, such as the Tank's inability to move beyond the assault beach and the



requirement to have Combat Engineers quickly available to break obstacles. Fire support was also missing in Dieppe - where the Canadians suffered heavy losses taking fire from the German pillboxes. Many of the causes of Dieppe's failure were properly addressed before Overlord, where assault waves would benefit from heavy naval gunfire (each division landing on a single beach was supported by a naval task group made up by 3 battleships and around 10 - 12 destroyers), airstrikes and specialized tanks to break obstacles. This was particularly true in the British sector, while the Americans did not have such specialized equipment. The

ineffective naval and air fire and a lack of engineer armoured vehicles caused severe losses at Omaha Beach, like in Dieppe but on a bigger scale. It was only after 6 hours of savage fighting that the US troops managed to get out from the beach and moved inland. Concerning logistics, the Mulberries (artificial harbours) were a major component of the answer to the problem of sustaining a logistic flow.

The Army was already engaged in combat operations and at the same time was to build up Allied forces from 150.000 on the D-Day to 1.000.000 by the end of July. The visit to Arromanche's museum and its impressive scale

model of Mulberry was an invaluable experience in order to understand one of the key features of allied success. In the fourth and fifth day the staff concentrated on the aftermath of Normandy landings and in particular on the follow - on battles the Allies fought to break the German lines and get in control of the lodgement required for the future advance against Germany. It was a 10 - week campaign where a number of offensive actions were launched and amongst them were two major operations - "Goodwood" carried out by the British, and "Cobra" by the Americans. Whether or not Goodwood had the scope to pin down the German armoured divisions around Caen, its execution was not a success, since the cooperation between infantry and tanks was still inadequate at the time. Moreover, changes in the chain of command (for example in the 7th British armoured division) had some undesired effects as veteran troops felt overconfident in their capacity and therefore they did not adequately prepare for the style of fighting of the German army in North - Western Europe, and their new leaders had not enough leadership to force them to do so. The outcome was the Villiers Bocage engagement in which Captain Wittmann's Tiger Company blocked and defeated an entire Armoured Brigade. Conversely, the US 3rd Army led by General Patton was able to break down the German lines and start a vigorous offensive that could have led to the operational encirclement of 140.000 German troops. In the end the closure of the Falaise pocket failed and the German

Army was able to recover most of their units out of the encirclement for use in future battles. Though the cooperation was more than adequate, the missed entrapment of German Forces could be attributed to a lack of centralized control of Allied forces. No order was issued to close the Falaise pocket: on the contrary - Patton's divisions were stopped, and though the German losses were severe, the operational encirclements did not succeed. Both sides fought tenaciously, particularly the Canadian Corps, the Polish 1st Armoured Division and the 2nd SS Panzer Division that, just after its exit from the pocket, turned back and wildly counterattacked the Polish: something that has been rarely seen throughout military history.

### Relevance today

The battle of Normandy provides an excellent example of the implications of a conventional battle in a truly joint environment, and allows us to achieve a better joint mentality for a JTF HQ. Additionally, a number of interesting lessons can be drawn: Firstly the understanding of the type of war we will be engaged in is of

paramount importance. "The first, the supreme, the most far reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive".<sup>5</sup> Hitler and the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht were not able to predict the strategic Allied moves nor envisage which kind of battle they would eventually face - especially regarding their freedom of movement.

Despite mistakes that were made, the Military that proved more flexible, adaptive, and able to sustain the effort gained victory in the end. The Germans were deceived about the real place of landings and, once Overlord was launched, still kept their armoured reserves close to the Pas de Calais for weeks. The Allies were able to support the landings, deploying more and more formations without the availability of a seaport thanks to Mulberry. The

<sup>5</sup> Karl von Clausewitz "On war", translated and edited by Peter Paret and Michael Howard, Princeton UP, p.88



personalities of different commanders played, as always, a prominent role. Both sides had leaders that were not always fully cooperative.

