

INTERVIEW

By Inci Kucukaksoy and
Sonia Bjerke Abdelmaguid

Commodore Hans Christian Helseth Royal Norwegian Navy Special Advisor to Commander JWC



Sir, thank you for giving us the time for this interview. Before being assigned to JWC in September 2015 as the Special Advisor to the Commander, you had various key assignments with the Navy, on the ground in the Balkans and Afghanistan and with the International Military Staff at NATO HQ; what was the most important thing that these assignments taught you?

— This is both an easy and a difficult question for me. The experience I gained from having spent fifteen or so years at sea, in submarines and on frigates has shaped me. I have mainly been in operational command-and-control positions, so maybe "joint warfare" can sum it up. You see, the Norwegian Navy gave us command responsibilities at a relatively young age, and in a lifestyle where the only certainty is change, I would say you learn to bloom where you are planted.

How do you feel about your assignment to JWC so far? And to expand on this point, what are your priorities?

— Some of my dear colleagues from earlier assignments, who were very familiar with the work of the Joint Warfare Centre, immediately told me upon my nomination that this was indeed the perfect post for me. And I must say that the more I get to know the Centre, the more I tend to think that they were right. I know that my experience from NATO HQ and other NATO assignments as well as my operational background in general are appreciated here, for which I am grateful. As for priorities, in my position as Special Advisor, I reside outside the Chain of Command and thus I am

not in a position to introduce any changes as such. My task is to support the Commander and other levels of the organization, where my expertise is needed.

You joined JWC just before the execution phase of TRJE15. What are your observations from this exercise?

— I would say that the foremost observation was the enormous effort that the team had put into preparing and conducting the Command Post Exercise (CPX). It got me off to a flying start being able to observe a JWC-designed exercise of this scale, and I also got to see with my own eyes the professionalism and flexibility of JWC as a whole and of the TRJE15 team in particular. Exercise Control (EXCON) was manned by 800 experts, including the Higher Control (HICON), Response Cells (RCs), the Computer Assisted Exercise (CAX) and the Opposing Force (OPFOR). Some of the things that made an impression on me were the 2,800 Main Events List/ Main Incidents List (MEL/ MIL) injects and the CAX and OPFOR capabilities, all of them unique to JWC. Similarly, the effort of the deployed White Cell, consisting of role players from real-world international and non-governmental organizations was also quite impressive. It is my understanding that TRJE15 had the largest ever Response Cells, which gave the exercise yet another layer of realism. Last but not least, JWC's Media Section also made a great effort in depicting the fictitious conflict. I could go on and on with: the industry members observing the exercise, the massive task of our professional Real Life Support team, the support of Spain as our host etc. Having seen a



Commodore Helseth in Zaragoza, Spain, during TRJE15. Photo by JWC PAO.

large number of exercises and operations, I can confidently say "well done, JWC".

In your view, what role do you feel that JWC plays for NATO and our Host Nation Norway?

— It did not take me many days to realize that JWC is the jewel in NATO's crown. I am impressed by the fact that JWC has trained close to 50,000 personnel from NATO and Partner Nations for operations, for the NRF stand-by and for other purposes. This simply could not have happened without the JWC. Our Host Nation has provided accommodation, maintenance, security, transport and much more, and I have been told that all the services are provided in a professional manner. Both SACT and Chairman of the NATO Military Committee have been very happy with the service they have received while here. And they were not referring to the beautiful nature, the fjords and the splendid view from our building, which of course come in addition and at no additional cost! For Norway, NATO's presence here is a symbol of the country's commitment to NATO, and vice versa.

And to conclude, why did you choose the Navy?

— Very easy to answer! I applied for admission for about ten different military colleges—including the Army and the Air Force—but the Naval Academy was the first to do their acceptance tests. So, you could say that the Navy chose me! And reflecting upon the camaraderie, the ethos, the friendships, the challenges, the rewards, I would have done it all over again. Thanks for the opportunity to pay my tribute to The Three Swords Magazine. ✦