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January 2013 | 19



**ISAF
2013**

THE MAGAZINE OF **NATO RAPID DEPLOYABLE CORPS - ITALY**



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ISTRID (Istituto Studi e Ricerche Informazione Difesa), Rome (Italy)
www.istrid.it/en - President Piercarlo Valtorta

Publisher in charge

edizioni speciali s.r.l.

20143 Milan (Italy) Via Santa Rita da Cascia, 33

Communication operators registry n. 21845 - Director Luigi Rigo

The **everywhere rapidly** is the authorized official publication of NATO Rapid Deployable Corps, Italy. All editorial content of the **everywhere rapidly** is prepared, edited and approved by the NRDC-ITA Commander, at Caserma "Ugo Mara", via per Busto Arsizio, 20 - 21058 Solbiate Olona, Varese, Italy.

The **everywhere rapidly** is published by-annually by the Public Affairs Office. Contents of the **everywhere rapidly** are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or the Nations thereby represented.

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The editor reserves the right to edit all submissions for style, brevity and clarity.

Submissions should be made available via e-mail only.

Send all submissions for publication to editor@paonrdc.it

Circulation is 1.500 copies.



COVER PICTURE

[by OR9 Francesco Civitelli]



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*a*s the end of 2012 approaches, we need to take a moment to have a look back at what our headquarters has undergone over the past 12 months, and also look ahead to the enormous challenges that we will face in 2013. 2012 marks one of the busiest years in the history of NRDC-ITA and the pace will continue as we conduct split operations, both in support of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and moving forward with efforts to prepare us to transition to a new structure, the Joint Command and Control Capability Deployable (JC2C-D). In 2012, NRDC-ITA conducted itself at the highest levels of professionalism and efficiency that maintained its position as the premiere rapid deployment corps within NATO. The body of work that the corps has produced is indicative of the personnel we are blessed to have within the 400-plus commissioned, warrant, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers.

The New Year sees us integrating our personnel within the command structures of both ISAF and Intermediate Joint Command (IJC) headquarters. The deployment to Afghanistan will allow us to further expand our knowledge levels and impart lessons learned from our past experiences into our daily battle rhythm. To not be forgotten, the personnel staying behind will continue on all the work we have done in 2012 to prepare to add the additional capabilities that being a JC2C-D brings.



Commander NRDC-ITA

We must continually take the time to conduct self-analysis. We must continually ask ourselves, are we ready? Equally important we have to ask ourselves have we prepared our families for the challenges that they face on a day-to-day basis. I am confident that we have the systems in place to meet any challenge that could arise.

I am very content for everything we accomplished and how you all represent

NATO, NRDC-ITA, and your Nations. As we move forward into 2013, I am fully confident that we will exceed any challenge that arises.

Continue to look after your families, teammates, and also yourselves. I am really proud to serve at NRDC-ITA.

[Lieutenant General **Giorgio Battisti**, Italian Army]

[by OR9 ITA (A) **Pasquale Dionisio**]

*a*s the Senior Non-Commissioned Officer I am very proud and honoured to be the Commander Sergeant Major (CSM) of NRDC-ITA HQ. On 28 May 2012, I was chosen as CSM after a demanding and challenging selection among numerous suitable NCOs. On the one hand it is a great privilege, but on the other it is a huge responsibility that I have to face every day, and if I may use a quote from a hero from the past: "Commanding is not a privilege but it is an obligation towards my soldiers."

I am very confident that we will accomplish our mission in Afghanistan in the best way we can. Throughout the NRDC-ITA history, the Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) has been a pivotal figure, but never more so than today with our full spectrum of operations, including the on-going insurgency war in Afghanistan and peacekeeping operations where we have achieved an extraordinary level of understanding.

The leadership, professionalism, commitment, courage and dedication of the NCO, as well as of all other ranks, are the essential pillars on which our HQ foundations stand. The worth of our soldier is a national treasure where everyone in each section, branch and division is a fundamental element of this HQ joined by a spirit

of friendship and highly proficient military skills. Moreover, the unique "NRDC team" follows the ideals of the North Atlantic Council and focuses on a shared goal in ensuring peace and security to all that have the rights. I have the faith among all our soldiers, without looking to the gender, rank or appointment, that they will all reach the end of the tour in Afghanistan having brought to the table of the Afghan people all our experience, capacity and loyalty that each nation worldwide is providing to Afghanistan for a better future.

and our families will be far away from us due to the distance but they will support and help us through.

We will have good days as well as bad days but what is very important is that we will make the most of them. I will do my best with the support of all the staff to stay in close contact with the families back home, we will help all our soldiers to make sure that everything will be achieved with flying colours until our tour comes to an end. Our families will give us the vital power to overcome any difficulties, as they do for us today.

Command Sergeant Major

Therefore when NRDC-ITA HQ was formally notified that we would deploy in the first days of January 2013 in support of ISAF, I was not worried about the performance of our soldiers, because the standards as mentioned before are set at a very high level. Having already deployed twice to ISAF (VIII and XII), I am fully aware what it means and what we are going to face before, during and after the tour. The deployment is quite long



Cultural Advice About Afghanistan

[by Major TUR (A) **Mehmet Ali Celik**]

the purpose of this article is to give an impression of Afghan culture that will need to be taken into account by staff during the ISAF mission.

Afghanistan Cultural Diversities

Afghanistan has been described by historians as a "crossroad of the ancient world". Afghanistan's ancient history has largely been determined by its geographic location between Central, West and South Asia. As well as in antiquity, also in modern times, armies of different nations have passed through the country, temporarily establishing local control and often dominating Afghanistan.

Afghan society is divided along ethnic and tribal lines. Historic factors, such as invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, and geographic factors, created ethnic diversity. Recognition of the diverse ethnic factors is important in understanding Afghan society and the complex problems facing the country.

Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in the country with 13 million in eastern and southern Afghanistan. The second largest ethnic group are the Tajiks, accounting for 25% of the

population. A third important group in the country are the Hazara, situated in the central mountains of Afghanistan. Uzbeks reside mainly in the Northern region: they represent about 9% of the total population.

Dari and Pashtu are the official languages of Afghanistan. Pashtu (also written Pushtu) was declared the National Language of the country during the beginning of Zahir Shah's reign in the 1930s; however, Dari has always been used for business and government transactions. Most Afghans are bilingual and approximately 35% of the Afghan population speak

Pashtu, while around 50% speak Dari. Eastern Turkic languages and other minor languages are also spoken in (see details in Figure below)

As Muslims, the Afghan people's traditional view of life is strongly influenced by their view of Islam. Their outlook of life is that Allah controls everything and everything happens according to his will.

Decades of war have contributed to a deteriorating social structure that is characterized by a low quality of life for the majority of Afghans. Poverty affects much of the population and many families are in desperate situa-





tions. Unemployment rates are very high. These are all areas of concern for Afghan people.

In a deeply religious and conservative country with an instilled culture of honour and pride, there will always be some uncertainty about cultural understanding of Afghans. But greater cultural understanding would mitigate some of the tension that continues to produce violence. Below you will see some primary points about Afghan Culture & Society.

