



NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

**SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER
TRANSFORMATION**

**SACT's remarks at the NATO Festival Flag Raising
Ceremony
Norfolk, 28 April 2017**

As delivered

Général d'armée aérienne Denis MERCIER



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Mayor Alexander,

Admiral Davidson, commander, US Fleet Forces Command,

Generals, Admirals, Air Marshal,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and an immense pleasure for me to welcome you to our flag-raising ceremony, on the occasion of the annual NATO festival, here, at the heart of this beautiful city of Norfolk.

Allow me first to pay tribute to the Patrouille de France, the French Air Force demonstration team, who honoured us with a flyover just minutes ago, and who will demonstrate its skills tomorrow above the Elizabeth River, closing a month-long tour of air shows and demonstrations all across American skies.

This year's NATO festival comes at a very symbolic time, because we also celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the United States officially entering World War One. It is symbolic, because this US commitment materialized for the first time since the American Revolution the existence of the Transatlantic bond – a bond based first and foremost on shared beliefs and values, but which also has a physical reality.

The construction of what became the Norfolk Naval Base began in 1917, a home port to secure the sea lines of communication across the Atlantic Ocean, and bring the US soldiers to the fight in Europe. Later, after the creation of the Alliance, the Allied Command Atlantic was established here, in 1953, with a comparable mission to defend and safeguard the passage across the Atlantic Ocean.

The evolutions of our security environment have led to its replacement by the Allied Command Transformation in 2003, with a different mission. But the necessity to secure the sea lines of communications did not disappear: the



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recent deployment of American and Canadian forces at our eastern borders in Europe leads NATO to reflect once again on the physical reality of the Transatlantic space.

As NATO approaches its 70th anniversary, it has proven to be a bedrock of security, both for Europe and for the United States. History has demonstrated time and again how important this Alliance is for the security and prosperity of our populations on both sides of the Atlantic.

In a world increasingly dangerous and unpredictable, having friends and allies is critical, as important today as it was a hundred years ago, when the first convoys transporting the American Expeditionary Forces left these shores.

But beyond these considerations, our common values are the foundations on which NATO has been built, as expressed in the preamble of the North Atlantic Treaty: a shared desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments, and a shared belief in the values of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law.

These principles constitute the symbolic “bridge” across the Atlantic Ocean, joining North America and Europe in a common destiny, and giving them a common purpose. Raising the flags of our 28 nations – soon to be 29 – illustrates our commitment to defend together the values upon which the Alliance is built. And I invite you to direct your thoughts and prayers to the brave men and women of our nations, deployed in harm’s way to defend them.

Our commitment today is also rooted in the history we commemorate. A hundred years ago, the US soldiers who joined their allies on the battlefields of Europe, and those before them that volunteered prior to that date, were serving a cause they deemed greater than themselves.

To illustrate this, let me borrow the words of an unsung hero of American history, a young North Carolinian named Kiffin Rockwell, who joined the



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French Foreign Legion in the summer of 1914, suffered severe wounds a year later, recovered, and then volunteered for flight training with the French Aviation. A member of the US-manned Escadrille Lafayette, he is the first American pilot in history to score a victory in aerial combat.

Shortly before his untimely death in action, in September 1916, he wrote in a letter to his parents: *“I do not feel that I fight for France alone, but for the cause of whole humanity, the greatest of all causes.”*

This sentence expresses the continuity of our engagement. In times of uncertainty, we must let our shared history and the sacrifice consented by our predecessors be an inspiration, and an example to follow.

For all these reasons, it is especially befitting to hold the NATO festival here, in our city of Norfolk, which has historically been a very gracious host to our staff members from all nations, and to their families. I express my sincere gratitude to the Mayor of Norfolk, and with him, to all the local civilian and military authorities, organizations and individuals from the Hampton Roads region, who contribute daily to this thriving relationship.

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