



By Major Donald R. Meeks, Jr.

Through a series of coincidental meetings, several North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military police leaders decided to form what is known today as the Military Police Chiefs' Conference. The vision of the forming leaders was to create a conference where senior military police chiefs affect change, make decisions, and represent their regiments. The conference benefits allied forces and betters the military police community through efforts across the military operational spectrum. The end result is an annual meeting of military police leaders, hosted by a different nation each year. Since 2002, when the first few senior military police leaders met, the conference has grown to more than 40 military police chiefs and/or delegates representing more than 33 nations. More importantly, the longevity of the meeting serves to solidify the importance and legitimacy of the conference to NATO and Partnership for Peace nations and the entire military police community.

The fifth successful meeting of the chiefs was hosted in September 2007 by the Royal Canadian Forces Provost Marshal in Ottawa, Canada. With the theme of the conference titled "Military Police Support in a Transforming NATO," the identified topics of discussion included NATO transformation, the role of military police in coalitions, and the level of understanding in different cultures during operations. In essence, these topics—

- Outlined the status of the new NATO structure and how it affects military police.
- Addressed commanders' and operators' expectations of military police and the efficient use of capabilities.

- Approached cultural differences as a capability rather than an operational constraint.
- Updated members on the status of the military police panel's doctrinal work and the progress of the Military Police Officers' Planners Course.

This year, the conference hosted a variety of military leaders and guest speakers, which built upon the knowledge base of participants. Lieutenant General Michel Gauthier, commander of the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, was the keynote speaker. Responsible for all Canadian forces outside of Canada, Lieutenant General Gauthier was able to articulate the importance and role of military police in operations abroad. When questioned on

his feelings and expectations of military police, he coined the phrase “all of the above.” He expanded his answer by stating that “as a force commander, I want my MPs to serve as statesmen, police trainers, combat enablers, ambassadors of peace, etc.”¹ In essence, he reiterated what the participants already knew: Military police today are tasked to conduct a plethora of missions outside their normal scope of operations. However, most of the tasks are within their capabilities (both trained and equipped), but are just not commonly seen.

Conference attendees shared experiences, knowledge, and ideas that built upon the foundation of NATO’s commitment to defeating enemies of allied forces through cooperation, partnerships, and understanding. Naturally, the later focus fosters a clearer understanding of operational capabilities, cultures, and willingness to serve as coalition partners.

The final portion of the conference consisted of presentations by the chairmen. The outgoing and incoming chairmen spoke of Military Police Chiefs’ Conferences of the past and plans for the future, with key focus on the importance of maintaining the NATO military police family and supporting efforts across the entire spectrum of NATO (transformation and operational). The conference concluded with the

handover of chairman responsibilities from Oberst Heiner Erdmann, the German Army Provost Marshal, to Brigadier Colin Findlay, the United Kingdom Army Provost Marshal. In the wake of his chairmanship, Colonel Erdmann leaves the allied military police doctrine work and various other documentary updates, several successful panel conferences, and the NATO Military Police Officers’ Planners Course. As Brigadier Findlay will serve the NATO military police family as chairman for two years, he described his vision and will seek more resolution in NATO on detention operations and the framework of provost marshals within coalitions and operational headquarters. Closure comments from conference participants were successfully accomplished and all looked forward to meeting in the United Kingdom next year.

Endnote:

¹Lieutenant General Michel Gauthier, speech given at the 5th Annual NATO Military Police Chiefs’ Conference, 13 September 2007.

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