Afghan Culture & Society

Islam

- Muslims are to pray five times a day: at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and night.
- Friday is the holy day. Most shops, businesses, Government offices make the weekend Thursday and Friday.
- During the holy month of Ramadan Muslims fast from dawn to sundown. Fasting includes no eating, drinking, smoking or sexual intercourse. Foreigners are not required to fast; however, it is not recommended to eat or drink in the public. (next Ramadan month will be 9 July - 7 August 2013)
- Charity (Zakat): Every year a Muslim must give at least 2.5% of his wealth to the poor.
- Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj): Every Muslim who is able must make at least one trip to Mecca, the holiest city in Islam. The pilgrimage must be made during Dhu al Hijja, the last month of the Islamic calendar (14-29 October 2012)

The family

- Primary loyalty is to the family clan and tribe, where Afghans express



their identity. Their various codes are often strict and inflexible. Family honour is also affected by personal behaviour.

- Men and women's role are much more defined along traditional lines.
- Women are generally responsible for household duties, whereas men will be the breadwinners. It is not common but professional women do exist. In most rural communities women live completely hidden away. There are still few schools for girls.

- Even before the Taliban, women in suffered high maternal and child mortality rates. In tribal law they have no legal rights and no right of inheritance.

- Families traditionally live together in the same walled compound, known as the kala (kala means "castle"). When a son gets married he and his wife begin their married lives in a room inside the kala. But this is much more related to financial reason rather than an Islamic view.

The Concept of Honour and Shame

- As in many cultures, honour in Afghan culture defines the reputation and worth of individual.

- The head male of family is responsible for protecting the honour of the family. The issue of honour drives much of the behaviour surrounding protection of women, modes of dress, social interaction, education and economic activity.

- If someone's honour has been compromised, they are shamed and will look for revenge for themselves and their family.

- The role of honour and tribalism has fuelled much of the disharmony



in the country's recent history - with one group carrying out violent acts against another, the victims are forced to respond causing a circle of violence as happened during the Mujahedeen Wars after Soviet invasion.

The Social Etiquette

- No matter who you are, if you visit a home you will be given the best the family has. This relates back to the idea of gaining honour.

- It is necessary to take a seat with the host and drink tea when offered.

- Do not ask an Afghan his ethnic origin or political stance. Nor should his female family members be mentioned.

- The left hand is also taboo. Do not shake with the left hand and do not eat with your left hand in public and do not give anything with your left hand. The left hand is considered to be unclean.

- Nose blowing in public is also unacceptable.

The Insider Threat

A number of Insider Attacks have been reported in 2012, when members of Afghan Security Forces turn their weapons against ISAF troops. These attacks have threatened to undermine

trust and confidence between ISAF troops and Afghan Security Forces although less than a quarter of the attacks have been attributed to Taliban. Less reported has been the fact that Afghan Security Forces have also been victims of Insider Attacks, thus sharing a strong interest in confronting the threat.

The great majority of the attacks are thought to stem from personal disputes, misunderstandings and cultural differences. However, the assaults have become an effective tool for the Taliban, which seeks to drive a wedge between Afghan and Allied troops.

Looking from the Afghan perspective, a 28-page "Brochure for Understanding the culture of Coalition Forces" has been published and distributed to 5000 Afghan soldiers this September in order to avoid some of the misunderstanding and friction. This is a welcome development for ISAF troops. Also preventive measures have been taken to strengthen vetting and recruitment procedures, and counter-intelligence. Ultimately, increased cultural awareness translates into better personal relationships between foreign and Afghan troops - and greater success on the ground.



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A Day of Life at IJC

[by Major GBR (A) Colin Masson and OR9 ITA (A) **Enzo Salvi**]

the ISAF Joint Command (IJC) is not a hotel, of course, and for sure you are not here to spend your vacations, but if you are able to manage your life in the right way, you could experience one of the better times abroad during your military career. In fact, KAIA Airport offers you a good possibility to have a stimulating and enjoyable tour. Depending on your job and where you work within the IJC, your daily routine will vary. These notes describe a typical day in the life of comrades assigned to the IJC.

Every day begins with a good breakfast – plenty to choose from at the Dining Facility from a full cooked breakfast (English) to continental style (Europe), waffles (US) or porridge (Scottish), moreover you have possibility to choose between different Dining facilities. Usually I am at my desk by 0730hrs, ready for a series of update briefs which will set the tone for the day. Meetings and briefings dominate the day during which I grab a good lunch with my office colleagues and during almost all the afternoons, I take care of my body and my health in a gym that's really well equipped. The evening meal at 1900hrs is followed by a few more hours in work, usually finishing off the day at about 2100hrs. I can call home whenever I like, I can do this either from the phone on my desk or

going to one of the free Wi-Fi areas on base and using Skype. I'm called by my National Support Element twice a week to pick up any mail and drop off my laundry. In the same NSE on Saturday night we are might try to cook some national foods and we love to join with people from other countries and share experiences and cultures; it's a fun time; I can take advantage to improve my language and to discover something new. I usually get my daily supplies posted out to me by my family in my weekly "morale box", but we are lucky because there's a choice of different coffee shops on the base and also two supermarkets which are very helpful

where I can buy all sorts of things. My department work on a roster to give each member a late start on one morning a week. This is my "weekend" giving me some time to relax or do some shopping in either the PXs or the local shops on base. The days are long but the weeks fly by. I am busy at work, staying fit and, through the internet, keeping in contact with family and friends. I know the 6 months will pass quickly with your support...It's time to conclude with an ancient Afghan (Neapolitan) saying: "He who comes here, usually cries twice: when he arrives, and when he leaves..."

Be an optimist and be safe!!!





Civilians and Us: A Case for Afghanistan 2013

[by OF1 ITA (A) **Francesca Citossi**]

*d*ealing with civilians – the local population, UN agencies, international NGOs, local NGOs, government organizations, local government, and central authorities - is a tricky business. They generally feel odd (uneasy, intimidated, challenged, threatened, uncomfortable, mistrusted, undervalued) having to relate with us. We do not know exactly who we are talking to (most of the time we feel that they are not all really willing to share information with us and that our projects are never good enough for them). Fully understandable - it is not our world; it is originally “theirs”. The truth is that civilians started working in a conflict environment as humanitarians or development aid workers a century and a half ago; we really started at

the beginning of the Nineties and our CIMIC doctrine is very young. Now we have the Comprehensive Approach, considering the Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, and Information, PMESII. Civilians now make up to 80% of the victims in a conflict, so they have a point in having their say. The nature of conflicts has changed, we must change too¹, and pretty fast, or we will constantly run behind. Humanitarians were born in 1859, when a Swiss businessman remained devastated by what he saw on the Solferino battlefield. He founded the International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC (not an NGO), and it all started. Their first 4 of 7 principles - humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence - became an ideal to

follow, both in humanitarian and in development work. The 8 biggest world NGOs (all Western) have a budget of almost six thousand million dollars (the UN's budget is around four thousand million dollars); ECHO, the European Commission Humanitarian Office, manages 50% of the world humanitarian budget; the number, budget, nature of projects, and fields of intervention of the local NGOs in every country is beyond control and impossible to track. What lies in between the civilians and us is the humanitarian space. We cannot invade it, we should preserve it and we must oblige to it. We have rules of engagement; they have their principles². We respond to our governments? They have their donors. We have a Concept of Operations?

