

Victory Through AGILITY

The end of the Cold War meant that national defence had to become an infinitely flexible, endlessly adaptable and ultimately agile entity. General D. L. Berlijn – former Chief of the Netherlands Defence Staff – reflects on this change and its implications for the future.



Born in Amsterdam on 18 March 1950, General D.L. (Dick) Berlijn began his military career in 1969 and received his Pilot Wings in 1975. On 24th March 2000 he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Netherlands Air Force and on 24th June 2004 he took over as Chief of the Defence Staff and was promoted to General. He retired in 2008. General Berlijn's decorations include the Legion of Merit, the NATO Medal and the Multinational Peace Operations Commemorative Medal for operations in the former Yugoslavia.

As a highly decorated soldier, General Berlijn personally witnessed this transformation.

“Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, we had the situation where two armed Blocs kept each other balanced. If I look at my own experience, when I joined the Dutch armed forces at the height of the Cold War in 1969, we exercised every day for a scenario which thankfully never unfolded.

“By contrast, today we deploy at such a rapid rate on missions, ranging from direct military intervention to protecting humanitarian aid, that sometimes we do not even have the time to train any more. Even a small defence force like ours has been involved in at least 50 operations since the Cold War ended.”

Armed with information

Inevitably, information – and the technology which organises it – are key assets in this new kind of warfare, as General Berlijn explains: “Intelligence and information have always been important military tools. Even early strategic thinkers such as Sun Tzu or Von Clausewitz appreciated this fact. If you create a system where you can see in real time what a situation is or how it is developing - and on the basis of that insight can quickly come up with a response – then you can keep the initiative.”

Business Development Director at Fujitsu, Andy Head, has seen this trend taking hold across the defence sector:

“The most important trend in the defence industry that we have seen over the last ten years is the increasing importance our customers are giving to information, placing it at the very centre of their strategy. Building an operational picture from multiple sources provides battle-winning capability. In such an aggressive and demanding environment, you can't underestimate having the ‘right information, in the right place, at the right time.’”

So should this IT weapon remain firmly in national government hands - or is there a case for outsourcing in the search for maximum operational efficiency?

“In my view, it really isn't significant whether the information is held in-house or outsourced so long as you have the infrastructure to keep it available and secure. In the Dutch defence organisation, for example, we have our own centre of excellence. It does great work – but that doesn't mean that they would wish to do everything on their own. They would also want to make use of other centres too. Whether those centres are military, or NATO, or third party isn't necessarily the issue. Ensuring successful operations most certainly is,” says General Berlijn.

These are familiar and enduring priorities for defence, as Andy Head points out: “To deliver world class solutions, we need to be responsive and adapt systems and offerings to meet the changing needs of our armed forces. Converting new inventions, ideas and innovations into reality – at high speed with high security – is a key requirement.”

Powerful allies

It is a potent combination: agile IT facilitating a flexible military capability.

General Berlijn observes: “When we think about spending our money, we should think about the effect we want to create. Which means that a military planner today needs to see when we have too many tanks or bombers or frigates for our requirements and reinvest that budget in transport, command and control and information technology systems.”

And for General Berlijn, IT Services organisations with the proven capability of implementing systems from the business space to the battlespace can be invaluable allies in harnessing the full potential of all these assets. “I think it is very wise for the Ministry of Defence to make use of all the expertise available out there – whether that expertise is military or civilian is not the issue, as long as it meets our critical criteria.”

IT SERVICES IN THE BATTLESPACE

- Data gathering, analysis and reporting to drive operations
- Fixed and deployable IT infrastructures
- Secure sharing of real-time information between bases to build an accurate operational picture
- Secure messaging on and offshore, with an audit trail, proof of delivery, multi-level security clearances and secure networking
- Significant technologies include:
 - Defence Information Infrastructure – 300,000 users linked across a secure infrastructure
 - J CHAT – Instant Messaging technology with added security features
 - NavyStar – IT administration and email solution for the British Royal Navy
 - OpenJOP (Open Joint Operational Picture) – adapting Microsoft SharePoint technology to deliver Command and Control information in the field

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