

OTX 2012 France - Joint Warfare Centre

Written by Inci Kucukaksoy, JWC PAO
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The French contingent in Stavanger, Norway, organized this year's Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) staff ride to France, which took place from 10 to 12 September 2012 with the participation of 72 personnel, including French Army Major General Jean-Fred Berger, Commander JWC, U.S. Air Force Brigadier General John W. Doucette, JWC Deputy Commander/Chief of Staff and Norwegian Army Brigadier Gunnar E. Gustavsen, Special Advisor to the Commander.

Dubbed as *OTX 2012*, the staff ride aimed to provide participants with important cultural and military information and knowledge about France and its armed forces following the country's return to NATO's integrated military structure in 2009. The focus was primarily on French operational/tactical levels of command and NATO's most recent operation: Operation Unified Protector (OUP) in Libya. A shared experience away from the work environment, the *OTX 2012* also served to further enhance teambuilding at the JWC by bringing participants together in a memorable event and encouraging active participation in discussions.

The *OTX 2012* programme started with a rewarding cultural tour showcasing Paris. On 11 September, the first briefing took place at École Militaire, which hosts the Joint Defence College (Collège interarmées de défense) and the Institute of High Studies of National Defence ([Institut des hautes études de défense nationale](#)). The distinguished briefer was French Army General Thierry Durand, who gave a presentation diving deep into the organization and functions of the French Armed Forces. Other briefers also provided valuable insights into the Organization of the Change of Education and Training for Senior Officers, including École de Guerre (Direction de l'Enseignement Militaire Supérieur, DEMS) and the DEMS unit in charge of MEL/MIL and CAX for exercises (Centre de Simulation pour la Formation, l'Entraînement et l'Expérimentation, CSFEE). At the end of his briefing, General Durand answered questions from the OTX participants. The participants subsequently had the privilege to visit Les Invalides, which houses the burial site for some of France's war heroes, notably Napoleon Bonaparte, and Musée de l'Armée, the military museum of the Army of France. At the end of the productive day the participants flew on to the South of France city of Toulon.



On 12 September, the group visited the military port of Toulon (arsenal de Toulon), one of the two major bases for the French Navy, where they received a briefing by French Vice Admiral Philippe Coindreau, Commander of the French Maritime High Readiness Force or, COMFRMARFOR, on the OUP operational environment and the lessons learned. After a short instruction by Vice Admiral Xavier Magne, the French Fleet (ALFAN) Commander, participants then engaged in an interesting question and answer session and a discussion period. The programme continued with a splendid tour aboard the French Navy's BPC Mistral, the amphibious assault ship, also known as a helicopter carrier, which deployed to Libyan waters in 2011 to support NATO's OUP. The Mistral can transport and deploy 16 NH90 or Tiger helicopters, four landing barges and up to 70 vehicles, including a 40-strong Leclerc tank battalion and 450 soldiers. Captain François-Xavier Poldermann welcomed every visitor as they

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arrived, and the crew was excited to show off their impressive ship.

Following a bus trip to Puyloubier, which since 1953 is home to the French Foreign Legion's wounded and disabled members, the group received a briefing by French Army General Christophe de Saint Chamat on the Legion's history, as well as an extensive overview of the very demanding security duties the Legion performs overseas. After the briefings, there was an enlightening display of equipment, including the French Army's light aviation Tiger helicopter used in missions in Afghanistan, as well as in joint missions together with the British Apaches in Libya. The OTX 2012 participants also had the opportunity to meet face-to-face a group of Legionnaires from all files and ranks.

Participant's Thoughts about OTX 2012 France



"I am thrilled with this year's staff ride," said Dutch Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Hans Breemans, JWC Section Head for Doctrine. "It will be a challenge for the next year's OTX organizers to surpass the smooth execution of this year's very detailed itinerary. I hope the annual tradition of OTXs will continue for years to come at JWC. I enjoyed all legs of the visits, but for me the highlight was seeing Paris, once again, after 50 years."

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Ms. Aysegul Demirelli, Fiscal Assistant, agreed and added: “Following the success of the last year’s OTX to the Norwegian High North, we wanted to take part in this year’s OTX as well. Each OTX gives us the opportunity to deepen our understanding of key security issues. For me, particularly, coming aboard the Mistral was very interesting. You may expect to see a military ship embodying the latest technology in terms of command and control systems, but seeing them closely is always impressive. The visit to the ship’s helicopter hangar and 69-bed hospital made me feel the vitality of the mission. I also remember the motivational quote on the wall: Eat Well, Be Happy and Work Hard! I guess you can take this with you wherever you go.”



U.S. Navy Commander and JCID Staff Officer Daniel Gage said: “As a navy officer, of course, I thought the most interesting event was the tour of the French ship Mistral. The briefing we received from the Ops Officer on how the execution of the OUP was directed and coordinated from the ship was fascinating. The entire trip was superbly executed but I’d have to say that was the highlight for me.”

Ms Tone Arnesen of the Deputy Commander’s Office commented: “Both Paris and Toulon are wonderful cities: the first with so many great historic landmarks, the latter with breathtaking mountains and vineyards. I especially enjoyed the wide range of topics briefed and discussed during the OTX, ranging from an overview of the French military to the Libya operation. The tour of the Mistral was very exciting.”

“This OTX was my first, and it gave me great insight into several aspects of the French Armed Forces,” Mr. Tommy Hansen Reiestad, NCIA Chief Event and Configuration Manager, noted. He went on to say: “What impressed me, in particular, was the meeting with the Legionnaires. To be able to hear them introduce themselves, their background and motivation for serving with

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the Foreign Legion was a quite powerful experience. Later on, being given the opportunity to meet them face-to-face and offered a peep into their life and work was something I never thought I would experience. Also to get to see the Legionnaires caring deeply for their veterans made a strong impression.”



Lead planner for the *OTX 2012*, French Navy CDR Stéphane Cheze thanked all those who participated in the event and said: “This event is a success because of the dedication of all participating staff. They listened attentively to the briefings, engaged well with the sailors and Legionnaires, and therefore have built an updated situational awareness of the NATO Force Structure in connection with real-life recent operations. On the other hand, all of us were ambassadors of the JWC, and we have shown the best sides of our capabilities and commitment to NATO. I envision exchange of observers between the JWC and the CSFEE as a potential output of this staff ride.”