¹ Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Stanford, 1999.

² Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002.

³ Rudyard Kipling, *The white man's burden*, 1899.



They have a Strategic Development Framework in each country. After the 2005 Humanitarian Reform a more understandable coordination structure took shape, referring to the Humanitarian Coordinator and the Cluster system.

Using different words, we carry out our jobs in a parallel universe, but we should not become the same. The mistake we make too often in the Western world is to try to read other social groups with our own categories and criteria. The Kipling syndrome³ that we, as Western countries, continue to follow well beyond the end of colonialism, makes us expect free and fair elections, a legitimate government and rule of law, factors that we use to justify aid to support stabilization and a clear development path. Universal Human Rights are considered as such by those that share them; instead, those that do not

share them consider Human Rights as a new colonialist and arrogant attempt to impose our vision from the (rich) Western world.

Some further examples: for many years the developing world - we call it as such - suffered the IMF and World Bank diktat on how to rescue their desperate economies, and then we suddenly discovered that the Grameen Bank with micro credit plans works better. For decades we dispatched to Africa industrial powdered milk enriched with vitamins, but it does not compare to mothers' milk; we forgot to consider that 70% of the world population has no access to drinkable water⁴. Likewise, we keep watching at the world through our Western-military glasses while we operate in a civilian context on the other side of the globe with a totally different culture, history, economy, society, religion, tradition and poli-

tical organization. After the Soviets withdrew, Afghanistan withdrew from our thoughts. Then on 9/11 we suddenly realized what we did⁵.

In 1980 the UN-NGOs operated cross-border, only in neighboring countries. The arrival of aid agencies in Kabul was accompanied by the first attempt to set up a robust UN humanitarian coordination mechanism, while simultaneous UN attempts to negotiate a long lasting peace failed and humanitarian assistance was used by the United States and its allies as a tool for political aims. It was not humanitarian anymore - it missed the essential requirements of neutrality and impartiality. An array of NGOs, sponsored largely by the United States and other Western governments, provided assistance to the mujahedeen, shaping the Afghan perception towards foreign aid, no matter if civilian or military. The uncon-

⁴ UNDP, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2011*, <http://www.undp.org.af/Publications/KeyDocuments/2011/annual%20report%202011/UNDP%20annual%20report%202011.pdf>

⁵ A. Donini, 'Between a rock and a hard place: integration or independence of humanitarian action?', *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 93, no. 881, March 2011.

⁶ M.B. Anderson, *Do no Harm: how Aid can support Peace or War*, Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., Boulder, 1999.



trolled cash flow fuelled the conflict among warlords, along tribal and ethnic lines⁶, increasing corruption and competition for scarce resources in a country desperate for poverty. In the Nineties and with the appearance of the Taliban the situation further deteriorated with the devastation and complete breakdown of institutions, hampering the provision of assistance. The rise of the Taliban regime triggered a resurgence of interest in humanitarian principles and was coupled with a second attempt for robust and coherent coordination among assistance, Human Rights, and political dimensions of the international response, in accordance with the 'unitary approach' that was articulated in the UN Secretary General's Agenda for Peace⁷. In 1998, the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan was born. The key assumption was that, by reducing the disconnect

between the political assistance and the Human Rights pillars of UN action, there was a better chance for an effective peace strategy. The Strategic Framework was criticized by some for the alleged subordination of humanitarian and Human Rights concerns to the UN's political agenda. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and ISAF deployment meant heavy engagement characterized by politics in a vain quest for a durable peace: the intervention of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the corruption of the humanitarian space, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan strongly contested by assorted warlords, re-emergent Taliban and other insurgent groups. The result of all these elements intertwined together was an extremely politicised environment and little understanding of or respect for hu-

manitarian principles by the Taliban and other insurgents. For whatever reason, we convinced ourselves that aid would bring stabilization. There is no robust evidence⁸ for that. There is evidence though that pumping money in a country with low development indicators fuels fragmentation, corruption, warlordism and frustration towards a lack of justice.

On one hand we need to be more careful about how we deliver aid - and the military might learn from civilians who have wider experience in this field. And on the other, we need to re-establish the humanitarian space: humanitarianism is not our job, but we need to establish a renewed relationship with civilians since very often we share space and time during operations.

Non-military problems-poverty, unemployment, lack of education, lack of justice-cannot have a military solution.

⁷ B.B. Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping*, 1992.

⁸ Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder, 'Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan', , Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2011.

⁹ David Rieff, *At the Point of a Gun: Democratic Dreams and Armed Intervention*, Simon&Shuster, 2005

ISAF Pre-Deployment Training

[by Major GBR (A) **Chris Kierstead**]

troughout 2012, NRDC-ITA staff conducted a series of coordinated and complimentary training events in preparation for deployment to the ISAF Joint Command (IJC) Headquarters in January 2013. The training programme was designed in accordance with criteria set in JFC Brunssum's numerous training directives (75-8 v2, COIN MST guidelines, PDT annual and quarterly letters) and also followed the specific guidance of both COM NRDC-ITA and the lessons learnt papers of other Graduated Readiness Force Land (GRF(L)) Headquarters who have previously deployed in similar roles. As a result of the copious direction on mandatory training events mentioned above, NRDC-ITA was able to establish its training programme early, enabling a clear allocation of resources from its supporting agencies/units, and most importantly, the prioritisation and desynchronisation of other tasks for which the headquarters retained primary responsibility. Direction from JFC Brunssum also enabled both the framework nation and other troop contributing nations to synchronise their deployment requirements and take part in joint training activities throughout the individual training activities.

Senior National Representatives (SNRs) were offered positions for their contingent members for all training events to facilitate an optimal amount of cross-national expertise, with the Headquarters maintaining an 'Individual Education Plan' spreadsheet to capture all individually completed objectives. Individual Competency requirements

were completed by the following collection of training events. Individual Military Training (IMT) aimed to train deploying staff to adequate levels of proficiency in movement, shooting, communications and survival (MSCS). These training serials were based on a series of doctrinal lessons followed by a period of consolidated "hands





on" training during four iterations of Battle Camps. This training, along with several specialist courses and training days (SERE, COIN, Plans workshops, IT training) enabled individuals to satisfy both NATO and National training requirements for deployment to Afghanistan. Additionally, NRDC-ITA staff conducted a series of supportive training events. The staff completed the required Joint Advanced Distributed Learning (JADL) online courses, both the ISAF basic user course and also the more specialized IJC or ISAF HQ lessons. A Counter Improvised Explosive Device (C-IED)

seminar took place in the headquarters, with an advanced course enabled by the SACT C-IED MAT. Additionally, English language courses were made available for Italian personnel scheduled to deploy. All of the above training ensured that individuals were trained and ready for deployment as individuals.

