



NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

**SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER
TRANSFORMATION**

SACT's REMARKS during

**NORFOLK NATO FESTIVAL
FLAG RAISING CEREMONY**

NORFOLK, 22 April 2015

Général d'armée aérienne Denis MERCIER



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Your Excellency Ambassador Bozo Cerar,

Congressman Bobby Scott,

Mayor Paul Fraim,

Ambassador, Generals, Admirals,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my great pleasure to be here with you in the heart of this great city of Norfolk.

I would especially like to acknowledge:

- Ms Terri Dunn-Campbell, representing Congressman Scott Rigel, and the proud Gold Star Mother of US Marine, Lance Corporal Kielin T. Dunn,
- Admiral Philip Davidson, Commander, US Fleet Forces Command,
- Chief Michael Goldsmith, Norfolk's Chief of Police
- Mr Jaime Areizaga-Soto, Deputy Secretary of Veteran's Affairs and Homeland Security,
- As well as Ms Yvonne Almond, who chairs the Norfolk NATO Festival Board

for their presence and their support in organizing this ceremony.



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This flag raising event, enhanced by the presence of the Finest of the Fleet - the Fleet Forces Band - is a perfect symbol of the essence of our Atlantic Alliance:

a unique community built around the shared core values of unity, trust, confidence in the future and friendship.

- **Unity** because it creates strength.

It remains the best way to respond to the many and complex security challenges that we face today and may face tomorrow.

Rogue states or terrorist organizations seeking to challenge our international order will always find an Alliance ready to respond promptly and efficiently.

Because, we are and will remain “one NATO”.

- Such unity can only exist if there is **trust** between our Nations.

Trust is a deeply-held military value with special meaning in the armed services.

Trust is what enables a soldier, sailor, marine or aviator to transcend the self and contribute to the collective defence of our Alliance and its Members.



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We want therefore to salute all the service men and women of our different Nations currently deployed in harm's way to protect together our population and territories.

We wish them all successful missions.

- Thanks to these remarkable people, we **look confidently to the future** with renewed commitment and ambition.

Our world is evolving rapidly and we must be assertive in our ability to adapt at the right pace.

This adaptation finds its roots here in Norfolk, in Allied Command Transformation.

I want to pay tribute to the Allied and Partner Nations that send us the dedicated men and women serving in this Command.

They work every day to turn our vision into reality and thus allow our Alliance and all the Member Nations to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

We can achieve this because we work as a team, but also because of the outstanding support we receive from the people of the Hampton Roads area.

- In Norfolk, considerable efforts are made to foster deep and enduring **friendships** between all our communities.

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We feel at home here and enjoy the hospitality extended to us by this great city and the state of Virginia.

We deeply appreciate all the initiatives taken to give greater visibility to our international community – even if we are a tiny entity when compared to the scale of the biggest naval station in the world.

I must therefore thank Yvonne Allmond for coordinating and organizing the NATO Model Challenge, “*Industry engages NATO*”, the Parade of Nations, this week’s events...and so many others which allow our ACT families and the people of the Hampton Roads community to come together and enjoy unforgettable moments.

Tonight, we will be attending what has become the world-famous Virginia International Tattoo.

As many of you may know, the word tattoo originates from the Dutch for ‘turn the tap off’ and the habit of sending drummers into towns to ensure soldiers returned to barracks.

From these humble beginnings, tattoos became a way for military forces to celebrate and entertain the towns in which they were garrisoned.



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Ceremonies were held with fluttering banners, pipes and drums and myriad uniforms, in a way very similar to what we have for you today.

So tonight, through our celebrations

- it is our turn to thank our yearlong hosts,
- our turn to honour fallen heroes,
- and our turn to draw inspiration from this kaleidoscope of flags.

These flags floating together around this plaza symbolize the mightiest military Alliance in the history of the world, based upon a strong and enduring transatlantic bond.

In closing, allow me to say a few words about a few American citizens who came to embody the Transatlantic Bond and personified the values of unity, trust, confidence in the future and friendship.

Just this week, a moving ceremony took part near Paris in which French and US authorities honoured the brave American pilots of the Lafayette squadron.

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These men, the first American fighter pilots, took part in the battles of World War One, winning many victories over France before the United States had even entered the war.

Their quest to build a safer and more peaceful Euro-Atlantic area, later gave birth to the reality of an Atlantic Alliance in 1949.

Our ceremony is therefore a reflection of our pride in this long heritage and of our firm desire to pass it on to future generations.

Thank you all for your commitment to this exceptional Alliance.