

History of NATO Chess

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Polish Air Force University
Dęblin 2025

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lat Szkoły Orłąt

HISTORY OF NATO CHESS



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POLISH AIR FORCE UNIVERSITY ♔ AND CHESS

by Lt. Col. (ret.) Witold Sarnowski

Chess activities at the Polish Air Force University (formerly the Air Force Academy) date back to 2001, when a chess club was established at the University Club. There, too, weekly meetings have been held regularly since 2015. Chess games and tournaments are organized, and cadets participate as representatives of the University in the annual Uniformed Services Championships and the Polish Army Championships.

I represented Poland twice at the NATO Championships, in 2005 in Kołobrzeg and in 2007 in Ankara.

In 2025, as part of the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the Polish Air Force University, the Polish Army Chess Championships were organized, which gathered over a hundred participants. Organizing the 35th NATO Chess Championships in the jubilee year is also a great honour for the University.



from Polish Air Force University folder



The School's 100th anniversary, which falls this year, is a source of pride and honour for all generations of aviators who have left the Dęblin "Nest of Eagles." This is a special year not only for the School of Eaglets but also for Polish military aviation.

The history of our university is a history of continuous development, striving for excellence, and an unwavering will to fulfill its mission of educating the elite of Polish military aviation. Over the past hundred years, the university has become a symbol of the highest values: honour, courage, professionalism, and service to the Homeland. The university at Dęblin is a place where tradition meets modernity, and successive generations of aviators have learnt how to face the challenges of contemporary warfare.

This year's celebrations are an expression of our deep respect and appreciation for those who, through their effort, passion, and dedication, have contributed to building the strength and prestige of this university. We pay tribute to the first graduates and instructors who, in the challenging years of the Second Republic of Poland, laid the foundations for today's achievements. We also honour those who, during the years of occupation and struggles for freedom,

sacrificed their health and lives so that Polish wings would never cease to glide in the sky and that the white-and-red checkerboard would continue to achieve triumphs.

Today, we proudly look at the achievements of the Polish Air Force University, but we also think about the future with a sense of responsibility. Modern technologies and aircraft, innovative training systems, and international cooperation are challenges we are ready to meet. Dęblin will always remain a place where aviators learn to face adversity, spread their wings, and reach for the highest goals.



THE ROYAL GAME IN NATO: A TRADITION OF STRATEGY AND CAMARADERIE

Chess, often referred to as the royal game, enjoys considerable popularity within the military communities of NATO member countries. Among the various initiatives fostering this interest, the annual NATO Chess Championship (NCC) stands out as a long-standing tradition. With the exception of 1993 and 2020, the event has been held every year, bringing together military chess enthusiasts from across the alliance.

In addition to the NCC, twelve so-called NATO Tournaments were held between 1978 and 1988, with a final edition in 1993. These events have collectively attracted hundreds of players and featured thousands of classical and blitz games. Many participants travel thousands of kilometres to compete, often after rigorous national selection processes. Over the years, the championship has seen participation from exceptionally strong players.

Notable individual champions include renowned grandmasters such as Simen Agdestein – former coach to World Chess Champion Magnus Carlsen – and Jan Gustafsson, a popular tournament commentator. Other prominent participants have included WGM Elisabeth Pähtz, the first board of the German women's national team, and GM Karsten Müller, one of the world's foremost endgame experts (who competed as an FM at the time).

Each year, the championship is hosted by a different NATO member country. This rotating venue system not only promotes cultural exchange but also provides a unique platform to highlight each nation's armed forces. Planning typically begins five years in advance to ensure that the host's organising committee has ample time to prepare for the event.

All 32 NATO members are eligible to field a national team of six players, along with two players for the multinational NATO Team. The top four results from each national team contribute to the team standings. Players of the same nationality do not compete against each other unless required by the pairing rules.

While winning the individual title is a prestigious achievement, the most coveted honour remains the team trophy – the “King Canut” cup – symbolizing the spirit of unity and competitive excellence that defines NATO Chess.

Nearly 50 years of chess within the NATO alliance provides a unique and valuable opportunity to publish a comprehensive book on the subject. Each NATO member state has been invited to contribute a chapter, offering their own national perspective on the history and significance of the game within the alliance. In addition, the inclusion of annotated games will provide insightful material for analysis, making it an engaging read for both chess enthusiasts and those interested in the intersection of strategy, culture, and military camaraderie.



„King Canut” – king of England (1016–35), of Denmark (1019–35), and of Norway (1028–35). Canute was the grandson of the Polish ruler Mieszko I and most probably Dobrawa on his mother's side (Sygryda Storrada)

NATO CHESS CHAMPIONSHIPS	
1989	Hammelburg, GERMANY
1990	Oslo, NORWAY
1991	Cranwell, UNITED KINGDOM
1992	Muenster, GERMANY
1993	No Championship
1994	Breda, NETHERLANDS
1995	Gausdal, NORWAY
1996	Viborg, DENMARK
1997	Apt, FRANCE
1998	Portsmouth, UNITED KINGDOM
1999	Stetten am kalten Markt, GERMANY
2000	Leopoldsburg, BELGIUM
2001	San Remo, ITALY
2002	Brest, FRANCE
2003	Høvelte, DENMARK
2004	Hague, NETHERLANDS
2005	Kołobrzeg, POLAND
2006	Crowthorne, UNITED KINGDOM
2007	Ankara, TÜRKİYE
2008	Brussels, BELGIUM
2009	Hammelburg, GERMANY
2010	Køge, DENMARK
2011	Kaunas, LITHUANIA
2012	Brest, FRANCE
2013	Warsaw–Rynia, POLAND
2014	Quebec, CANADA
2015	Amsterdam, NETHERLANDS
2016	Shrivenham, UNITED KINGDOM
2017	Budapest, HUNGARY
2018	Lubbock, USA
2019	Berlin, GERMANY
2020	No Championship
2021	Blankenberge, BELGIUM
2022	Tartu, ESTONIA
2023	Portorož, SLOVENIA
2024	Rhodes, GREECE
2025	Dęblin, POLAND

JUBILEE BOOK NATO CHESS 35 YEARS CONTRIBUTION

by Brigadier-General (ret.) Drs H. Steffers

IMCC 1978–2011

*As long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives chess and Nato gives life to thee*

(Free after Shakespeare:

Sonnet 18 a Bundle Thomas Thorpe 1609)

Chess is one of the oldest games in the world. According to the Englishman Murray, chess must have originated on the Ganges around 560 AD.

NATO chess covers a considerably shorter period of time. Informal and formal competitions combined for about half a century, military and civilians working in an organisation of defence that is part of NATO try to fight each other in a sporting manner on the 64 squares of the chessboard.

This year – 2025 – the NATO Chess Tournament will be held for the 35th time. Poland is the host country. It is a good time to take a closer look at the history 1989–2025.

Three distinct periods can be identified:

- ♣ Period 1: 1978–1988 Run-up to NATO Chess Championship;
- ♣ Period 2: 1989–2011 Formalisation, continuation and expansion;
- ♣ Period 3: 2012–2025 Stabilisation and further expansion.

1978–1988

Three individuals played an important role in this period, which eventually led to the NATO Chess Championship.

They are those gentlemen: Ken Moore, P.E. Jensen and John Exell.

- ♣ Ken Moore, Danish tourist board liaison officer assigned to the NATO forces in the Federal Republic of Germany, stationed in Hanover, Germany.

- ♣ P.E. Jensen, Director of the Aalborg Tourist Office Jutland Denmark.

- ♣ John Exell, captain of the British team 1978–1984.

In 1978, officer Ken Moore invited military personnel stationed in Germany to a chess tournament. The personnel were representatives of countries that are members of NATO. The tournament took place in Aalborg, Denmark. Thus, without perhaps realising it himself, Ken Moore followed in the footsteps of illustrious British predecessors who organized chess tournaments. Staunton, for example, a name still often heard in chess circles, organised an international chess tournament for masters and grandmasters in London in 1851. The famous Hastings tournament also has a long history.

The start of the first informal NATO chess tournament was very promising and thus received an annual follow-up. There was enthusiastic play with quality games. Often FMs and IMs participated.

There were organisational problems. In terms of the rules of the tournament, the team leaders could not come to an agreement. An attempt by Major D. Nolte, team leader of the USA, failed. The call for greater clarity on the rules of the tournament increased the desire for an international body to solve problems. As a starting point, in addition to promoting chess within NATO, all wished to foster friendships. To encourage this, an excursion focused on the culture of the host country was programmed from the outset.

Due to the overwhelming interest, the facilities in Aalborg were no longer able to host the tournament. A farewell to Aalborg was made in 1988.

All in all, we can safely say that the 3 individuals mentioned have been the musketeers of what is now a special event.

1989–2011

The ever-growing group of participants and their entourage demanded much attention. In this context, think of playing space and especially housing.

Establishing an international body to support it was necessary. The burden of organisation by only a few countries also played a role.

An important basis for formalisation was a notice in the February 1989 Federal Gazette of the Royal Dutch Chess Federation.

“NATO CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP”

“In October 1989, the NATO chess championships will be held in Germany. For conscripts of the national armed forces. One is looking for someone who, because of his military position, is able and willing to act as a liaison and who can assemble a team of conscripts. Interested parties should contact Mr. C.I. Randag, head of the union office”.