Once the individual portion of pre-deployment training was under way, NRDC-ITA then also looked to train deploying staff in 'role competency', through training events aimed at ensuring that deploying personnel possessed a clear understanding of the

Mission, current Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and in Functional Area Systems (FAS) specific to their role. This was achieved through a set of coordinated exercises within the means and capabilities of the Headquarters and its support brigade, based largely within the barracks in Solbiate Olona. Exercise EAGLE ACTION concentrated on the Functional Area Training of battle staff, by establishing functional syndicates tasked to go through a series of vignettes aimed at gaining a deeper insight of the issues more relevant to the various IJC Directorates.



This succeeded in briefing the collective staff on the laydown and staffing procedures of IJC and ISAF HQs, and enabled them to experience the IT framework and portal structures of the real-time HQs. It also allowed staff to experience the SOPs and staff processes of the Cross Functional Teams (CFTs) extant in theatre. Branch heads took the lead in the planning, preparation and execution of the exercise. This resulted in excellent value training being achieved across the HQ and reduced the G7 role to a facilitating function.

After the success of EAGLE ACTION, the Exercise EAGLE FOCUS series was planned to further enhance the

level of knowledge laid down in EAGLE ACTION, and to maintain the operational currency of deploying staff. EAGLE FOCUS 1 comprised a series of briefings by subject matter experts, either recently returned from Afghanistan, or via satellite from KABUL, on the ongoing work of the HQ over the summer and early autumn of 2012. While NRDC-ITA staff were aware of a number of changes within the IJC and ISAF HQs, the experts were able to add details and address specific questions on matters of concern. EAGLE FOCUS 3 re-focused staff efforts on their roles within theatre, and specifically with reference to real event data from IJC HQ. Vignettes and

subject matter were drawn from the IJC wise pages, and enabled staff to both train themselves and their CFTs in the rhythms and procedures of theatre, but also to absorb considerable details from real events in theatre. Add to this the directives set by DCOS Ops, that all staff should be in constant contact with their opposite number in theatre, and this led to staff knowing precisely what would be their role upon arrival in Afghanistan in January 13.

In summary, to date (mid November 12), during this year of preparation, the following themes have been explored:

- Cultural Awareness;
- Physical and mental fitness;



- Health and medical support with focus on First Aid and Force Health Protection;
- NBC Self Protection measures;
- Anti-Terrorism measures;
- Force Protection measures;
- ED-threat awareness/C-IED training;
- Mine and explosive ordnance awareness;
- Hot and cold weather operations;
- Individual weapons handling and firing;
- Law of armed conflict;
- Escalatory use of force.
- Crowd and Riot Control (CRC) procedures;
- Personnel Recovery (PR);
- Building Integrity (BI);

- COM ISAF Tactical & Tactical Driving Directive;
- CIVCAS Prevention and Mitigation;
- COMISAF Critical Guidance on:
 - COMISAF Standards of Ethical Conduct;
 - COMISAF Direction and Guidance on Escalation of Force;
 - COMISAF Night Ops Tactical Directive Rev 2;
 - COMISAF Tactical Directive Rev 4;
 - COMISAF Tactical Driving Directive Rev 2;
 - COMISAF COIN Contracting Guidance;
- Insider Threat;
- Gender Issues in Afghanistan;
- Female Engagement Team Training;

- Strategic Communication;
- SFA Concept principles (MAT/PAT/OCCAT);
- JADL dedicated packages.

With the information received from our second theatre recce in November, and with the unparalleled training which staff will undergo during Exercise UNIFIED ENDEAVOUR13-1 (the Mission Rehearsal Exercise in Germany), the NRDC-ITA Headquarter staff are well prepared to take control of the mission in Afghanistan in early 2013.

[Photos provided by NRDC-ITA PAO]



A year in Afghanistan

[by Captain ITA (A) **Francesco Pino**, 1 Signal Regiment]

L September 2012: With the return of the latest Task Force C4 team from Herat, the 3rd Company of the Spluga Battalion has concluded operation ISAF XVIII. It was an intense year, made up of sacrifices, countless hours in the classroom and out on the field, and likewise innumerable hours of training

around Italy, aimed toward sharpening theoretical knowledge and practical skills on the ground.

The mission of the 1st Signal Regiment was to send a Company to be integrated with Joint Task Force C4 in support of the 7th Signal Regiment of Sacile. The Company's task was to support the units of the Task Force

Center (at the 82nd Infantry Regiment "Torino" base, Barletta) deployed in Shindad, in the central zone of Regional Command West in Afghanistan. Training activity began in October 2011 with a major programme in Sardinia, at the Capo Teulada range, where the Garibaldi Brigade, under the leadership of General Chiapperini,



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drew up to best simulate the Afghan scenario.

In this context, the soldiers of the 1st Signal Regiment were able to work with the infantrymen of the 82nd Regiment as well as their signal colleagues from the COTIE area, alternating the training typical of the service base with the work specific to Signal methods and materials in order to guarantee the necessary support for the operational units.

On the return from Sardinia, a new major training programme was undertaken in the mountainous region of Brunico, also with the 82nd Signal Regiment, which allowed the Company to achieve top form and optimal accord with the operational units.

Tactical heli-transport and combat training in inhabited areas, conducted at the 3rd Alpine Regiment in Pinero-lo, completed the training activities carried out preliminary to entering Afghanistan.

Operation ISAF XVIII began in February 2012 and involved the 1st Signal Regiment using its own assets to support 82nd Infantry Regiment CIS deployed at the "La Marmora" FOB in Shindand.

Their main activities were the Management of the C4 Systems Centre, including its Classified and Non-Classified communications sections, management of the data and site networks, management of the telephone network and maintenance of the Jammer equipment provided to the Operation forces.



[Photos provided by The Author]



FROM THE STAFF



Moreover, during the mandate, the Company actively participated in the installation and implementation of new satellite terminals with DVB (Digital Video Broadcasting) technology, which in the short term will permit better management of CIS services.

The 4th Signal Company, also from the 1st Signal Regiment, succeeded the 3rd Company at the end of August. To those now carrying the colours of our flag to this impenetrable and far-off land, we send our heart-felt wishes for a job well done.

Stay strong, guys.



Health Advice in Afghanistan

[by Colonel ITA (A) **Giuseppe Azzena**]

being part of a military Force means to be able to work in different locations and different operational conditions. To cope with the threats posed by the environment on fighting potential, Armed Forces provide soldiers with dedicated equipment, e.g. clothing for low temperatures, and with a comprehensive set of medical prevention tools overall described as Force Health Protection (“the sum of all efforts to reduce or eliminate the incidence of disease and non-battle injuries to enhance operational health readiness”). In this article I summarize some aspects of medical relevance regarding deployment to Afghanistan.

1. Always comply with the directives given from your national chain of command.

Fitness Certificates for deployment are a national responsibility as well as the vaccinations required and, in general, all medical-related deployment procedures. If you are supposed to follow a specific treatment while in Theatre, such as taking a drug to prevent malaria, you should act in accordance with it. It is never recommended to decide for yourself in relevant medical matters. If you suspect that mandatory medical treatments are causing problems inform your medical service and follow their guidance.