While Gen Eisenhower's best feature was his remarkable ability to make the coalition work well together, Hitler's distrust of his military leaders led the

Fuehrer to micromanage the battlefield at sub-tactical level, creating enormous frustration amongst his generals. The exercise was a wonderful opportunity for team building amongst the staff, and officers coming from different countries could exchange views and experiences on professional issues. Certainly an

added value was the beauty of Normandy and its wonderful landscapes. The lessons that were drawn from ET14 can easily be translated into the reality of the 21st century and have utility today. We should continue to look to the battles of the past to help us find the right strategy for our future challenges.

## Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen - 17 June 2014

Like some of you, I've visited Omaha Beach before to pay my respects to the men who fought and died here. It's a particular honor to be here today with you, my NATO colleagues, and with our leadership. If I came back a 100 times to walk this beach and the cemetery grounds, I would still be in awe of the men who fought and died here.

What they did is almost beyond words to me...

...especially the older I get and the longer I serve in the military. I remember the FIRST time I set foot on this beach over 20 years ago as a young, single lieutenant, newly - assigned to Europe.

My cavalry unit conducted a staff ride here and we focused on the tactical, operational, and strategic context of the invasion. The facts of war were presented to us in numbers, on maps, and with detailed graphics and timelines...

...the type of information all soldiers study and absorb in our profession to learn from the past and to help us apply its lessons to any future operations.

The SECOND time I visited Omaha Beach was just a few years ago (ironically after having lived in the real Omaha, NE). My family and I came here as guests of a French friend and NATO colleague who hails from Brittany. Though he'd been here many times, he wanted to host us for a visit to Omaha Beach. In many ways, it was that visit which drove home the real "facts" of what happened here; and the true cost of war.

I remember my wife saying through tears how surprised and happy she was to see so many young European families here - some pushing baby carriages through the cemetery - to pay their respects to the soldiers of D-Day.

My son who was only about 8 years old at the time, didn't really understand all that had happened here, but he saw the flags, and the gravestones, and his mom's tears...

...And all he could think of to do - in the way a child does - was to start cleaning up whatever pieces of paper and plastic which had blown onto this almost - sacred ground, to remove any trash he saw on it as a way to honor the men who'd fought and died here.

In contrast to my son and his innocent show of respect for the veterans of Omaha Beach, there were also some very, very old men here that day...

We saw some of them on the beach, bending down with great difficulty, just to pick up a stone or two at times, and

hold one in the palm of a hand for a moment, before quietly slipping it into a trouser pocket.

Some of those men just stared out to sea, thinking about the events of that momentous day.

Returning here as a husband and as a father, with a SON of my own, the meaning of everything those other fathers and sons sacrificed here hit home for me in a way it couldn't possibly have on my first visit.

Watching my children walk up and down this now - serene beach, it became personal for me, thinking about the ultimate price that these men lying here in the cemetery paid.

They never went home to have children of their own, or to see again the ones they'd left behind. Too many mothers, fathers, wives and girlfriends would never again enjoy their company here on earth...

...ALL so that we, and our children, and our grandchildren could enjoy one another's companionship in peace and safety. Now here I am again, a THIRD time, standing near this beach with all of you

- It's an honor to be back here to pay my respects alongside my European and NATO colleagues, friends, and fellow soldiers. Those of you from Europe already know better than most people the cost of war to entire countries, cities, villages, and families.

The Second World War, like so many other wars here, touched your relatives' lives profoundly and shaped this continent's future in ways that are still felt today.

Like me, each of you has chosen to wear a uniform on behalf of his nation, but also on behalf of our NATO Alliance, one that has endured for 65 years now, keeping alive the blessing of peace that these men fought and died so bravely to give us. It inspires me to be back here and to remember what is still at stake. Recent events in Eastern Europe prove that "the price of freedom is eternal vigilance," as the historian Will Durant has put it.

We owe that vigilance to those who won us the freedom and peace we currently enjoy. May God bless all who've sacrificed so much in defense of peace and freedom.

May we continue to remember and honor such men always, with our own cooperation and with our enduring commitment to their noble cause.

THANK YOU



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