The then Major RNLA Gert-Jan Ludden, himself an avid chess player with an ELO-rating of around 2200 picked up the gauntlet. The text “conscripts” was expanded with “all actively serving soldiers” in accordance with participation of other NATO countries. He organised selection matches in Enschede for a Dutch team. The participants were all military within the Netherlands Defence forces. The participation of the Dutch team was the beginning of intense cooperation of the Netherlands in chess with other NATO partners. The first period was mainly an English, Danish and German affair. In the second period, the Dutch representatives mainly took the lead.

The first formal NATO Chess Championship took place in 1989 at the German town of Hammelburg in the “Heinrich-Koppler Haus”. The tournament was a great success with Germany as the eventual winner. No doubt the financial assistance of the German KAS organization played a weighty role in this success. As was the opening by the Secretary-General of NATO Dr. Alfred Wörner. His hope and expectation for continuation of this wonderful event came true.

The program and structure of the tournament was largely adopted from previous informal tournaments without much modification. On the eve of kick-off, team captains and officials meet to go over the details of the program with the national committee of the host country. After the opening on Monday morning in uniform, with the photo session and speeches, the first round would be played on the Monday afternoon.

Then two rounds on Tuesday and Thursday and one round on Wednesday and Friday. So, a total of seven rounds. A country may enter the tournament with a maximum of six participants and two officials. The score of the four chess players with the highest number of points counts for the final standings. In addition to the team championship, the player with the highest number of points wins the individual championship. Pairings are done according to the Swiss system. In case of a tie, the Sonneborn/Berger system applies. Excursions are organised on Wednesday afternoons. The host country shows something specific about the country. Traditionally, a blitz chess tournament is held on Friday afternoon. The annual meeting of the International Military Chess Committee (IMCC) is scheduled on the Thursday evening. The awards ceremony of the tournament is held on the Friday evening followed by a formal dinner. The wearing of uniform is mandatory for the latter two activities.

Participating in the first formal NATO Chess Championship were 11 countries: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom and the United States. Germany became the first official NATO champions and FM Michaelsen (Germany) the first individual champion. In charge of the first tournament were Mr. Wolfgang Berger, national arbiter of the German Chess Federation and Commander Graf Otto von Ibenfeldt (Norway), international arbiter of FIDE. Both gentlemen have also conducted subsequent tournaments and have been influential in formalising the NATO chess tournament. This is also true of officials Kermeeen and Watson of the United Kingdom. Not surprisingly, the first three formal NATO Chess Championships were held in Hammelburg, Oslo and Cranwell (UK).

During these three tournaments there was already much discussion about the creation of an institution that would have the important task of ensuring the continuity of the tournaments with the aim of achieving the objectives.

From the start of the informal and formal tournaments, two objectives have been dominant. The promotion of chess within NATO and thus the continuation of friendships and the establishment of new friendships within NATO. Getting to know each other's culture is useful. In 1991, the International Military Chess Committee (IMCC) was formed, originally consisting of the following members: General P. Scaramucci (Italy), Lieutenant-Colonel S. Wolk (Germany),

Wing Commander B. Kermeen (United Kingdom), Commander Otto Graf von Ibenfeldt (Norway), Lieutenant-Colonel G.J. Ludden (The Netherlands). From 1990 Captain of the Dutch team Brigadier-General (ret.) Drs. Hendrik Steffers was chosen as chairman of the IMCC. Pretty soon after the start of the IMCC all team leaders became members of the Committee (1993). The chairman is supported by a secretary. Together they form the executive committee. For practical reasons, they come from the same country. The arbiters act as advisors. These arbiters are officially authorised on behalf of FIDE to conduct a chess tournament. This is essential for the recognition of the tournament by FIDE. The player's results are incorporated into their ELO rating which indicates the playing strength of a chess player. From 2000 onwards, during most NATO Chess Championships the much respected Belgian FIDE arbiter Luc Cornet has acted as chief arbiter, assisted by one or more arbiters from the host country.

After some discussion, a so-called NATO team was created to allow officials to also participate in the tournament. This team does not play for competition and participated for the first time in Oslo (1990).

During the first decade, three factors kept the IMCC particularly busy:

- 1) Acceptance by authorities. Is chess a sport?

For any sport, physical and psychological aspects are important. The balance of these aspects is different for each sport. The search for a balance also applies to chess. The discussion of whether chess is a sport has been silenced because chess is considered an Olympic sport (2010). In the early 1990s, denial often contributed to the fact that no or limited funds were made available. Chess was not included in the countries' sports calendar. For example, in 1995 the members of the Dutch team participated at their own expense in the tournament organized by Norway in Gausdal. In the beautiful snowy countryside with the famous Peer Gynt route, the Netherlands won both the team championship and the individual prize. The now Grandmaster Harmen Jonkman was the individual winner.

- 2) Obtaining the necessary funds for the host country and for the participating players.

Emphasis here is on facility costs and travel and accommodation costs. From its inception, the tournament has rejoiced in ever-increasing popularity. The number of participating countries is steadily growing. Finding suitable accommodation in barracks or other possibilities such as housing of training units, is becoming more

difficult for the host countries and more expensive. As a result, the entrance fees are a permanent worry.

Due to budget regulations of different countries, it was necessary to designate a country as the host country for a NATO Chess Championship well in advance, after consultation with the IMCC. Not being able to submit a proper plan in time leads to disappointments.

For example, in 1993 the United States withdrew from hosting the tournament in Virginia, unfortunately at such a late stage that replacement with another country could no longer be arranged. The Dutch National Military Chess Committee did try to fill the gap but time was too short. The invitations came too late. Only a few countries – the hard core from the informal era – responded. This is why 1993 is not considered an official NATO Chess Championship but just a military chess tournament.

A year before that, Italy dropped out. Germany filled the gap, hosting the tournament twice in 4 years. In 1996 the same happened after Scotland withdrew. The IMCC received word from the official side that Denmark could not host the 1996 Championship on such a short notice either. However, the Danish National Chess Committee, under the inspiring leadership of Mr. Finn Stuhr – a noted and much appreciated long time military chess organiser – managed to host a full tournament in Viborg, together with the local military and civilian authorities. Older participants will undoubtedly remember the steeple chase that they unexpectedly had to take part in during the excursion, led by a rather unforgiving sports instructor.

In practice, the biggest culprit in particular was the failure to reserve the necessary funds in a timely manner. In the mid-1990s the IMCC decided that at least a five-year schedule should be prepared. Host and participating countries now have ample time to obtain desired funds that can be included in the budget. This applies equally to other preparations such as, for example, the search for suitable accommodation for the participants (sometimes accompanied by their partners) and proper playing space.

- 3) Changing organisation of the defence departments of participating countries.

Due to environmental factors, organisations have to constantly adapt. It is no different for defence organisations. At the end of the last century, conscription had ended in many NATO countries. For a number of countries, this meant a significantly smaller amount of defence personnel to select players for a chess team. To counter this, the IMCC decided to also allow civilian

defence personnel to participate in the NATO Chess Championships. This was a huge turnaround because, until then, informally and formally only military personnel were allowed to participate.

In summary, the first formal period has been characterised by various ups and downs. At an often too late moment, a commitment to organise the tournament was withdrawn. Several times in the 1990s, the existence of the NATO Chess Championship was seriously threatened. Thanks to the spontaneous efforts of many enthusiastic organisers, officials and chess players in difficult circumstances, the tournament survived. It is worth mentioning that many sought ways outside the usual rules, regulations and procedures to keep the tournament going. For the Netherlands, for example, many thanks go to the continuous support from BIMS (Bureau Militaire Sport). For Germany the KAS (Katholische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Soldatenbetreuung), for Norway the Welfare Service, for France the Federation des Clubs Sportifs et Artistiques de la Defense, not to mention the creative ways of sponsoring the tournament that the Danish National Military Chess Committee had often been able to find.

The number of participating countries grew steadily. Nowadays, there is hardly a NATO member state who has not for some time participated in a NATO Chess Championship.

Changes in the IMCC organisation also occurred. In 1998, Lieutenant Colonel Gert Jan Ludden announced that he was going to leave active military service for a career in business. The international and national NATO chess family owe him many thanks for his achievement of putting the NATO Chess Championship on the map, often under difficult circumstances. Unanimously, the IMCC agreed to appoint then Commander RNLN Harm-Theo Wagenaar LL.M. as his successor. As a military lawyer, he became the author of the regulations for the NATO Chess Championships and for the IMCC, thus giving the tournament the necessary stability. This led to more “credibility” when NATO member states were asked to organise the tournament, and with FIDE to process the results. The IMCC agreed to the regulations in 2000 in Leopoldsburg (Belgium). Stability was also enhanced over the years by the aforementioned Belgian FIDE arbiter Luc Cornet, and the appearance of a NATO Chess website (www.natochess.com), originally a Danish initiative but gradually taken over mostly by Dutch player Jan Cheung. On the website many interesting things can be found, such as a history of the championships,

the planning of future tournaments, many photos and a huge database of games played.

In his speeches, the IMCC president continually pleaded for female military and female civilian personnel working within NATO to consider participating. This plea finally succeeded in 2004: in The Hague, the team of the Netherlands had the first female competitor within its ranks: the now LCDR RNLN Rieke Hof-van Run. A strong female contestant who now participates regularly and is team leader of the Dutch military chess team. She was soon followed by several other female colleagues.