2. Know the environment.

Kabul is located at an altitude of around 1800 meters (6000 feet). Even if at these heights you are unlikely to

suffer from altitude sickness, at the beginning of your stay you could experience some mild to moderate generic symptoms, such as headache or dizziness. These could just indicate that your body is adapting itself to the altitude. It is better to avoid intense physical activities in the first days of your stay. The location of Kabul leads to extremities in weather conditions; be prepared.

3. Be aware of infectious diseases.

Even if you are vaccinated against several infectious diseases present in Afghanistan you are still vulnerable. Keep in mind that the best way to prevent an infection is to avoid the exposure. Microbial agents enter our body through different routes (figure 1) but properly washing your hands will protect you more than any other measure (figure 2). Diseases transmitted by vectors, like Malaria and Leishmaniasis, endemic in Afghanistan, can be prevented by avoiding the bites of mosquitoes and sand flies that carry these diseases. More information on infectious diseases in Afghanistan can be found in several websites. I suggest <http://www.mdtravelhealth.com/destinations/asia/afghanistan.php>.

4. Do not forget psychological well being.

Deployment could be challenging even for personnel not directly involved in combat operations. In spite of false myths, no one is immune from psychological stress and to admit it is not a sign of weakness.

The 5 R's for combat and operational stress reaction (figure 3) are a simple but effective way to remind yourself what kind of help you can get from healthy habits and from your colleagues.

5. Seek health care when necessary.

Physical and mental health are your first resource and timing is crucial to avoid health issues. If you experience unusual symptoms do not wait; ask for a medical check as soon as possible.

This short compendium will not probably cover all the questions you could have on the topic.

More extended Force Health Protection Topics can be found in the MED Wise Page/SharePoint and, if it is not enough, just ask and the MED Branch will, hopefully, be able to answer.

FIGHT GERMS BY WASHING YOUR HANDS!



Figure 1: Routes of Microbial Entry

Inhalation



Germ survive in droplets produced during sneezing and coughing.

Ingestion



Fecal-Oral spread. The germs must survive the stomach acidity.

Sexual contact



Germ cannot survive easily in the environment.

Skin Injuries/
Injection/
Blood exchange

Includes vector-borne transmission.

Figure 3: The 5 R's
Combat and Operational Stress Reaction

Reassure of normality (normalize the reaction).
Rest (respite from combat or break from work).
Replenish bodily needs (such as thermal comfort, water, food, hygiene, and sleep).
Restore confidence with purposeful activities and talk.
Retain contact with fellow Soldiers and unit.

(They are commonly referred to as the 5 R's)



Experience as an Army Reservist

[by Captain ITA (A) **Gina Di Meo** (R)]

I joined the Army Reserve officially last June when I was appointed a Captain. I am a member of this 'collateral army', unknown to many, made up of civilians that provide their skills to the Department of Defence. Why did I become what can be called a 'part-time' officer? Despite being considered either crazy or bold, there are different reasons behind my choice. One above all is my occupation.

I am a journalist and I have been embedded several times both with the American and the Italian Army. It was in 2009 in Kabul in Afghanistan that I found out about the Army Reserve. I was immediately intrigued by the fact that some civilians could enter the Army. I did not think twice; I applied, and here I am. I have to say, though, it was a 'bumpy' process, at least at the beginning. As

a journalist I immediately felt that life as a Reservist could be something challenging for me, a new way to 'test' my skills of information gathering and use it for a different purpose. There was also another reason that was kind of 'patriotic'. While being part of the 'boots on the ground' with the US Army I could not help being impressed by the way American citizens treat their soldiers.





They consider them heroes and they try in every possible way to make their deployment as comfortable as possible. They ship them (the US Postal Service has a flat rate to ship to the troops) boxes full of anything the soldiers may need, from candies to cookies to toothbrushes, from magazines to chewing gums. Simple stuff, but enough to make them feel, in a way, at home.

I spent some time with the Italian troops and it looked like that Italians simply did not care about their soldiers. Why? I asked myself. I might be wrong but I came up to the conclusion that in part this 'denial' is due to a mistaken policy by the Department of Defence. It is nothing new if I say that there is a gap between the media and the way

Defence wants to handle press and public opinion. Whoever is in charge both politically and technically can seem to 'hide', and not to be open, about what is really going in the military.

Well, I might have been a dreamer when I thought that maybe I could make my skills available to bridge this gap and to make our soldiers more accepted in society. Of course it's this and much more. I think journalists are flexible figures (well, at least sometimes) and can be used in multiple ways so whatever is meant to be in store for me it will be challenging. For now it is too soon for me to draw conclusions, it is only the beginning. Whether I succeed or not time will tell, but at least I tried. In the meantime of one thing I am sure: Proud to serve.



JLSG vs RSC - Concept and Future Solutions

[by Rear Support Command **staff**]

t Background

The NATO deployable joint staff element (DJSE) is a headquarters (HQ) element designed to function in theatre as the deployed joint staff for a static operational-level commander. The recent NATO Command Structure (NCS) review will deliver a reduced number of standing HQs although the stated Level of Ambition remains the same. The 2010 NATO strategic concept retains the Alliance's commitment of conducting 2 Medium Joint Operations (MJO) and 6 Small Joint Operations (SJO), maintaining the flexibility to mount a Joint operation larger than an MJO. This will be met through the involvement of the existing Graduated Readiness Force Land (GRF- L) HQs in commanding SJOs. Under current SHAPE direction, this will also require GRF (L) s to deliver a Multinational Joint Logistics Support Group (JLSG).

The Rear Support Command's (RSC) proposal is to use the existing NCS model but tailor it to the needs of a Joint Task Force deployed in a SJO. The Joint Logistic Support Group (JLSG) is an executive tactical level logistic formation responsible for the execution of operational logistic plans and

reporting to the operational HQ. As such it is the key organizational element of the agreed NATO conceptual approach to the direction and coordination of logistic support methods in order to provide for integrated theatre-level logistics. The JLSG approach is designed with rapidly deployable forces and flexible C2 structures in mind; each necessary to bolster the NATO Response Force (NRF). When directed, the JLSG can also provide the focus for the organization, training and command of an augmented JLSG HQ and assigned units. The JLSG HQ will be task organized to match the mission. The resultant functional logistic staff elements will be operation specific and tailored to meet the logistic framework of operations.

