



NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

**SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER
TRANSFORMATION**

SACT's opening remarks at the NATO Festival Flag Raising Ceremony

Norfolk, 26 April 2018

As delivered

Général d'armée aérienne Denis MERCIER

Secretary Hopkins,

Mayor Alexander,

Admiral Davidson, Admiral Nielson,

Generals, Admirals,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and an immense pleasure for me to welcome you to our NATO festival flag-raising ceremony in the heart of this beautiful city of Norfolk.

Last year, we celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the United States entering World War One in 1917 and the unique role Norfolk played in the transport and the protection of the troop convoys across the Atlantic. This led to the development of the Norfolk Naval Base which also celebrated its centennial in 2017.

During the Second World War, the “Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation” was reactivated. Most of the convoys that left Norfolk headed towards the North African and Mediterranean theatres of operations, and once again, the Norfolk Naval Base played a central role in securing the lines of communication across the Atlantic.

When the North Atlantic Treaty Organization established Supreme Allied Command Atlantic in 1953, it had a similar mission: to defend and safeguard the passage across the Atlantic Ocean, and to secure the transatlantic lines of communications. Making the Norfolk Naval base its home made perfect sense.

Following changes in our security environment, the Atlantic Command became Allied Command Transformation in 2003, with a different purpose.

But the need to secure the sea lines of communications remains and a new command, with the United States assuming the role of framework nation, will soon be entrusted with this important mission.

This is yet another sign that NATO strives to keep up with the evolutions of our security environment.

As part of that adaptation, Allied Command Transformation is growing to focus on warfare development. Today, warfare can mean anything from crisis response to high intensity operations, from projecting stability to preparing for war. It also involves building resilience, strengthening partnerships, developing government-wide approaches as well as preparing for worst case scenarios or fostering innovation, to name just a few of the functions required to cope with the constantly evolving strategic environment. At Allied Command Transformation, we ensure that NATO has the military posture it needs today and in the foreseeable future.

To accomplish this mission, we will continue to enhance our partnership with the Hampton Roads community. Last year's joint effort, the Interdependency in Resilience Conference, brought together leaders from around the world to improve the understanding of resilience among civilian and military decision-makers. Last December, Norfolk hosted 470 leaders from 52 Allied and Partner nations to tackle future international security issues during the Chiefs of Transformation Conference. We will continue to plan many other international events here in Norfolk.

This year's festival comes at a very symbolic time for NATO's home in North America, Norfolk.

We celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of Allied Command Transformation, and with Montenegro's accession to NATO in June last year as the twenty-ninth member state, its national flag joins those of the other Allies for the first time today. These twenty-nine flags symbolise our commitment to standing together in defence of the Alliance's values and the almost one billion people it represents.

As NATO approaches its 70th anniversary next year, Allied Command Transformation remains the only NATO Headquarters on American soil, and a strong symbol of the Transatlantic bond.

Today, the NATO service members and their families working at Allied Command Transformation represent thirty five allied and partner nations and all of us call Norfolk home.

With its vibrant arts and culture community, distinguished universities and educational programmes, numerous recreational and shopping opportunities as well as nearby beaches, and the warm hospitality of its population, it is easy to see why Norfolk won over the hearts and minds of the entire NATO community.

The Norfolk NATO Festival and Parade of Nations is one of the most anticipated annual events hosted by the City of Norfolk, but it also gives the NATO family a chance to give back and share our culture and appreciation with the local community.

We just witnessed the fly-over of a formation of two French Navy Rafales, two US Navy F-18s, and a US Navy and French Navy Hawkeye, taking part in a training exchange programme at Naval Air Station Oceana and on board the USS George Bush aircraft carrier.

And both the Norwegian Navy Frigate Roald Amundsen and the German Navy frigate Hessen spent several weeks in a joint pre-deployment exercise here at the Norfolk Naval base. The German frigate then joined the US Navy Carrier Strike Group Eight for an operational deployment mission.

These multinational engagements illustrate the cooperation and interoperability that are made possible through NATO training and procedures, allowing us to operate together and deploy to different theatres of operations.

We should also remember the brave men and women deployed in harm's way in NATO or national missions and operations, and I invite you to direct your thoughts and prayers to them.

Finally I want to express my sincere gratitude to the Mayor of Norfolk, along with all the local civilian and military authorities, organizations and individuals from the Hampton Roads region and the State of Virginia, who contribute daily to this thriving relationship.

In a couple of moments, the Italian Band “Bersaglieri” will play a tribute song “Flying under the Norfolk sun”, to reinvigorate the fly-over we witnessed earlier, but also and foremost to resonate our immense pride to be part of this community of Norfolk, NATO’s home in America.

Thank you for your commitment to this year’s NATO festival, and thank you for your commitment to the values of the Alliance and to our bond that links both sides of the Atlantic.