Every tournament is a highlight. The National Committees always manage to operate optimally as hosts. However, a few occasions stand out. First of all the opening of the first NATO Chess Championship in Hammelburg by the Secretary General of NATO Dr. Manfred Worner in 1989. The foundation was laid for continuation: Norway, England and the Netherlands immediately showed a positive attitude. The already mentioned steeplechase in Viborg (1996). The first ten year celebration in Stetten am kalten Markt (Germany, 1999). The organising committee of the Championship in Brest (2002) arranged a large number of side activities in addition to the chess tournament.

Also special was the decision of the “Appeals Committee” to declare the game of the Chairman of the IMCC against a German chess player a draw. During the game Steffers offered a draw. His opponent gave no clear response and his flag fell, so normally he should lose the game. However, “no clear response” was for the committee apparently enough for a draw. A draw that proved very important at the end of the tournament. It took place in the flower city of San Remo (Italy, 2001). Dr. Fabio Molin was the inspirational force of the host country. Hovelte (2003) celebrated the 25th anniversary of the number of informal and formal tournaments combined. This was honoured by inviting “veteran” players who were not allowed to play in NATO Chess Championships anymore, to show their chess skills one more time. The start of this tournament was spectacular with a military parade. The finale of the chess fest was no less spectacular with a show in Tivoli (Copenhagen) by the Royal Life Guards Band with guest singers performing songs from the musical “Chess”. Last but not least: the establishment of a “Presidency of Honour” for Mr. Ken Moore and Mr. Jensen. The congenial Belgian team piloted us into the twenty-first century in Leopoldsburg. Very special was the reception of the chairman of the IMCC and his wife in Ankara (2007).

With waving lights we were brought to the hotel on the barracks complex of the Gendarmerie, and the tournament included an “indoors parade” and an impressive visit to the Gendarmerie museum.

The first Eastern European country to organise a NATO Chess Championship was Poland at Kolo-brzeg (2005). A beautiful playing area within walking distance of the lodgings and enough space to enjoy the beach besides playing chess. Not for nothing the closing ceremony was called “Polish marriage to the sea”.

Two tournaments in Great Britain, Portsmouth (1998) and Crowthorne/Wellington (2006) are inextricably linked to the late Commodore (RN) L.P. Brokenshire. As an amateur magician, one of his many qualities, he surprised us during the final banquet with a hilarious performance of magic tricks. The atmosphere around the tournaments was perfect under his leadership. In the maritime historical environment of Portsmouth, Admiral Nelson’s spirit played an invisible but intense role.

After two decades and advanced age, it is necessary and important for continuity to rejuvenate the board. A committee of wise men, after ample consideration, came up with the proposal to nominate Colonel Tomasz Malinowski (Poland) as the new president of the IMCC. Despite not being a chess player, Colonel Malinowski accepted the position. As non playing team leader of the Polish chess team and chief organiser of two NATO Chess Championships in Poland he had amply demonstrated enthusiasm and commitment at various tournaments. The selection of then Major Sławomir Kędzierski (a good chess player) as secretary completed the team. At the 2011 closing banquet in Kaunas (Lithuania), Brigadier-General (ret.) drs. Hendrik Steffers handed over the gavel to Colonel Tomasz Malinowski. Secretary Captain RN LN Harm-Theo Wagenaar (himself about to retire from the Dutch Navy) handed over his position to Maj. Sławomir Kędzierski. Poland was now the main country to keep the ship (memory of Ken Moore) sailing and protected against storms. The retiring team with all officials and participants is confident of this partly because the support and motivation of the national chess committees is strong. Besides being appointed honorary chairman, Brigadier-General Steffers was surprised with the “Silver Medal of the Polish Army”, awarded by the Polish Minister of Defence and presented in 2015 by the chairman of the IMCC.

From numerous speeches, a few more quotes:

Life with its struggles, its competition, its ups and downs is a kind of chess. After all, chess teaches foresight, caution and prudence. Moreover, not to be discouraged when things are bad, but to keep looking for favourable turns.

Benjamin Franklin (1779, Morals of Chess)

It’s not a matter of looking for the best move, but to move according to a wise plan of play.

Eugene Snosko-Borowsky

Chess has conquered the world.

Reuben Fine

Chess is exciting at all levels. Every player can be enchanted by splendid combinations just like music lovers being taken away by a magnificent nocturne in a classical concert.

Music versus chess

The elements of strategy and tactics play an important role in the practice of chess. In often complicated positions a decision must be based on strategic and tactical considerations. This applies to any organisation and certainly to the Defence organisation with today’s global operations.

It would not be a luxury for chess – perhaps optionally – to be a subject in the curriculum at the various staff schools.

Opening speech of the Chairman IMCC, 14th NATO Chess Championship, Copenhagen 2003

Chess is like an ocean in which a fly may bathe and the elephant may drown.

Proverb India

Pawns are the soul of chess.

Philidor

I considered chess excellent practice to improve thinking and creative potential.

Philosopher G.W. Leibnit

The threat is stronger than the execution.

The last but one mistake is victorious.

Xavier Tartakower

Animus in consulendo liber

When the International Military Chess Committee decided in 2011 that the leadership of the body should go to Poland I was very much surprised that I was chosen to continue the work of the Secretary. I rather thought that there would be a change only to the Chairman's position. Since I was busy preparing for the final game, I did not even attend the IMCC Meeting in Kaunas.

Nevertheless, after a sincere and detailed discussion with Col. Malinowski we decided to take up the challenge and start appropriate measures within the Polish Ministry of National Defence. The then Minister of National Defence Tomasz Siemoniak approved the choice of the committee, and in addition a letter informing the NATO Secretary General about the change was sent soon afterwards.

In the meantime I received from my predecessor Capt. RNLN Harm-Theo Wagenaar many files which documented the work of the IMCC in previous years with assurance of support anytime should needs arise.

Every NATO Chess Championship is unique even if every host organises the competition according to the same Rules & Regulations. Why? We, NATO state members, share the same values and have many common procedures, but still have different cultures, habits and customs. These factors make the tournaments even more interesting and attractive.

Now I would like to write a few words on the championships during the time that Poland has been chairing the IMCC. Detailed national reports with (sometimes) annotated games can be found on the website www.natochess.com.

Brest–2012 welcomed all participants with wine to every meal (French cuisine!) and excellent conditions of play. At the IMCC Meeting there was much discussion on the role of non-active service soldiers – whether they should be allowed to the championships or not. The final decision was against their participation in national teams but the subject saw new light the next year.

Warsaw–Rynia–2013 offered participants the chance to be part of the celebrations of Polish Armed Forces Day (15 August) and a visit to the Museum of the Polish Army. The IMCC decided that every country has the right to bring up to three players that

are non-active soldiers provided that the host nation has enough accommodation capacity. Estonia made its debut at the championships.

Quebec–14 was a special event for a few reasons. It was the first ever to be hosted in North America and a logistic and financial challenge for European teams at the same time. The venue – Citadelle was a marvellous place to stay for a week. The gala dinner in the building of the Parliament was also a highlight.

Amsterdam–2015 broke the record for the number of participating players – reaching over 100 since 1989. Another record, probably not possible to break, was an extremely low entry fee without the slightest attempt to diminish living or playing conditions. Only the waves of extreme heat didn't allow participants to wear uniforms at the first round. Life-time certificates were presented to team captains and regular players with respectively 5 and 8 participations. Team Captains were presented with the medallion Friend of Chess.

Shrivenham–2016 surprised many with the unique venue (a military museum) and the gala dinner with candles and many toasts. The presence of the well-known GM Raymond Keene OBE and the magic performance by Cdre Laurence Brokenshire CBE were further highlights.

Budapest–2017 let the community enjoy Hungarian hospitality, and the visit to the Parliament Museum was very attractive. Seeing the Holy Crown of Hungary guarded by two soldiers made a big impression on many players. Greece made its first appearance with very good results.

Lubbock–2018, Texas, USA was the second ever NATO Chess Championship held in North America. Texas Tech University with GM Alexander Onischuk as the head of the chess programme at the university played a very important role showing professionalism and friendship at the same time. One of the highlights was the Lubbock Open to which NCC players were kindly invited.

Berlin–2019 produced a new title: organisational grandmaster which was given to no other than Capt. Senior Grade Karl Koopmeiners, a longtime German Team Captain and director of the tournament. Players had the chance to offer condolences to the closest family of IM Lorenz Drabke (several times NATO individual champion) who passed

away in a tragic road accident the previous year. As Col. Malinowski noticed, Lorenz was scoring points for Germany but was actually playing for NATO Chess. The IMCC decided to play the next championship with increment. In a sense it showed how much the old time control was treasured as part of a tournament tradition, and closed the era of playing without increment.

In the year 2020 the NCC was not organised due to the COVID-19 pandemic and all sorts of lockdowns worldwide.

However, in 2021 the Belgian Organisational Committee hosted the championship in Blankenberge, in a very nice touristic resort. COVID-19 was yet not forgotten but luckily didn't do much damage to the participants. It was also the year when Col. Malinowski resigned from his post due to retirement plans and a new career as a skipper. The IMCC elected me to the post of a chairman. Maj. Dariusz Sycz (then Lt.) became IMCC Secretary (2021–2024). Since 2024 that role has been taken over by Lt. Marcin Pietruszewski from Poland.