Mission statement

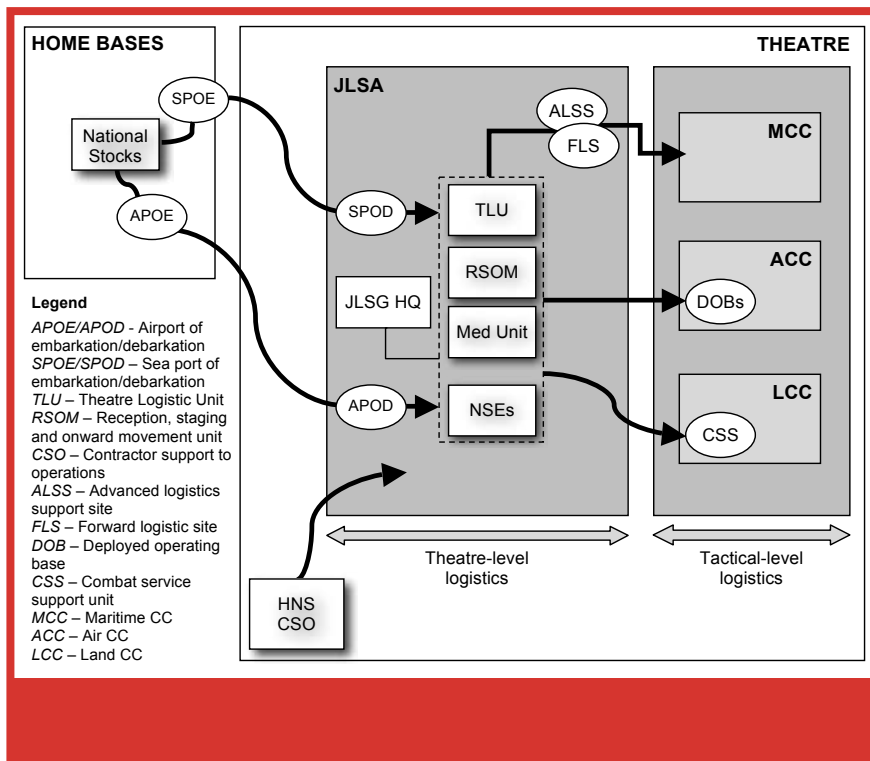
Multinational Joint Theatre Logistics (MJTL) addresses the requirements for, and the organization and functions of, logistic support across the spectrum of current and potential NATO operations. The NRF and the DJSE concepts are the basis for this approach. Both the NRF and DJSE

concepts recognize that there is no fixed template for C2, which may vary from operation to operation depending on type, scale, complexity and location. Each concept therefore has the flexibility to provide for a number of courses of action, against which an operation-specific arrangement will be made in the context of the mission. In this context the Mission statement for the JLSG HQ is the following:

"Be prepared to deploy as a stand alone HQ subordinate to COM JTF and capable of exercising C3 of theatre level logistics in order to conduct RSOM and deliver theatre level logistic support (third line log) to the deployed Joint Force in a Land Heavy Small Joint Operation (SJO)."

Area of Responsibility

The operational area size is approximately 150km x 200km. This implies 1-2 days for the delivery of supplies but it depends on the distance of APOD, SPOD and lines of communication and above all depends of the functions. In fact, the area of responsibility of JLSG is a functional and not only material area because it includes joint capability.



contributing as necessary, while the execution of the plans, coordination of activities will fall under JLSG HQ responsibility, providing the situational awareness to the RD as required. Furthermore, JLSG provide functional support and advice to the JTF HQ staff during the Operations Planning Process (OPP), execute theatre level logistic support in accordance with requirements agreed with nations (RSOM, fuel, common user supplies and services, etc), command and coordinate assigned national, Host Nation or commercial support resources, and establish the support and facilities required to provide effective and efficient RSOM for the force.

Supply and Service Functions

Nations are responsible for determination of stock levels of food, water, bulk fuel, some types of ammunition and medical supplies and JLSG establishes and operates the system to distribute the supplies. Furthermore COM JTF establishes priorities/principles and determines all the measures for restoring the existing assets. JLSG operates the theatre level multinational system and coordinates its utilisation. JLSG coordinates and deconflicts theatre level movement and transport operations to meet priorities established by COM JTF.

Differences between JLSG and RSC

In order to identify the differences between JLSG and RSC it is paramount have a logistic joint vision in deployment, re-deployment and sustainability activities. Presently, RSC, in order to accomplish the mission, has to carry out:

Functional Responsibilities

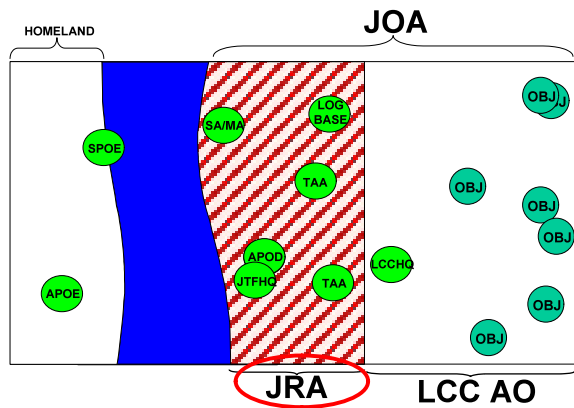
The JLSG is the tactical level logistic formation responsible for the execution of operational logistic plans and reporting to the JTF HQ. A division of functional responsibilities between the JLSG and the Resource Directo-

rate (RD) established at the JTF HQ will be developed, mission specific, reflecting the C2 relation of these two organisations and the complexity of the mission. Generally the planning, assessment and definition of the requirements will fall under the responsibility of the RD – with JLSG HQ



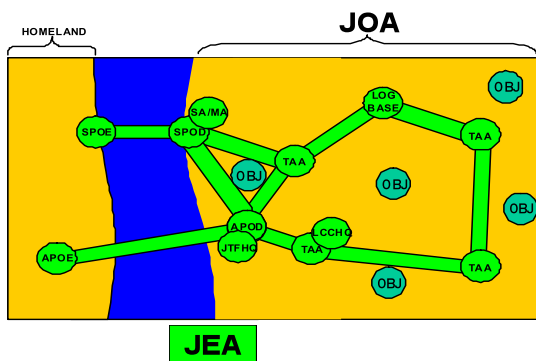
everywhere rapidly

JOINT REAR AREA



The JRA is normally a specific land area designated by the JF Commander within a Joint Operations Area (JOA) to facilitate the co-ordination of operations supporting the entire Joint Force

JOINT ENABLING AREA



The JEA is one or more specified areas containing mission critical support functions that enable operations. The JEA may include installations, activities and forces

[Differences between JEA and JRA]

JRA/JEA CONCEPT

JRA	JEA
LINEAR OPS	NON-LINEAR OPS
INSIDE JOA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INSIDE/OUTSIDE JOA (including homeland POEs) POCKET AREAS (connected by LOCS)
AREA CENTRIC	FUNCTION CENTRIC
SUPPORT FUNCTION CONCEPT	ENABLING FUNCTION CONCEPT





FROM THE STAFF

- RSOM of NRDC-ITA assigned forces;
- Coordinate the sustainment and resupply of these forces;
- Coordinate the redeployment;

And, furthermore, the COM RSC represents COM NRDC-ITA in the JRA.

Overarching roles and responsibilities of the JLSG HQ are described in MC 526 and in the SHAPE Planning Guidance and, as requested, it is Joint and responsible for the coordination and control of 3rd level Logistic Support to all NRF forces in theatre.

