

# *NATO Striking Fleet Atlantic*

## *Overview of Mission and Capabilities*

In addition to training U.S. forces and conducting operations in the Atlantic area of responsibility, COMSECONDFLT has a permanent assignment within NATO's Supreme Allied Command Atlantic chain of command as Commander, Striking Fleet Atlantic. As such, Striking Fleet Atlantic, when assigned, commands a multinational force whose primary mission is to deploy a combined, joint task force to deter aggression and protect NATO interests. COMSTRIKFLTLANT (CSFL) works routinely with units and commands from all NATO nations.

To ensure allied forces operate effectively under realistic conditions, NATO exercises are conducted by CSFL at least once annually, and every U.S. Joint Task Force exercise includes some Allied participation and even NATO procedures. These exercises sharpen war-fighting skills and allow combined, joint forces to improve their ability for rapid deployment and employment of maritime, air and land forces. The exercises are based on generic scenarios and demonstrate alliance solidarity and strength as well as commitment to member nations.

CSFL is a fully integrated NATO headquarters staff, which numbers over 275 personnel. Included in this number are 28 multi-national officers from 12 NATO nations. They hold positions at various levels of the chain of command.

The staff is embarked aboard the command ship USS MOUNT WHITNEY (LCC/JCC 20). One of the most capable C41 platforms afloat today, MOUNT WHITNEY is a communications rich, readily deployable, mobile and sustainable headquarters platform which provides the embarked Commander with the long reach to lead assigned forces. Capable of accommodating up to 1410 personnel, her comprehensive NATO and US C3 suite has been progressively upgraded to meet the requirements of joint and combined command at the operational level. Using NATO-specific systems and procedures is a routine matter at CSFL. During a recent NATO exercise, the Joint Operations Center was converted from 80 percent U.S. C2 systems to 75 percent NATO systems in only seven days.

MOUNT WHITNEY fulfills multiple national and NATO tasking and serves as NATO's Sea-based Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) Headquarters platform. First proposed in 1994, NATO's CJTF Concept requires that a CJTF Commander and associated staff be capable of leading a CJTF composed of up to an army corps, NATO Expanded Task Force (NETF), comparably sized air forces and other components and forces. Three NATO Commands, Regional Command North, Regional Command South, and Striking Fleet Atlantic are designated as Parent CJTF HQs, tasked to have a trained, pre-designated core staff around which the CJTF HQ can be activated using augmentees

drawn from an Alliance-wide pool. Only CSFL is designated as a Sea-based CJTF HQ, and USS MOUNT WHITNEY is identified as the HQ's prime command platform. Primarily designed for non-Article 5 Crisis Response Operations (CRO) outside Alliance territory (peace support, humanitarian relief, peacekeeping, peace enforcement, non-combatant evacuation), a key element of the concept is to develop a capability to integrate Partner and other non-NATO nations into Alliance-led crisis operations. A CJTF could also be an option for Article 5 operations.

Deployment of the MOUNT WHITNEY could be achieved in as little as 72 hours given the necessary political will. Embarkation of some critical augmentees would provide a comprehensive short-term command and planning capability during transit while the main staff augmentation could be embarked at virtually any available port en route to the crisis area. Her inherent mobility, readiness and ability to move easily from within sight of a shoreline to over the horizon make the MOUNT WHITNEY the ideal NATO, political, and CJTF Commander's headquarters of choice in a rapidly developing crisis situation.

On scene within days, and sustainable for months, the CJTF Commander is optimally poised to transfer ashore from the MOUNT WHITNEY upon provision of suitable host nation support and adequate force protection, if the situation is stable and the move politically desirable. The CSFL staff could, if required, also serve as a Maritime Component Commander, directing all associated maritime units in a contingency operation. In addition, both the Land Component Commander and a Joint Force Air Component Commander can be – and have been – embarked aboard MOUNT WHITNEY. A powerful and flexible Bi-Strategic Commander asset, MOUNT WHITNEY supports the needs of the Alliance and can be assigned to either SACLANT or SACEUR.

#### Berthing Capacity

- Flag/General Officer - 6
  - Permanent use - 2
  - Available - 4
- Officer Total - 439
  - Permanent Staff - 158
  - Ships Company - 36
  - Staff Augments - 245
- CPO Total - 90

- Enlisted Total - 1006

#### Ship's Data

- Commissioned - 16 Jan 1971
  - Size:
    - o Length: 636.5 feet (194 meters)
    - o Beam: 107.9 feet (32.9 meters)
    - o Draft: 28.9 feet (8.8 meters)
    - o Sustainability (to 75% fuel capacity)
      - 5 days at 23 knots (maximum speed available)
      - 8.5 days at 16 knots (normal transit speed)
- 30 days of food carried aboard

#### Helicopter Certifications

- Level I/Class 2A: Landing (day/night with minimal support facilities)
- Level I/Class 4: Vertical Replenishment (VERTREP) (day/night)
- Every helicopter in the NATO and US inventory (per HOSTAC) except H-53E, which can VERTREP only.
- No hangar, limited on board maintenance capability, and no HIFR.