Tartu–2022 was memorable for many things, especially the visits to the museums and nearby bus trips. The patron of the championship, Estonian Chief of Staff Gen. M. Herem not only heartily welcomed the participants but also played all rounds in the blitz tournament. Knowing the general's passion for the royal game the IMCC presented him with a commemorative chess set. A new coin was presented to players with 12 participations at the NCC. Every year the coins are presented to new eligible players.

Portorož–2023 gathered a record of 116 players. The beautiful landscape, spacious playing hall in a hotel and military parade will surely not be forgotten. The IMCC after a detailed discussion elected not to approve the proposal to broaden the NCC dimension by allowing professions other than soldiers and civilian workers of MoD. Another important decision was made that only member states can participate at the championship. Some non-NATO teams (from Europe, Asia and Africa) contacted the IMCC and expressed their desire to participate at the NCC. A new trophy was introduced: Best Veteran.

Rhodos–2024 beat another record with 118 players. Many participants were attracted to the place a few days or even weeks before the tournament. Late October allowed us to avoid heat waves but still have nice conditions for sea swimming. Each Head of Delegation was presented by the host with

a gift. In addition, it was a great pleasure for me to accept in my capacity as the IMCC Chairman a FIDE 100-years anniversary pin and medal presented by the Latvian Delegation.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the core task of NATO Chess is to hold a classical championship. The times and situations change and we have to be flexible and adapt to them. COVID-19 forced many people to stay at home and turn themselves to online activities. As a side effect, strengthened by the popular American mini-series *The Queen's Gambit*, there was a noticeable chess boost. NATO Chess could not miss out. The first EU and NATO Online blitz tournament was organised in 2021 and is held on an annual basis. The idea of a joint undertaking came about while I was serving at the NATO Headquarters in Brussels and playing for the club Europchess in the Belgian league.

A NATO Chess FIDE 100 Years Online blitz tournament was also held to mark the importance of founding an official international chess organisation. The online tournaments are relatively popular and top three winners are awarded with medals.

What are the prospects of NATO Chess?

I am quite positive that the championships will continue to be held. The show must go on as the song goes, after all. The question will be not if but how many teams and players. I just wish we had more participating nations to make friends with and achieve better integration. This will, needless to say, make organisational arrangements more difficult but it can be overcome.



BGen. H. Steffers



Col. T. Malinowski



Col. S. Kędzierski

I don't believe in psychology. I believe in good moves.

Bobby Fischer (World Chess Champion)

CHAMPIONSHIPS	PLAYERS	CHAMPIONSHIPS	PLAYERS
1989	72	2007	68
1990	64	2008	82
1991	70	2009	95
1992	70	2010	82
1993	No Championship	2011	88
1994	70	2012	80
1995	52	2013	82
1996	38	2014	74
1997	52	2015	108
1998	54	2016	98
1999	53	2017	105
2000	63	2018	67
2001	61	2019	114
2002	79	2020	No Championship
2003	89	2021	99
2004	82	2022	94
2005	88	2023	116
2006	75	2024	118

Over the years I had the chance to get more insight into the problems of hosting the events. Not surprisingly, they are often the same: finding sponsorship, a venue, and creating an efficient Organisational Committee. I have met many dedicated people spending great amounts of their time to make NATO

Chess function better. I think this is a good place to thank all of them.

I would like to conclude my part with FIDE's motto: *Gens una sumus*.



Logo of NATO Chess



by Lt. Kimball Rosseel

Belgium, one of the twelve founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, took part in the NATO Chess Tournament for the first time in 1986 with the late pioneer Ben De Cat. In the following years, the number of Belgian participants grew into a full-fledged team, which was almost

continuously present during this international military chess event.

Highlights for the Belgian Military Chess Team were the silver medal in the team ranking in 1996 and the individual gold medals in 1990 and 2012.

TEAM RESULTS	
1986	7 th place
1987	7 th place
1988	6 th place
1989	3 rd place
1990	6 th place
1991	7 th place
1992	7 th place
1993	5 th place
1994	7 th place
1995	8 th place
1996	2 nd place
1997	7 th place
1998	8 th place
1999	5 th place
2000	5 th place
2001	4 th place
2002	12 th place
2003	4 th place
2004	7 th place
2005	12 th place
2006	10 th place
2008	5 th place
2009	8 th place
2010	11 th place
2011	11 th place
2012	6 th place
2013	8 th place
2014	13 th place
2015	11 th place
2016	9 th place
2017	15 th place
2019	10 th place
2021	9 th place
2022	15 th place
2023	15 th place
2024	20 th place

The Hague – The Netherlands;
Luc Geerts, Marc Kocur, Jan Gooris,
Daniël Vercauteren, Freddy Charles,
Fabrice Wantiez, Gunter Deleyn,
Ben De Cat;
photo by IMCC



Hammelburg – Germany;
Daniël Vercauteren, Marc Kocur,
Luc Cornet, Fabrice Wantiez,
Ben De Cat, Jan Gooris, Kaan Cappon,
Guy Delforge;
photo by IMCC

Amsterdam – The Netherlands;
Jan Gooris, Frank Deneyer,
Kaan Cappon, Luc Geerts,
Kimball Rosseel, Luc Windey,
Patrick Maes, Fabrice Wantiez,
Ben De Cat, Daniël Vercauteren;
photo by IMCC



Tartu – Estonia;
Marc Kocur, Alberto Perez-Sordo,
Kris Steen, Luc Windey,
Kimball Rosseel, Sofie Camp,
Freddy Charles, Rik Boudry;
photo by IMCC

Belgian NATO Chess Champions



1990 – FM Gunter Deleyn



2012 – FM Fabrice Wantie

Belgian Referee



2000–2006, 2008–2016, 2019–2023 – Luc Cornet

BELGIAN PARTICIPANTS	
Pascal Berghmans	Jean-Paul Lamproye
Rik Boudry	Dominique Lecluyse
Theo Brouwers	Philip Lemmens
Jeroen Bruynck	Patrick Maes
Kaan Cappon	Philippe Maesfranckx
Cédric Chabot	David Malchair
Freddy Charles	Marc Mercier
Philippe de Brouwer	Luc Michiels
Ben De Cat	Bob Minnaert
Luc de Roo	Christoph Moga
FM Gunter Deleyn	Alberto Perez-Sordo
Guy Delforge	CM Dieter Plumanns
Frank Deneyer	Kimball Rosseel
Christian Depauw	Nico Segers
Jan Dreesen	Kris Steen
Luc Geerts	Danny van Elsen
Stephane Glibert	Jan van Hoorick
Jan Gooris	Tony van Linden
Roland Huylebroeck	Daniël Vercauteren
Andy Jackson	Johan Vervust
Piet Jorissen	FM Fabrice Wantiez
Robert Ketels	Luc Windey
Marc Kocur	

Belgian Organisations



2000 – Leopoldsburg;
Tournament Director: Daniel Vercauteren; photo by IMCC



2008 – Brussels;
Tournament Director: Jan Gooris; photo by IMCC



2021 – Blankenberge;
Tournament Director: Kimball Rosseel; photo by IMCC

While all artists are not chess players, all chess players are artists.

Ben De Cat was known to all of us as a joyful and social chess player. His joie de vivre was appreciated by anyone who had the pleasure of playing a chess game or with whom he simply stopped for a friendly chat.

He did not shy away from playing unusual openings like Sokolsky (b4) and Grob's Attack (g4) with white.

When playing with black, he sometimes took his opponent to unknown territory with unconventional continuations such as the St. George Defence (a6) or the Borg Defence (g5).

His most memorable match was probably during the NATO Chess Championship 2001, in which he raised his opponent's eyebrows with the Barnes Defence (f6).

Alaslar, Devrim – De Cat, Ben (San Remo, 2001)

1.e4 f6 2.d4 Kf7 (diagram) 3.Be3 g6 4.Qd2 h5 5.Nc3 Bh6 6.0-0-0 d6 7.f4 c6 8.Nf3 b5 9.Rg1 Qa5 10.Kb1 Na6 11.h3 b4 12.Ne2 Be6 13.d5 cxd5 14.exd5 Bd7 15.Ned4 Nc5 16.Nb3 Nxb3 17.axb3 Rc8 18.g4 hxg4 19.hxg4 Bg7 20.Nd4 Nh6 21.Ne6 Bxe6 22.dxe6+ Kxe6 23.Bc4+ Kd7 24.Qd3 f5 25.gxf5 Qxf5 26.Rxg6 Bf6 27.Bb5+ Kc7 28.Bxa7 Qxd3 29.Bxd3 Ra8 30.Be3 Ra5 31.Be4 Nf5 32.Bxf5.

Result: 1/2–1/2.

Rizihs, Valerijs – Rosseel, Kimball (Portorož, 05.09.2023)

1.d4 e5 2.dxe5 d6 3.exd6 Bxd6 (diagram) 4.e4 Nc6 5.Nc3 Qe7 6.Be3 Bd7 7.Qe2 Bb4 8.f3 Bxc3+ 9.bxc3 f5 10.exf5 Bxf5 11.Bf4 0-0-0 12.Qxe7 Ngxe7 13.Bc4 Bxc2 14.Nh3 Bf5 15.Ng5 Ng6 16.Be3 Rhe8 17.Kf2 h6 18.g4 hxg5 19.gxf5 Nf4 20.Bxf4 gxf4 21.Be6+ Kb8 22.Rad1 Ne5 23.Kg2 Rd3 24.Rhe1 Nxf3 25.Rf1 Nh4+ 26.Kg1 Rxd1 27.Rxd1 c6 28.Kf2 Rf8 29.Rd4 g5 30.fxg6 Nxg6 31.c4 Rf6 32.Bd7 Ne5 33.Bh3 Kc7 34.c5 b6 35.cxb6+ axb6 36.Re4 Kd6 37.Bg2 Ng4+ 38.Kg1 Ne3 39.Bf3 c5 40.h4 c4 41.Kf2 c3 42.Ke2 Kc5 43.h5 c2 44.Kd2 Rd6+ 45.Kc1 Rd1+ 46.Bxd1 cxd1Q+ 47.Kb2 Qc2+ 48.Ka3 Qxe4.