The main areas of effort/responsibility of the JLSG are:

- Capable of providing command, control and coordination of theatre-wide logistic support based on joint and multinational approaches;
- Reception, Staging, Onward Movement of NRF Forces into and out of theatre (RSOM);
- Exercise OPCON (over assigned forces) and LOGCON over NSEs;
- Operate the JLSA (Joint Logistics Support Area);
- Provide/Coordinate Joint/Multinational Theatre Logistics to gain efficiency, and increase effectiveness;
- Sustainment and distribution;
- Establish/maintain the Recognized Logistic Picture (RLP);
- Provide Role 3 Medical Support to the NRF;
- Theatre level Contracting (NAMSA);
- Real Estate management;
- Coordinate and provide Engineering Support;
- Liaise with DJTF (Deployable Joint Task Force) and Host Nation
- Coordination, and visibility of intra-theatre movement and Theatre Control Routes;
- Coordinate Host Nation Support;
- Coordinate theatre Recovery.

Conclusion

The next steps in order to achieving this goal are the following:

- To elaborate the appropriate manning and equipment within JLSG;
- To formulate the RSC/JLSG final manning study and possible roster with regards to structure and functions developed in close coordination with the other Divisions within NRDC-ITA;
- To produce the necessary training activities in order to be fully capable and effective to perform our mission.

Role of the Media in Military Conflicts

[by Major GBR (A) **Gareth Allen**]

Understanding who to trust, building human relationships and treating journalists as vampires were all topics for discussion in the NRDC-ITA sponsored seminar, 'The Role of the Media in Military Conflicts', which took place at Solbiate Olona on 4 October 2012.

The event saw a number of nationally and internationally prominent journalists participate in a frank and open discussion, parts of which were, if such a concept truly exists, definitely "off the record". What follows can be considered the unclassified highlights...

Media: A Powerful Mass Weapon

The Commander of NRDC-ITA, Lieutenant General Giorgio Battisti, intro-

duced the seminar by explaining that military personnel need to understand that the media and journalists are our conduit to reach out to audiences. And he further concentrated military minds with the advice that the media can now be considered the most powerful mass weapon.

The first speaker, Lao Petrilli (one of Italy's best known journalists and author of the book 'Nassiriya: The True Story'), developed this theme in his talk 'What a Reporter Wants' when he revealed that journalists are like vampires: "If you don't feed me, I will go after your neck." Revelling in his self-appointed role of horror, Lao also explained that journalists have the capacity to act as a lie-detection machine, and that any untruth on a soldier's behalf would

lead to a flashing red light in the mind of the journalist.

Apart from striking fear into the minds of the audience, Lao made a number of very useful points, not least that when someone lies to the media they lose credibility as both a person and an organisation. As at the forefront of most people's minds is the forthcoming operation in Afghanistan, this is a lesson worth learning in advance. Lao summed this up with the view that "a lie will be like a bomb on the chair of your organisation".

The talk highlighted that journalists have also fully embraced the world of new technology, and that even in Afghanistan they will have the benefit of numerous sources of information. What that means is a reality check from a military perspective: it is no longer possible to have command and control of the information environment.

Information vs Disinformation

Giampaolo Cadalanu (*La Repubblica*) spoke of the balance between information and disinformation, offering an insight into the challenge to the journalist when on operations and searching for the truth. He explained the difficulties he faced when reporting during the





Libya conflict in trying to confirm news when there are no independent witnesses and everyone has an emotional stake in the conflict's outcome. It was interesting to a military audience to hear the lengths a journalist will go to in order to verify the facts of a story (even visiting a morgue), and the daily pressures on them to balance the need for information with the search for truth. This discussion served to reassure NRDC-ITA staff that journalists, if not all then surely the majority, take their principles and standards extremely seriously. Giampaolo commented on the issue of maintaining Operational Security (OPSEC), often at the forefront of a soldier's mind when speaking to the press and wary of putting any colleagues' lives in danger. He said: "I don't want a father to come to me in the future, blaming me for the death of his son."

In other words, it was clear that journalists too are human, at least those who are not vampires.

Good Morning Afghanistan!

One of the highlights of the day was to hear sports journalist Fabio Caressa, from SkyTV relive his experiences when he was 'deployed' to Afghanistan to present the TV documentary 'Buongiorno Afghanistan (Good Morning Afghanistan)'. The idea behind his show from Afghanistan as a sports journalist, rather than a seasoned war correspondent, was to try to give the audience a different point of view from someone not experienced in war.

Fabio focused on the importance of building human relationships, and reminded military staff who might perhaps have forgotten that when a civilian is in a war/conflict environment they are almost inevitably scared. His recommendation was to be friendly, but not friends; to build a relationship somewhere in-between, founded on trust and professionalism. He also won-over the NRDC-ITA staff by saying that sometimes the media are scared to say they are proud of something, but that the media and the public should be proud of the work we, the military, are doing in Afghanistan.

Fabio also revealed the emotional reality of being deployed on operations, even in the role of press in a limited time scale, when he concluded that "Afghanistan has been perhaps the greatest experience of my life".

Microscope on the Media

As an alternative to the journalist's perspective, we also heard from Giuseppe Milazzo, a researcher and media analyst from the Osservatorio di Pavia. Giuseppe had a wealth of experience to pass on, not least in a role of EU observer and Press Officer. He offered a balanced view of the pros and cons of dealing with the media, including positives, such as promoting norms in human rights and focusing attention on a developing conflict, and also negatives, such as reinforcing or spreading fears (Rwanda; Yugoslavia), or joining-in an international spiral of silence (Darfur). It was encouraging to see that the suggested aims

and objectives in dealing with the media did relate to Nato policy in Public Affairs. The talk also added a dose of reality to military and media relations, when it highlighted that we should not expect perfection in dealing with the press. The seminar continued in the afternoon for the Support Brigade personnel with Gian Micalessin, Angelo Macchiavello and Daniela Stigliano, who in turn gave an Italian-specific overview of the role of media in military conflicts.

Media: Friend or Foe?

From the various speakers during the seminar it was clear that journalists are not so different from the military, in that they are driven, professional people who have their own values and standards that they live and sometimes die for. The key themes that emerged from the seminar were to trust the media, where appropriate, to understand their need for information and support them (within limits of operational security), and not to lose a media opportunity through fear. But also that to tell a lie would bring out the vampires. The spirit of the seminar could be best summarised by Fabio Caressa, who put the unity between the military and the media into context by saying: "In a place like Afghanistan, your life values become clear. Life, family, children; all come into perspective. If you can make people smile more then you are doing something right." This will be no bad objective for those deploying to ISAF in 2013.

