



NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

**SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER
TRANSFORMATION**

SACT REMARKS to

ALL HANDS

DSACT Change of Responsibility

NORFOLK, 24 March 2016

12h04

As delivered

Général d'armée aérienne Denis Mercier



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Mayor Fraim,

Ambassador,

Generals, Admirals,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cannot list all noted guests present today.

I am pleased however to acknowledge Mayor Fraim who has done so much for ACT and families.

“Monsieur le Maire”, I want to thank you for your personal involvement in supporting our headquarters.

It is also our privilege to welcome

- LGEN John E. Wissler, Commander of the Marine Corps Forces,
- VADM Joseph E. Tofalu, Deputy Commander of the US Fleet Forces,
- RADM Brad Williamson, Commandant Joint Forces Staff College,
- MGEN Luca Goretti, Defence Attaché representing the Italian Embassy
- and BGEN Dirk Backen, Defence Attaché representing the German Embassy

Thank you for your presence and your support in organizing this event.



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In a moment, I will ask you to honour the memories of those who died or were affected by the recent terrorist attacks in Turkey and Belgium, with a minute of silence.

In standing here together, we express our solidarity with these Nations as well as all our forces committed to fight against extremism, terrorism and in defence of our core values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. Please...

[1 minute of silence –] – Thank you

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These events more than ever should reinforce our willingness to adapt the Alliance itself to cope with a rapidly evolving and more unstable security environment.

In pursuit of this aim, I know the personal involvement of many members in ACT's staff. Therefore, I would like to resume our ceremony by recognizing four of them.

Please join me in a round of applause to congratulate them.

These medals recognize exceptional individual services to NATO and its Transformation but is also, from my point of view, the result of the great team effort of this Command.



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I want you to continue this spirit of professionalism and friendship.

It is the best way to prepare the future of our forces while generating change and innovation in our Alliance.

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Today, considering our ACT team, it is also with mixed feelings that we arrive at a major milestone for our command with the handover of the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander position between two most distinguished officers of Italy and Germany.

Indeed, it is with deep regret that we say farewell to a most valued member of our team, General Mirco Zuliani.

Mirco, through this solemn ceremony, we want to mark the departure of a great commander, an exceptional adviser who brought an impressive combination of serenity and tenacity to our command group.

I felt immensely privileged to have been able to “fly” with you at the head of this Command for the last 7 months.

You assisted me in setting out the vision we try to develop for ACT and our Alliance.

I appreciated your tact and your ability to pull back from the tyranny of multiple tasks, to focus on what is essential for our Transformation. You always provided the Team with wise advice.



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And the staff will capitalize on your many decisive achievements throughout the Command.

- **Above all, Partnerships.** In a very pragmatic fashion, you made a strong case for the benefits of developing NATO's Partnerships through a more mutually beneficial approach.

Your unrelenting engagement with Partner Nations and Organizations helped to shape the concept of Individual Tailored Roadmaps for Partners.

- **Turning now to collective training and exercises,**

You assisted General Paloméros in the rapid implementation of the Connected Forces Initiative, which brought significant improvements, in terms of quality and quantity, to NATO exercises.

Nations witnessed the scope of these major achievements for Exercise Trident Juncture 15 during which Italy offered exceptional Host Nation support for the event.

Mirco, I could speak at length about the contributions you made to our many commitments, but instead I would like to highlight the essentials: your deep sense of human relationships.

All the staff appreciated your trademark smile and keen sense of humour.



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You kept calm in all circumstances and showed exceptional human and moral qualities. You instantly created trust and confidence with everyone you were involved with.

This “team spirit” was obvious to anyone visiting your office. You had an exceptional team to support you and it was a real pleasure for any personnel in the staff to work with all and each of them. We wish them the best in their next positions.

Talking about team, I must also pause to recognize the exceptional woman who stands behind this great man.

I therefore extend our wholehearted thanks to your wife, Carla, who accompanied you during this rich and rewarding career.

Carla, I want to highlight your personal involvement and many contributions to the NATO community and especially to the SOPC.

And above all, as with Mirco, please keep your legendary smile and communicative cheerfulness.

*We wish you both all the best as you head back to your home town:
Treviso.*

The mountains close to the city will prove a pleasing contrast to the flat landscape of Tidewater and an enticing invitation for hikes.

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It is also for you, Mirco and Carla, a return to the glories of Italian food and wine, and in particular the Prosecco wine and Tiramisu desert made famous in Treviso.

Best wishes for you and your family for the future...and remember that you will forever be a part of the ACT family, and therefore welcome anytime in Virginia.

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In my introduction, I spoke of our mixed feelings today and this is because we are also very pleased to welcome your distinguished successor, Admiral Manfred Nielson and his wife Annette.

Manfred. Today's ceremony is the opportunity for me to introduce you to this demanding command.

It is not for detailing your background but tell you how fortunate we feel in seeing you joining our Command team.

We strive for capitalizing on both your operational and forward-looking experience. We are glad to have such a capable navigator to help our Command find the fair wind on our Transformational journey.

With you in the team, we will continue to confront ACT's challenges with enthusiasm, and we hope you will enjoy working with all of us in the furtherance of our goals.

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We hope our common work will also provide you individual satisfaction and cultural enrichment. Indeed, Henri Miller used to say that “*one’s destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things*”.

What is sure is that you will find yourself right at home here, with true friendship and a keen listening from the great people of the United States and especially the Hampton Roads area.

This does not happen by chance but thanks to the enduring commitment of many of our guests here today towards the ACT community. They really deserve our deep recognition for creating such a family spirit.

So, Manfred, on behalf of all ACT staff, and our guests present today, we wish you and your wife, Annette, a very, very warm welcome into this new family.