Result: 0–1.



Ben De Cat;
photo by IMCC



Kimball Rosseel;
photo by IMCC



by Lt. Col. Régis Bellemare

Canada has been a proud participant in the NATO Chess Championship since its very beginnings in Hammelburg in 1991. Indeed, we had a Canadian participant, R. Jackson. We know little about this player, probably he was there by chance, but his participation sets the course for many years of Canadian participation in this unique chess event.

Canada participated for the first time with a delegation in 2002. From 2002 to 2004, Canada had a small delegation of volunteers under the leadership of Navy Captain Paul Leblanc. Paul has retired from the military but is still highly involved in chess and currently President of the British-Columbia Chess Federation. Notably, in 2002 in Brest, France, Glen Morin would have the best Canadian performance to date at the NCC with a 12th place.

The Canadian players' chess flame was revived in Kandahar, Afghanistan, when Major Régis Bellemare, deployed there with the NATO mission, founded a chess club for down time entertainment and as a way to engage with the Afghans who happened to be avid chess players. The Kandahar Airfield Club was very popular and players from all contingents participated in its weekly activities.



Maj. Régis Bellemare and Mr Jelani Ghiacy playing at Kandahar Airfield (KAF) Chess Club, Afghanistan (2008); photo by IMCC

At one of these evenings, Sgt. Karl Emmins, from the UK, mentioned to Major Bellemare that the previous year he had played in the NCC in Türkiye and he had noticed that Canada was not represented there. The NCC was unknown to Major Bellemare at the time and he took upon himself the challenge to bring Canada back to the NCC, which happened in 2008. He even managed to find funding for this first delegation of 4 players. He was accompanied by

Corporal Roger Lebrun, who was part of the delegations from 2002 to 2004, Jelani Ghiacy, a Canadian civilian employee of Afghan origin who worked in support of Canada in KAF Camp and Lieutenant-Colonel Jean Bigras. Jelani Ghiacy sparked the Canadian imagination by winning his first game at the NCC with a checkmate in 13 moves with the black pieces! (game annotated below). As a side note, Jelani later became KAF Chess Club president upon the return to Canada of Major Bellemare and the Club remained active until the closure of KAF.

In 2009, Canada had its first full delegation in Hammelburg, Germany and did so again in 2010 in Køje, Denmark. Canada quickly took a prominent place within the NCC community so much so that in 2010, the idea of organising the NCC in Canada germinated. In 2011 in Lithuania, Canada returned with the official proposal to organise the 25th NCC in 2014, which was approved by the IMCC.

In 2012, we had a large delegation in France. Due to Canadian bilingualism, we often played the role of translator during ceremonies. French hospitality is unmatched, and etiquette must be followed... which led to a misunderstanding during the first dinner, amicably remembered as the French Chess-Gate. On the chessboard, we remembered the 6th round match of Major Bellemare (1764) against the French Cédric Soulier (2073). The game was heading towards a draw, but the French player did not want to accept it because he had been directed by his team captain that the point was necessary to support the possible French victory in the championship. The game ended "on the ropes" during an intense blitz won by Major Bellemare after an impressive sacrifice that allowed him to promote a pawn. The pressure and stress were such that Major Bellemare lost the use of his fingers for more than 15 minutes after the end of the game!

Canada's 2013 participation in Poland was enhanced by a simultaneous performance by Master Corporal Philippe Léveillé for the staff of the Canadian Embassy during an impressive reception hosted by the Canadian ambassador and Military Attaché. Canada accepted the Spirit of Denmark during the IMCC closing ceremony following a performance by Canadian artist Jenny Galt.

In 2014, Canada welcomed the 25th NATO Chess Championship in Quebec City, the first time in North America! The host was the Canadian Army Royal Twenty-Second Regiment, which was celebrating its centennial. The championship was held in the magnificent city of Quebec City in the heart of the Citadelle of Quebec, an historic military site dating back to the beginnings of the colonisation of Canada. Canada offered an unparalleled event to participants from 11 countries. They will long remember the air show, the grand opening ceremony on the parade ground with the flags of all countries and the goat Batisse, the Royal 22e Regiment's mascot, the many social evenings in the various messes of the Citadel and the impressive closing evening held at the Parliament of the Province of Quebec.



Team Canada members and flag holder Captain Francois Simard are greeted by reviewing officer Colonel Dany Fortin during the opening Ceremony of the 25th NATO Chess Championship (2014); photo by IMCC

For the occasion, Canada had a team made up of veteran chess players from the Canadian Armed Forces who made a very good showing. We witnessed some beautiful chess battles, and Germany took the final honours. Outstanding work from the organising team of Lieutenant Guillaume Landry, Corporal Frédéric Langelier and Major Régis Bellemare.

From 2015 to 2019, Canada maintained participation, with almost complete delegations at each edition of the NCC. Captain Francois Simard and

Major Fernando Echavarria-Hidalgo took the leadership of the team on a few occasions. 2019 in Berlin was the last edition where funding for the team was available. We never have the strongest team but Canadians are renowned for being tough opponents to be taken seriously, despite their lower rating. A great example is the game won by Leading Seaman Samuel Heran-Boily (1933) against Finn Pederson (2305) in round 1 of the NCC in Berlin in 2019 (annotated below).

As of 2021, we entered the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. Canada continued to participate in the NCC but limited national funding requires that participants be volunteers. Since 2023, Major Fernando Echavarria-Hidalgo has been the Team Captain and Canadian representative on the IMCC while Lieutenant-Colonel Régis Bellemare continues to supervise domestic chess activities.

MILITARY CHESS IN CANADA

The KAF chess club initiated the creation of a very active community of Canadian military chess players. In 2009, the first Canadian Military Chess Championship (CMCC) was organized at Fort Frontenac in Kingston with 7 players. We have just concluded the 15th edition of this championship with more than 70 players!



14th CMCC at Royal Military College of Canada (RMC), Kingston, Ontario, Canada; photo by IMCC



The 25th NATO Chess Championship Official Picture at the Citadelle of Quebec City, Quebec, Canada (2014); photo by IMCC

Over the years, it has been held at various Canadian Forces bases including the Citadelle of Quebec, in preparation for the NCC, the St-Jean Military College and since 2023 has established its new permanent residence at the Royal Military College (RMC) of Canada where it is organized by the RMC Chess Club. The CCMM is almost a miniature version of the NCC. Like the latter, it is a team championship of 3 players from the same base or unit. But the main objective is to crown the Canadian military champion and select the 6 players who will represent Canada at the NCC. The players all hope to put their name on one of the magnificent trophies including the rookie of the year, the most improved player, the best civilian or the best officer cadet of the RMC. In parallel to the CMCC is a championship for veterans to crown our best veteran. For us, it is essential to recognize our veterans and offer them the opportunity to join us every year. Notable veterans not already mentioned in this article are Master-Corporal (ret.) Brian Murray and Corporal Herb Langer, both were previous arbiters of some editions of the CMCC and participated in many NCC. Also worth mentioning is Second Lieutenant retired Gilles Legaré, a true chess enthusiast and wiseman who left us recently.

The RMC club, established in 2010, has become a pillar of military chess. It plays an important role as host of the CMCC. We always offer the best RMC member at the CMCC the opportunity to accompany the Canadian team to the NCC. Notably, each year since 2012, the officer cadets participate in a friendly match with the United States Military Academy West Point, this is on the way to become a long-standing tradition.



11th Annual Chess Match Royal Military College (RMC) of Canada vs US Military Academy West Point (2025) Kingston, Ontario, Canada; photo by IMCC

In August 2025, 10 years after hosting the NCC, Canadian military chess players carried the FIDE 100th anniversary torch to the Citadelle of Quebec and were featured as the pieces in a human size chess game performed during the FIDE centennial ceremony. A nice tribute to chess and its links with the military. We take this opportunity to thank the Canadian Federation of Chess and the Quebec Federation of Chess for their unrelenting support to military chess in Canada over the years.



Reenacting a chess game by Wilhelm Steinitz and Emanuel Lasker (1894) during the FIDE 100th Celebration in Quebec City (2024) by Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) chess players; photo by IMCC

Canadian military chess players are proud participants in the NCC and we value the opportunity to build friendship and camaraderie with our NATO partners. We hope to stay part of the NATO chess family for years to come and to continue demonstrating our unity through the NATO Chess Championship.

19th NATO Chess Championship 2019 (Brussels, Belgium)

Round 6 – 07 Aug 2008

**Carelli, Donald (USA), ELO (1704N) –
Ghiacy, Jelany (CAN), ELO (1403)**



Jelany has participated in numerous NATO Chess Championships and is now a Lifetime Member (LTM) with 13 participations – the highest number for any Canadian chess player

Comments by Jelany Ghiacy

“In 2008, I participated in the 19th NATO Chess Championship in Brussels, Belgium, representing Canada. This was the first time the Canadian chess team, consisting of four players, competed in Belgium. It was also my debut in an international competition on the world stage, and emotions ran high with excitement and eagerness to do well.

