

## Families, staff celebrate U.S. Independence Day - ACT

Written by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Carla Burdt  
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Allied Command Transformation (ACT) staff members and their families celebrated the 234th Independence Day of the United States with a flag raising ceremony and picnic July 2.

This celebration is an event that allows NATO Nations and the Hampton Roads community the opportunity to celebrate this important day in United States history.

The U.S. National Liaison Representative, U.S. Navy Commander Ken Long, kicked off the flag raising ceremony by presenting interesting facts about the customs, traditions and history of the United States.

“We are by no means a perfect country but Americans pride themselves on cultural diversity, religious acceptance, economic prosperity and the preservation of our constitution,” said Long. “So this weekend, Americans will celebrate our independence with fireworks, parades, barbeques, carnivals, picnics, concerts, baseball games, political speeches and ceremonies to honour the history, the government and the traditions of the United States.”

Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, French Air Force General Stephane Abrial, presented a gift to the Guest of Honour, U.S. Marine Corps General James Mattis, Commander, U.S. Joint Forces Command.

“On this day, we hope America remembers she has always had many friends abroad waiting to help shoulder the burden of preserving our common values and security. In NATO, she has allies that on September 12, 2001, formally declared an attack on the United States was an attack on them all,” said Abrial. “Sunday, our host nation will be illuminated with displays of patriotism and civic pride. Let us share whole-heartedly in these celebrations from the universal values expressed in the declaration of independence are truly the same as those that founded the core of our Alliance of freedom-loving nations.”

Mattis spoke about the significance of the men and women who are part of the Alliance.

“Today we stand here as representatives of all of our Nations who have made a choice to shoulder the responsibility of defending freedom,” said Mattis. “General Eisenhower once said that the history of free men and women is never written by chance but by choice – their choice. After 60 years, NATO continues to stand as one of the most successful alliances in the history

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of man, a choice of each nation and an alliance prevails by choice of free men and women who choose to stand against injustice and tyranny.”

The United States Fleet Forces Band, the United States Marine Corps Colour Guard and the Allied Command Transformation Colour Detail passed in review around the Allied Command Transformation (ACT) flag plaza.

In addition to performing the U.S. National Anthem as the headquarters’ colour guard raised the flag, the U.S. Fleet Forces Band and the Fifes and Drums of Yorktown played several patriotic selections including “The Stars and Stripes Forever” and “The World Turned Upside Down.”

The band played the U.S. military service songs to honour the various branches of service of the Alliance Nations.

Following the flag raising, staff and family members enjoyed a picnic which featured food and drinks and activities for kids including bounce houses, a climbing wall, face painting and goodie bags.