[Photos provided by NRDC-ITA PAO]

Family Support Centre Activities

[by Warrant Officer Class One ITA (A) **Antonio Spinelli**]

the Family Support Centre (FSC) is deeply involved in planning the Family Support activities for the deployment of the NRDC-ITA members to the mission in Afghanistan. Since the planning began, we have been involved in discussions with the Senior National Representatives (SNRs). The debate issues have been related to: everyday life, integration with the local communities, public transportations, the schooling system, security and surveillance from the local police forces and more. In order to have a clear picture of the needs of deployed personnel, seen from the family support point of view, the office will produce a brochure where there will be inserted useful tools for the NRDC-ITA members. It will contain information such as: The FSC organization and mission, points of contact, addresses and telephone numbers within Varese and Milan plus a wide range of information about life in the HQ. All chapters are reader-friendly and could be considered a really helpful tool to facilitate families' daily life.

A safety card has been also edited by the FSC. It is a small card (like a business card) to be used in case of emergency. It has printed on both sides, one in Italian and one in English, the following text: "Good morning, my name is _____ and I am

a _____ Citizen. I work in Italy for the NATO HQ in Solbiate Olona and I do not speak Italian. In case of need, please contact the following numbers", listing the telephone numbers of the Support Brigade Carabinieri (Military Police) Section and the numbers of the Family Support Centre. The FSC also organized a "Computer course for beginners" with the aim of helping families to keep in touch with their deployed loved ones and an "Italian course for foreign NRDC-ITA members", in collaboration with the Solbiate Olona Municipality.

Here are some examples of support to the families:

Linguistic assistance: provided for all international NRDC-ITA personnel and their dependents to face everyday problems;

Car pass renewal: assistance in filling in the forms;

Personal ID renewal: assistance in filling in the forms;

Tax free procedures: assistance for the families in order to provide them with a better understanding of the buying procedures and supporting them in their implementation;

Insurance problems: assistance in contacting insurance companies in order to stipulate or modify contracts or define other bureaucratic details;

Information technology: assistance for problems related to new software installation, software crash, internet connection, software management, LAN/WAN management, hardware problems and, when necessary, "on-site" assistance;



NIWIC The NRDC-ITA Womens' International Club (NIWIC) meets once or twice a month. The aim of our informal group is to promote international friendships. With the impending deployment, NIWIC would like to ensure that as many of the NRDC-ITA wives know each other, thereby establishing an unofficial support network and means of supplying information and advice. We have been granted generous support from the Italian Families Support Centre and Morale & Welfare Fund to help families, in particular, from January to June 2013. All spouses are welcome to join NIWIC, it is not just an officers' club. It is free to join and **you do not need to speak English or Italian**. Moreover, many of the foreign wives would really like to learn more about their host country (Italian language, culture, food, wine, arts etc) plus the cultures of other participating nations.

This is achieved by informal Italian conversation mornings, coffee mornings, pot-luck lunches... The NIWIC also intends to organise a series of trips to interesting places in the local area, run various workshops, and host parties and get-togethers. We have a good relationship with the Corsi di Lingue in Gallarate and have funding for free Italian lessons (every Tuesday 1000 – 1200 hrs) for NIWIC members. If any readers would like further information on what NIWIC can provide, please contact your Senior National Representative or email niwic2012@gmail.com. All our events will be posted on our new website www.niwic.wordpress.com. If you want to receive news and updates of what NIWIC has planned, please forward your name and email to the email address provided above. NIWIC is fantastic way to get to know people, make new friends and enrich your time here in the Milan area. You will never know unless you give it a go!



Telephone and electric companies: assistance in different situations: when stipulating or modifying contracts, during landline installation, or other bureaucratic details;

Mason - plumber - electrician: assistance in finding appropriate contractors within the area in order to fix house problems;

Car repair shop and mechanic: assistance in finding contractors within the area in order to fix car problems;

Medical issues: assistance in finding physicians within the Varese area and suburbs in support of family requests for routine medical examinations;

Communication between families and deployed personnel: assistance in contacting personnel deployed with their families for urgent matters and vice versa (if required by the personnel deployed in Afghanistan).

The FSC will organize meetings, at least twice a month, and some events even to just share information.

The mission of the FSC is definitely to give the feeling: "You will never walk alone".



NRDC Divers Help Clean-up Lake Maggiore

[by OR9 ITA (A) **Olindo Gentile**]

A team of divers from NRDC-ITA made an important contribution to the community environment in June when they helped to clean-up parts of Lake Maggiore.

The event, organised by NOISEA Airports Milan in collaboration with the PRO LOCO in Arona, had the aim of cleaning the lake from waste accumulated on the bed.

The area cleaned was around 200m in length and up to a maximum depth of 10m. The refuse gathered was diverse: from plastic cups to a park bench. In the end, some 400 Kg of rubbish was removed from the lake. One of the team of eight divers, OR9 Olindo Gentile, said: "This was the first time that the NRDC-ITA diving club took part in the lake clean. It was a really exiting experience.

"We were delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to the safeguard of the natural environment. We hope to continue in this way and to take part in this event on an annual basis and continue to play an active role in the community."

Thanksgiving on Operations

[by Lieutenant Colonel US (A) **Jason G. Gardner**]

Background

Thanksgiving, celebrated in the United States on the fourth Thursday of November, is a holiday older than the country itself. The first Thanksgiving occurred as a result of the settlers of Plymouth and their Native American brethren celebrating together to give thanks for a successful harvest as a result of the knowledge and sharing of that information from their Native American friends. Over the years this holiday has grown to symbolize the setting aside of differences between family, friends, and others to give thanks for what they have and hope for peace and success in the future. Several other places around the world observe similar celebrations.

Thanksgiving in the Military

Thanksgiving, as with most holidays in the United States and other nations, takes on another meaning for the Armed Forces during times of conflict and instability in the world. For the past and the unforeseen future, this era of conflict often means separation from one's loved ones while protecting the ideals of freedom and security of the very nations we represent. While families come together to celebrate, the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Coast Guard, and Marines of a multitude of countries are deployed to forward outposts to accomplish important objectives with the hope that next Thanksgiving they will be with their families safe and sound. Instead of warm homes and heaps of food around the family table, servicemen and women are brought together with their teammates in dining facilities and on combat outposts around the world to give thanks for what they have and for the promise of what lies ahead tomorrow.

A Personal Reflection

My first Thanksgiving away from home, while serving my country, was spent in the Kuwaiti desert in the late 1990's eating a warmed up meal of turkey and ham with all the "fixins" with my platoon served off the back of a HMMWV. What we lacked in family, we brought together with friendship and stories of past Thanksgivings and what we hoped next year would be like. Holidays have a way of bringing teammates closer together and often these people become as close to one another as one's own family.

The explosion of technology in the recent past has given vanguards of liberty the ability to connect in an instant with loved ones often thousands of miles away. Gone in most instances is the arrival of a solitary postcard, letter, or care package to say thanks and that the family misses you back home. Instead, today, Wi-Fi and the internet allow family members to exchange emails and video chats to speak face-to-face. While nothing can replace having loved ones all together around the family table, technology has brought the means to be closer to the ones you love.

A Time to Remember

As Thanksgiving approaches, we should remember those we have lost and give thanks for family and friends. We must never forget the servicemen and women who stand vigil defending the freedom that we hold dear, the ideals that make our allied countries worth fighting for, and that the call could come one day when we will have the honour to stand side-by-side doing the same.





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