

EGUERMIN sets mine-warfare training mark

The EGUERMIN naval mine-warfare school at Ostend is NATO's centre of excellence for mine-warfare training and tactical development. Director of the school Commander Edwin Vanden Haute reflected on recent achievements and future plans in conversation with Guy Toremans

This year has seen the Belgian-Netherlands Naval Mine Warfare School, EGUERMIN — the only school to be run jointly by two NATO allies — commemorate its 45th anniversary, 30 years of Belgian-Dutch co-operation and the award of the Bureau Veritas ISO 9001-2000 certification.

According to the director of EGUERMIN, Commander (senior grade) Edwin Vanden Haute (Belgian Navy), achieving ISO 9001 accreditation “is the result of our endeavours to lead the way in naval mine-warfare [NMW] education, training and the propagation of our expertise. Skilled and highly motivated instructors and employees are of fundamental importance. The instructors’ knowledge and expertise is constantly increased by means of participation in conferences, workshops and studies”.

EGUERMIN’s task, said Cdr Vanden Haute, is to “ensure that allied personnel are kept up to date in mine-warfare tactics and techniques and that advice on tactical implications of these developments is readily available to senior commanders. A staff of 16 officers and 15 non-commissioned officers trains operators, command teams of mine-countermeasures [MCM] vessels and the amphibious warfare community for possible mine-warfare confrontations, future MCM equipment, and how naval mine warfare can be controlled”.

The school also advises and assists national and NATO commands. It has international relationships with a number of naval training establishments in Europe and North America, including the Italian COMFORDRAG and the Maritime Component Commands in Northwood (UK) and Naples.

Furthermore, EGUERMIN leads or contributes to a number of initiatives designed to promote improvements in NMW tactics and techniques. “We designed a model to calculate the NCM requirements for the Channel area in connection with the Force Requirement Study; we formulated and instruct [on] the MCMEXTAC 1007 [a NATO NMW reference work]; and we organise various computer-aided exercises like ‘Bell Bottoms’, ‘Co-op Banish’ and ‘Co-op Telos,’” Cdr Vanden Haute pointed out, adding that the school also initiated the Ad Hoc Working Group on Planning and Evaluation Models, which led to the creation of MCM EXPERT [a NATO NMW handbook]. “Presently EGUERMIN is the custodian of all MCM EXPERT-related publications.”

Cdr Vanden Haute remarked that throughout the school’s existence there has been a steady increase in the number of participants.



Guy Toremans: 1123093

“Skilled and highly motivated instructors and employees are of fundamental importance”

“From an original split of 80 per cent Belgian/Netherlands to 20 per cent NATO navies attendance, the ratio is now 30 per cent Belgian, 30 per cent Dutch, 30 per cent NATO and 10 per cent non-NATO students.”

A facility unique to EGUERMIN is the Naval Mine Warfare Gaming System (NMWGS), a computer-assisted simulation of a tactical NMW countermeasure situation, used as a training tool for the NMWSO [NMW Staff Officer] course as well as for large biannual NATO exercises. Officers from Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Croatia, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Japan, Latvia, Malaysia, Morocco, New Zealand, Singapore, Sweden and Ukraine have participated in recent wargames. It also provides an evaluation tool for MCM tactics, procedures and plans.

Cdr Vanden Haute noted that the NMWGS is becoming an increasingly important training tool. “The demand for NMWGS training by bi-national, NATO and PfP [Partnership for Peace] Naval Mine Warfare command authorities increases every year. However, the current system, developed in 1996, has some disadvantages both in usage and in maintenance. So, in order to comply with the ever-changing tactics, techniques, doctrines and equipment, a complete rebuild of the NMWGS is planned. It is necessary to have an NMWGS that can be easily extended in response to developments within the area of naval mine warfare and adjacent areas of interest like amphibious warfare.

“The new NMWGS will also have the possibility to implement new techniques and technologies such as unmanned vehicles, mam-

als, helicopters, drones, divers, team sweep and formation sweep. Our objective is to also add new functionalities with regard to aspects of other warfare types, like anti-air warfare, anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare and amphibious warfare, where interfaces exist with MCM.”

Another pending improvement in EGUERMIN’s capabilities is the installation of a new simulator facility to replace the NATO-funded Naval Mine Warfare Simulator (NMWSIM), inaugurated in 1994. An upgrade of the earlier simulator was considered, said Cdr Vanden Haute, “but with the rapid development of computer technology, it became clear that an upgrade... was no longer cost-effective”.

Instead it was decided to build a new simulator, for which the Belgian and Netherlands navies are sharing the costs on an equal basis. “A Tactical Training Facility [TTF] will replace the former NMWSIM by the end of 2006. Two cubicles from the NATO-funded NMWSIM will be kept operational until 2009, however, by which time all Tripartite-class minehunters will have received their Capability Upgrade Programmes,” said the commander.

He pointed out that forms of training available on the TTF include the classroom, universal operator trainer and combat team trainer concepts and the multi-cubicle combat team trainer. “The TTF will also be used to develop and try out new NMW tactics and procedures. It will be of considerable value as a design and research tool in the hands of tacticians and will be easily adaptable to take into account the latest equipment available.”

Cdr Vanden Haute is confident of the school’s future. “Our objective is to collect the information presently available in the world of naval mine warfare and subsequently disseminate this to both the NMW and amphibious warfare communities, not only preparing them for possible NMW confrontations but also to present them with the best possible training products. This particularly applies to our new or future NATO colleagues.”

He noted that NATO-wide recognition of the school as a centre of excellence will probably result in easier access to information and an increased number of ‘foreign’ students. “As a consequence we are looking into ways to enrol NMW specialist officers from other navies. A memorandum of understanding has been signed between EGUERMIN and the German Navy, which determines that a German mine-warfare specialist officer may be assigned to the school as an instructor. Possibilities for training and instruction will be even further enlarged by improving the wargame and by introducing the new TTF.”