In the first five rounds, I struggled against my opponents but remained determined to persevere. Fortunately, in the sixth round, the chessboard turned in my favour. Despite the US player’s rating being 1704 compared to my 1403, I focused all my thoughts and energy on the game and managed to checkmate him on the eleventh move! The tournament hall fell silent. After submitting our result sheets, my opponent and I were the first to leave the hall and headed to the analysis room, where we shared valuable insights.

I finished the tournament with 2 points. It was an enriching experience and an excellent tournament!”

Here is the game:

“The game started with the Bird’s opening, for which I was not really prepared for. I was wondering if he was well-prepared for it”.

1.f4 d5 (diagram 1)

The game continued as follows:

2.Nf3 Bf5 3.g3 e6 4.Bg2 Nc6 5.d3 Bg4 6.0-0 BxNf3 7.BxBf3 Bc5+ 8.Kh1 Nd4 9.Bg2 Qf6 10.c3 Nf5 (diagram 2)

Here white is already in trouble and had to play very carefully.

11.e4 Nxg3+ (diagram 3) Beautiful sacrifice!

And White immediately resigned because there is no way to stop checkmate after **12.hxg3 Qh6+ 13.Bh3 Qxh3++** (diagram 4) (checkmate).

Result: 0–1.



DIAGRAM 1



DIAGRAM 3



DIAGRAM 2



DIAGRAM 4

This game held the record for many years as the fastest ever in NATO Chess history until it was recently surpassed.

30th NATO Chess Championship 2019 (Berlin)

Round 1 – 16 Sep 2019

**Heran-Boily, Samuel (CAN), ELO (1897) –
Pedersen, Finn (DEN), ELO (2305)**



Samuel Heran-Boily and Finn Pedersen; photo by IMCC

This was Samuel's first game at a NATO chess championship. To his surprise, in the first round on board 3 in Berlin, he faced one of the strongest players in NATO. Finn Pedersen, the NATO individual champion in 2016 in the UK, was also the runner-up in 2015 and 2017, respectively. To date, he is the strongest player Samuel has defeated in a classical game of chess.

The game started with a Caro-Kann – Tarkakower (Nimzovich) variation

**1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nf6 5.Nxf6+
exf6 6.Nf3 Bd6 7.Bd3 O-O 8.O-O Bg4 9.h3 Bh5**
(diagram 1)

“Back in 2019 this was a line I was relatively comfortable with. I played it a lot in blitz. However, it is not the most testing”.

10.Re1 Nd7 11.c3 Qc7 12.Be3 (diagram 2)

“Already here white has to make a concession, the bishop doesn't really want to go to e3 as it accomplishes very little but ensuring that the rook on a1 can join the game was important enough for me to warrant Be3”.

12...Rfe8 13.Bc2

“Likely in this position I couldn't find a plan and played Bc2 as I cannot explain this move. A better plan would have been a4 and attempt to gain space on the queen side. However, as my opponent was rated over 2300 Fide at the time I was probably also scared to commit my pawns so early and live to regret it”.

13...Nf8

“Once Nf8 was played I realised there were some ideas to utilise the pin against my knight with Ne6 and decided to reroute my bishop to d3”.

14.Bd3 Re7 15.Be2 Rae8 16.Nh4 Bxe2 17.Qxe2
(diagram 3)

“Although it may look like I am putting myself in a pin, I successfully got rid of the pin on my knight and my queen can get out of the new pin in time. The position became a little bit easier to play after that”.

17...g6 18.Qd2

“Nf3 should have probably been played first so that the queen could potentially go to e3 and the bishop back up to e2. Not crucial but white loses a tempo”.

**18...Ne6 19.Nf3 Ng7 20.Qd3 Bf4 21.Bd2 Nf5
22.Rxe7 Rxe7 23.Re1 Bxd2 24.Rxe7 Qxe7
25.Qxd2** (diagram 4)



DIAGRAM 1



DIAGRAM 2



DIAGRAM 3



DIAGRAM 4

“The past 7 moves from white were all aimed at simplifying the position and trying to hold a draw”.

25...Qe4 26.Qd1 Kg7 27.Qb3

“Although this move is inaccurate the idea is pretty clear, white is trying to defend by counter attacking. An active defence in chess is often superior to a passive one when humans are involved”.

27...Nd6 28.Qb4 Qf4 29.b3 b6 30.c4 Qc1+ (diagram 5) 31.Qe1

“I am trying to push my pawns and be as active as possible without giving too many squares or hanging pawns”.

31...Qc2 32.Qd2 Qb1+ 33.Kh2 Ne4 34.Qe3 Nd6 35.Qe2 a5 36.c5 bxc5 37.dxc5 Nb5 38.Qd2 Qe4 (diagram 6)

“This move is not a good move by my opponent, it allows me to just pick up the a4 pawn and now if anything he has to prove the draw”.

39.Qxa5 Qf4+ 40.Kg1 Qc1+ 41.Qe1 Qxc5

“In the variation he chose, he allowed me to get a connected passer which is also bad for him. That being said I remember that we were both running out of time and we played the last moves a little bit faster to make time control on move 40”.

42.Nd2 (diagram 7) Qc3 43.Qd1 Qd3 44.Qe1 Nc3 45.a4 Ne2+ 46.Kh1 c5 47.a5 Nd4 48.Qe3 Qb5 49.Qc3 Qe2 50.Qe3 Qd1+ 51.Kh2 Qa1 52.Nc4 (diagram 8)

“Up until now all my moves were focused on pushing my pawns and transferring my knight to the queen side to help. However, I realized that he could win a pawn by force. Luckily for me I noticed that because he was so committed to gaining a pawn his king was actually quite weak and Nc4 comes with many threats such as Nd6 followed at some point by queen e7”.

52...Qa2 53.Nd6 Qxb3 (diagram 9)

“To my surprise after simply continuing with my only idea my 2300 FIDE rated opponent just completely collapsed and took the pawn. Maybe he thought it was free? After I took his Queen and he took it back with his knight I could tell he was very upset with himself”.

54.Qxb3 Nxb3 (diagram 10) 55.a6.

Result: 1–0.



DIAGRAM 5



DIAGRAM 6



DIAGRAM 7



DIAGRAM 8



DIAGRAM 9



DIAGRAM 10

“Once I pushed a6 threatening an unstoppable queen, after many faces and many sighs he resigned”.
“I had a great time in Berlin”.

Finn (DEN) finished the tournament 18th in the individual competition with 5 points and Samuel (CAN) finished 42nd with 4 points, one of the best performances for a Canadian Chess Player in a NATO Chess Championship.



by WO Erik Nilsson

NCC 1996 Viborg Denmark

Denmark first hosted an NCC from 18th to 22nd November 1996. Originally, the NCC was supposed to be held in Edinburgh, as presented by the UK in Gausdal, Norway (NCC 1995). On July 1, 1996, everyone received a notice from Gen. H. Stef-fers that the NCC in Edinburgh had been cancelled and we should expect that there would likely be no championship this year. Our leader, Chairman of the Danish Military Chess Committee Mr. Finn Stuhr, was concerned that the NATO Chess Championships would fall apart again after being restarted in 1994. Therefore, he decided to make one final attempt to see if Denmark could step in at the absolute last moment. He made a positive contact with his connections in the Defence Command, who referred him to the Chief of the Prince's Life Regiment, Colonel Jens Christian Lund. Preliminary work could begin, but many permissions still needed to be granted, and many decision-makers were on summer vacation. On August 31, 1996, at 11:55 AM, a fax was sent to Lt. Col. G. Ludden. "Denmark is ready to take on the task of hosting the NCC". Thereby the NATO Chess Championships in 1996 were saved at the last minute. No one from the Danish military chess team had any experience organising an NCC. Nevertheless, we were not poorly positioned as we had our Chairman Mr. Stuhr, who had considerable experience from international civilian chess tournaments held in Denmark, including the Nimzowitsch Memorial 1985. Mr. Stuhr was therefore appointed as the leader of the organising committee for the NCC tournament. The rest of us were just appointed as runners.

The Nimzowitsch Memorial tournament was a FIDE chess tournament in one of the highest tournament categories, held in memory of the Latvian-born chess master Aron Nimzowitsch (1886–1935), who lived in Denmark for 13 years and is known as Denmark's chess teacher. The tournament featured some of the best chess masters of the time: GM Bent Larsen, GM Curt Hansen, GM Murray Chandler, GM Simen Agdestein, GM Walter Browne, GM Ulf Andersson, GM Lubomir Ftacnik, GM Predrag Nikolic, GM Mikhail Tal, GM John Nunn, GM Nigel Short, and GM Rafael Vaganian, all prominent names among professional chess grandmasters.

 Quiz: One of the participants in the Nimzowitsch Memorial has participated in two of the NATO chess tournaments and won them both. Who was it? See the answer at the end of this chapter.

NCC 1996 Viborg was an event that garnered some local attention with several written articles in the local newspapers. Col. J.C. Lund was elected to the Viborg City Council in 1997 and in 2005 he was elected to the Danish Parliament. Unfortunately, he could not save his barracks in Viborg. In 2001, the barracks were closed due to reduced funding for defence, and the Prince Life Regiment was transferred to Skive Barracks, where it is still based today.



