



BY CMDR. ERICK A. PETERSON
United States Navy
SOCC Chief of Staff



United States takes lead for NATO Response Force Special Operations Component Command 2016



Commandos fast-rope from a CV-22 Osprey during TRJE15. Photo by 1st Lieutenant Chris Sullivan, U.S. Air Force.

HIGH DEMAND, LOW DENSITY — that is the catch phrase for NATO's Special Operations Forces, commonly known as SOF. In the past decade there has been an extremely high demand for NATO's relatively small Special Operations Forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, throughout Africa and at home within Europe. Therefore, it was understandably difficult for anyone within the Alliance to take the lead on 2016's NATO Response Force (NRF) Special Operations Component Command (SOCC). With short notice, and with numerous other missions ongoing, the United States Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR) accepted, on behalf of the United States, responsibility to be the component command for the upcoming NRF.

Based out of Stuttgart, Germany, SOCEUR transitioned roughly 80 personnel to be the SOCC framework, with 60 Allies and Partner Nation personnel from 15 Nations, contributing to create a very experienced headquarters staff. This capable and exceptionally talented staff was able to successfully execute the large scale computer-based TRIDENT JUNCTURE 15 (TRJE15) Command Post Exercise led by





TRIDENT JUNCTURE 15. Photos by NATO.



NATO's Joint Warfare Centre in Norway and obtain NATO certification as a Component Command. This same staff then seamlessly transitioned into the even larger scale Live Exercise (LIVEX), commanding and controlling 1,000 SOF in Spain and Portugal. The Special Operations Task Groups (SOTG) included forces from the United States, Portugal, Spain, Finland, Poland, The Netherlands, Belgium, Czech Republic, Canada and Slovakia.

For other fighting forces pulling together such a diverse force may have proved a tremendous challenge. For NATO SOF, however, this was a familiar assemblage. Such a massive gathering of varied nationalities is only possible with the familiarity that has been built over long standing professional relations and normal training engagement.

In the words of the SOCC's Commanding General, U.S. Air Force Major General Gregory Lengyel, "This was business as usual for SOF. Our long history of partnership allows

us to quickly pull together an unparalleled team of professionals."

Taking their lead from Joint Force Command Brunssum's Commanding General, General Hans-Lothar Domröse, the SOCC has made cross-component communication, liaison officer sharing, and force interoperability a priority and major training objective during exercise TRJE15.

The way ahead—looking to a secure Europe in 2016

Currently, Poland's Special Operations Forces Command (POLSOF) has the SOCC responsibility for 2015. With the turn of the New Year, the U.S. SOCC will accept stand-by responsibility from the POLSOF to be the NRF SOCC for 2016. In this capacity, the SOCC will remain based out of Stuttgart, Germany, and will have command-and-control over two Special Operations Maritime Task Groups,

five Special Operations Land Task Groups, and one Special Operations Air Component, positioned throughout Western, Northern, Eastern and Southern Europe. This diversity of forces and diversity of locations ensures any emerging crisis will be met quickly and effectively by NATO's quick response SOF. Apart from the habitual military exercises, the forces under the SOCC will also participate in the two NATO Very High Readiness Task Force (VJTF) exercises planned in April and May/June. These exercises will test the VJTF's, and SOCC's, ability to quickly alert and prepare their forces (BRILLIANT JUMP Part I) as well as quickly and effectively deploy their forces to a crisis location and begin conducting missions (BRILLIANT JUMP Part II).

In summary, with the highly successful completion of TRJE15, the 2016 NRF SOCC stands ready, and proven capable, to confront any new, or old, threats that emerge within or without Europe. ✦