Skive Barracks; photo by IMCC

Due to the short notice of only 12 weeks before the start, several nations unfortunately were unable to participate. The total number of participants in the tournament was therefore modest, with only 38 individuals from just six countries. The winners of the national competition were: 1) Netherlands 2) Belgium 3) United Kingdom. The Norwegians and Germans were unable to attend, but Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, France, USA, and UK did, making it the closest and consequently most exciting tournament ever, in the absence of the 'big two'. The lead changed hands after every round, but going into the last, the Belgians had a 1.5 point lead. An incredible finale saw the Dutch catch up at 18/28, winning the title on tie-break, 103 points to 102! The UK finished third. So close for the Belgians, but as a consolation, they won the special sports event we had organised on Wednesday. As we say in Denmark, "you can't expect to win it all when you are a minor country!" NCC champion was: 1) Andy Hammond (UK), 2) Fabrice Wantiez (BEL), 3) Gert Jan Ludden (NEL).

NCC 2003 Høvelte Denmark

The next time Denmark offered to host an NCC was in 2003. This was certainly not a coincidence. Mr. Stuhr had from the very beginning recognised that this was a kind of anniversary tournament in NATO chess history. There had been 12 NATO Chess tournaments from 1978 to 1988 and in 1993, and with the 13th Official NCC, it marked 25 years since the first NATO chess tournament, held in Nørresundby, Denmark. This time, Mr. Stuhr was proactive, and he received a commitment to take on the hosting role from Col. Flemming Rytter, the head of The Royal Life Guards. The offer was valid for the period from September 8th to 13th, 2003, at Høvelte Barracks, which is just 25 km from the centre of Copenhagen (Cph Central Station). Major Christian Wiggers was appointed as the host coordinator. Many positive responses gave Mr. Stuhr the energy and motivation to go the extra mile.



The Royal Life Guards barracks in Høvelte covered in snow; photo by IMCC

The year before in Germany, then Team Captain Karl Koopmeiners recognised that the old team trophy was starting to look a bit worn. Mr. Stuhr promised to find a solution for a new trophy for the winning team. After some searching, sculptor Joseph Salomon was contacted, and together they quickly came up with the idea for “Canut the Great”, who was a Viking king and king of Denmark, Norway, and England. The trophy was donated to the NCC organisation. Six mini trophies were also produced for the winners of the 2003 team chess championship who were allowed to keep them forever.

The ideas were endless, and what could be more natural than inviting the people who had originally

created these NATO friendship chess tournaments, Ken Moore from the UK and Jan Eggum from Norway, who accepted the invitations and participated in the events. During one of the preparatory meetings, Mr. Stuhr mentioned that he had a dream of having the Danish musical star, Stig Rossen, perform with the Royal Life Guards Military Band – in Tivoli’s concert hall – to which Mj Christian Wiggers said, “You arrange Stig Rossen, and I’ll handle the arrangements for the band”. The next day, Mr. Stuhr called Mj C. Wiggers to ask how things were going with the band. “All right, all right, Mr. Stuhr, first you need to get confirmation from Stig Rossen”, to which Mr. Stuhr replied “it has already happened; the contract has been signed!”

This is how the big concert event in NATO chess management came to be. It is also the story of how Mr. Stuhr secured 1,500 paying guests associated with the Armed Forces, which was a crucial prerequisite for it all to be possible. During the actual event on Wednesday, the participants and the specially invited guests were transported by buses to the Langline (CPH). A guided walk of 5 km started from the world-famous sculpture; the Little Mermaid, continued through Amalienborg Palace Square (the king’s palace) and via Nyhavn, down through “Strøget” and Rådhuspladsen to Tivoli amusement park where an exclusive concert was held in Tivoli’s Concert Hall featuring selected scenes from the musical Chess, led by Denmark’s two biggest musical stars Mr. Stig Rossen and Ms. Trine Gadeberg. This was followed by dinner at one of Tivoli’s better restaurants. On the tournament’s gala night on Friday, the 25th anniversary chess championships/tournaments were concluded with a large fireworks display, which was in every way worthy of a 25-year anniversary.

The medals in the national competition were won by: 1) Germany 2) Poland 3) Norway. The individual medals were won by: 1) Harald Gorchgrevik (NOR) 2) Christian Seel (GER) 3) Saturnin Skindzier (POL)

The individual winner of the tournament, Mr. Harald Gorchgrevik (Norway), was kind enough to choose to comment on one of his chess games from the tournament (see part about Norway).

NCC 2010 Køge Denmark

Much had happened in Danish defence since the unofficial end of the Cold War with the dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1991. Several rounds of budget cuts had already been initiated leading up to

the year 2010. One of the measures taken was to outsource the operation of barracks to civilian providers, including accommodations, cleaning, and cafeterias, which meant that the garrison commander no longer had control over his own barracks. The prices for accommodation had increased significantly, from nothing to 25 Euros per night

Additionally, the prices at the cafeterias on the barracks had also risen sharply. It was therefore decided that NCC 2010 would be held outside military facilities in the town of Køge, specifically in the Theatre building, which is not far from the Køge chess club. However, the NATO chess championships were only part of the events, as they were incorporated into the Køge Chess Festival 2010. Who was the organiser behind all this? Of course, who else but Mr. Stuhr. I am providing an excerpt from an article in the local Køge newspaper. Considering that there aren't many besides Scandinavians who understand the Danish language, I have translated it.



The Guards Hussar Regiment at Harbor Square; photo by IMCC

Køge Chess Festival was created when Køge Chess Club was offered the responsibility for the practical arrangements of the NATO Military Chess Championship, which alternates between NATO countries. At the same time, Køge Chess Club was contemplating the idea of a larger grandmaster tournament and received an offer from the Danish Chess Union to hold a tournament in honour of the famous grandmaster Bent Larsen's 75th birthday. Alongside these two major events, Danish amateur chess players are invited to participate in the Admiral Niels Juels Chess Cup. Approximately 200 chess players will visit Køge from October 11th to October 22nd. In addition to the participating guests, the public will flock from near and far to experience this completely different chess event, unprecedented in Denmark. No less than three chess tournaments will take place simultaneously under the umbrella of the Køge Chess Festival.



From one general to another. A small lesson in chess moves; photo by IMCC

Opening at the Harbour Square

Now one might think that it's just about 200 chess nerds sitting at a chessboard every day for up to 10 hours, but that's not the case. The event reaches out to the outside world right from the opening, which takes place with pomp and grandeur at the Town Square in Køge, where military chess players are lined up, and the Horse Squadron of the Guard Hussars visits the city and adorns the opening ceremony. Køge's mayor, Marie Stærke, will give one of the opening speeches. Midweek, the city will also host a sightseeing tour, where guests will visit the historical sites for which Køge is known, as well as a visit to the harbour.

Information about the city's development will be a planned topic, just as Køge Mini-Town will be one of the memories to be recalled when returning home. The official NATO chess championships will take place for the 21st time this year. The hosting rotates among NATO countries, and this is only the third time that Denmark can welcome 120 military personnel and officials.

Another great chess event in Denmark, it would be the last one with Mr. Stuhr as the initiator. The Danish Defence has subsequently decided that any sport that does not have a direct relation to military disciplines will not receive any support, which makes it difficult for chess, which cannot gain access to be part of the Danish Military Sports Federation.

I have participated all three times the NCC has been held in Denmark. I can say with certainty that none of these tournaments would have happened without Mr. Stuhr and his optimistic spirit as well as his organisational abilities to create chess tournaments, even chess festivals. Mr. Finn Stuhr, you will always have a place on the team as the first awarded veteran position. Your commitment will always be remembered among those of us who have had the honour of being on your team.

NATO Chess Games

NATO – 27th (Round 7)

With a victory in the last round, Finn Pedersen from Denmark had a chance to become the NATO chess champion, but it was immediately a difficult task for Finn, as back at NCC in Køge 2010 he had also faced Fabrice Wantiez in the last round with the black pieces and he was completely outplayed in a Caro-Kann.

Fabrice, Wantiez (BEL), 2331 – Pedersen, Finn (DEN), 2249 (Caro-Kann) (B13)

1.e4 c6

Caro-Kann again, but not the biggest surprise. In a fateful moment, one must hold on to an opening that one believes in.

2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.Bd3 Nc6 5.c3 Nf6 6.h3

A new concept in 2016, white attempts to limit the white squared bishop, it does not emerge without a concession.

6.... g6 7.Nf3 Bg7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Re1 Bf5!?

In the end, a good way to solve the problem with the white-squared bishop. However, it has taken some time, and white has a slight advantage from this in terms of space and better positioning of the pieces.

10.Bf4 Bxd3, 11.Qxd3 e6, 12.Nbd2 a6, 13.a4 Qb6, 14.b4 Rfc8, 15.Nb3 a5, 16.b5 Nb8, 17.Nbd2 Qd8, 18.c4 dxc4, 19.Nxc4 Nd5, 20.Bg5 Qf8, 21.Bd2 b6, 22.Nfe5 Ra7, 23.Ne3 Nxe3, 24.Bxe3 Rac7, 25.Bf4 Rc3,

Here is a crucial moment. White should play Qe2 here, which subsequently allows for capturing back with the pawn instead of the bishop, maintaining the initiative.

26.Qe4?!

Much better was; 26.Qe2 Bxe5 27.dxe5 Nd7 28.Rad1 Nc5 29.Rd4 Ra3 30.Qd1 with a clear white advantage. Now the game gradually shifts to a black advantage.

26...Bxe5, 27.Bxe5 Nd7, 28.Red1 R3c4, 29.h4 Nxe5, 30.Qxe5 Rd8,

Black has managed to turn the game in its favour. White still has space, but too much has been exchanged and the weaknesses on a4 and d4 are starting to cause real problems for White. In these types of positions, Finn is very secure, Fabrice continues to fight, but he never really gets any chance to make a comeback.

31.Rac1 Qb4, 32.Rxc4 Qxc4, 33.h5 Qxa4, 34.Rd2 Qa1+, 35.Kh2 Qa3, 36.Qf6 Rd5, 37.g4 Qd6+, 38.f4 Qd8, 39.Qxd8+ Rxd8, 40.h6 Rc8, 41.d5 Rd8, 42.d6 Kf8, 43.Kg3 Ke8, 44.Kf3 Kd7, 45.Ke4 f6, 46.g5 fxg5, 47.fxg5 Rc8, 48.Ke5 Rf8, 49.Rc2 Rf5+, 50.Ke4 Rxb5, 51.Rc7+ Kxd6, 52.Rxh7 Rxg5, 53.Rh8 Rg4+, 54.Kf3 Rh4, 55.Rd8+ Ke5, 56.Rb8 Rxh6, 57.Rxb6 Kf6,

White finally resigns. Result: 0–1.

NATO-ch 28th (5)

Rosenkilde, Alexander, 2246 – Drabke, Lorenz Maximilian, 2446 (Slav Defence) (D16)

1.d4 d5, 2.c4 c6, 3.Nf3 Nf6, 4.Nc3 dxc4, 5.a4 Na6, Slav Defence Smyslov variation, not the most surprising since Lorenz has played this variation many times over the years.

6.e4 Bg4, 7.Bxc4 e6, 8.0-0 Nb4, 9.Be3 Be7, 10.a5 0-0, 11.Qb3 Bxf3, 12.gxf3 b5, 13.axb6 axb6, 14.Rac1

We had a position like this on the chessboard in the preparation the evening before round five. Instead of looking at many concrete variations that are likely to be forgotten after a good night's sleep, in my opinion, it has always been more important to focus on structures. In this position, which Stockfish considers completely equal, there is still a lot of play, but we believe it is much easier to play this position with the white pieces. White has a weakness of the king's position in the squares g2 and h3, but is compensated with a couple of bishops and a bit more space. However, the problem with the king's position is not particularly significant. Black no longer has the light-squared bishop, and with the manoeuvre Kh1, followed by Rg1-g2, the weakness is more optical than real.

14...Ra5, 15.Kh1 Rh5, 16.Rg1 c5, 17.Ne2 Nc6, 18.dxc5 Bxc5, 19.Nf4 Rh4, 20.Rg2 Na5, 21.Qc3 Nxc4, 22.Qxc4 Bxe3, 23.fxe3 e5, 24.Nd3

Better for black is to play Nh5, to make the rook useful again. The rook on h4 seems to have arrived too early for the attack.

24...Qd6?

It costs a pawn without compensation.

25.Qb5 h6, 26.Rc6 Qd7, 27.Rxb6 Qh3, 28.Rxf6 Kh8, 29.Rxf7 Ra8,

A final desperate attempt in time trouble, white's king position is secure enough.

30.Qxe5 Ra1+, 31.Rg1 Rg4, 32.fxg4 Resign.

Result: 1–0.

The defeat in this game prevented Lorenz from becoming the next NATO chess champion.

Very tragically, Lorenz died on August 13, 2018, in a traffic accident at just 33 years old. The Danish team will always remember Lorenz in our hearts as a very beloved young man who could talk to everyone at the NATO chess championships and displayed the epitome of good sportsmanship.



The answer to the quiz question:
GM Simen Agdestein (NOR)

Estonia began participating in the NATO Chess Championship in 2013. To date (including 2024), a total of 24 players have participated in both the main tournament and the blitz tournament.

The Estonian team has made maximum use of the strength of the reserve army, where every male citizen is obliged to complete military service. This national defence organisation occasionally brings chess grandmasters into service, who have also participated in the NATO chess tournament with the Estonian Defence Forces team – GM Aleksander Volodin in 2014 and GM Ottomar Ladvä in 2017. Every year, a tournament is organised at the Estonian Defence Forces Academy, during which the best players are selected to represent the country in the NATO competition.

The Estonian Defence Forces has been represented the most times by SGM Lauri Allmann – 9 times.

The highest individual places have been achieved by:

- ♠ 2013 Andres Karba (1st place in blitz chess)
- ♠ 2014 Aleksandr Volodin (1st place in the main tournament and 1st place in the blitz tournament)

In the team competition, the most successful tournament for Estonia was the 2017 tournament in Hungary, where they achieved 11th place.

An important milestone was 2022, when the competition was organised in Estonia, and 15 countries with a total of 94 players participated.

The importance of chess for the Estonian Defence Forces as a game that develops strategic thinking is illustrated by the fact that the competition held in Estonia was opened by LTG Martin Herem, the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Forces, who also participated in the blitz tournament himself.



LTG Martin Herem



by Ulrich Bohn based on notes by Karl Koopmeiners

In Germany chess is quite a popular and widespread sport. There are about 90,000 players organized under the national Chess Federation (Deutscher Schachbund, DSB) playing in over 2,500 clubs. Thereby Germany has one of the largest chess federations in the world.

In the German Military (Deutsche Bundeswehr) chess championships have been carried out biennially since 1976 in a format very similar to that of NATO. They are organised and supported by the German catholic welfare service for soldiers (Katholische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Soldatenbetreuung, KAS). In light of this, it is no wonder that Germany has played and still plays an important role in NATO Chess, which is by now looking back on an impressive history since its beginning in 1978.

The first informal NATO chess tournaments, which were organised and conducted annually by Denmark in the years from 1978 to 1988, were attended by only a few NATO nations. Germany not only took part in all of them but also won the individual and the team scores in most of them. At that time the Bundeswehr team consisted solely of active soldiers and was already then supported by the KAS. “Man of the first hour” was Wolfgang Berger, a chess arbiter working with the KAS, who led the team.

Three factors assured its strengths: Firstly, the number of personnel in the Bundeswehr was at about half a million and hence two and a half times higher than nowadays. Secondly, the compulsory military service assured the team a periodic personnel influx. And thirdly, for several years in cooperation with the Deutscher Schachbund chess was fostered in the Bundeswehr in the context of a sports promoting company. Consequently, strong players joined the team such as the later grand master Gerald Hertneck and several later international masters, like Dario Doncevic, Detlef Heinbuch or Bernd Kohlweyer.

When it came to reorganising NATO chess tournaments into official Championships with changing host nations the KAS and Wolfgang Berger were significantly involved. Consequently, the first NATO Chess Championship was conducted in 1989 in Hammelburg, Germany. As chairman Dr. Manfred Wörner, at that time the NATO Secretary-General, could be won. The visit of Point Alpha on the still

existing border between West and East Germany, and hence between NATO and Warsaw Pact, with its inhuman ‘death strip’ was a memorable part of the social programme. Only two weeks after the tournament the German Wall would tumble down, with the subsequent reunification of Germany and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact.

Germany also organised the Championships in 1992 in Münster and in 1999, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the NATO Chess Championship, in Stetten am kalten Markt. Therewith a ten year’s tradition was established with subsequent Championships held in Germany. In 2009 Hammelburg again was chosen as the venue – due to popular demand from former participants of the 1989 tournament. In this year Uwe Bönsch, a strong German grandmaster and coach of the German national team at that time, was a visitor to the Championship for several days, especially since two of his protégés were part of the team.

In 2019 the Championship was held in the capital of the reunified Germany, in Berlin. This fact and the large number of 114 participants of 17 nations, at that time a record for participation, make it the most important Championship hosted in Germany so far.

Wolfgang Berger not only was captain of the German team until 1995, he also, even until 2009, served as its representative and occasionally as arbiter of the tournaments, even when they were not held in Germany.

In 1997 Karl Koopmeiners took over the role as team captain and subsequently also as its representative. Furthermore, he supported and latterly conducted, the organisation of the subsequent tournaments held in Germany, foremost the one held in Berlin. Since 2018 the role of the team representative was firstly taken over by Guido Schott and, lately by Ulrich Bohn.



Karl Koopmeiners at the 16th Championship 2005 in Kołobrzeg, Poland

Concerning sportive aspects, Germany was most successful in the chess tournaments from 1978 to 1988 and in the subsequent Chess Championships until the middle of the first decade of the millennium. In that period, except for the years 1994 to 1996, of which Germany didn't attend the one in 1996, Germany continuously played a dominant role and was able to win the team competition. The highest team victory was scored in 1989 in Hammelburg, where Germany was able to win with an impressive team score of 24 points, all first four places seized by German players. Due to the aforementioned circumstances also in the first years of the Championships very strong players joined the team from time to time amongst them the following later grandmasters; Philipp Schlosser, Michael Hoffmann, Karsten Müller, Jan Gustafsson, Fabian Döttling and Elisabeth Pähtz. Due to strong fluctuations of the team members all of them only took part in at most two Championships.

Since the year 2000, active civilians were also allowed by the KAS to take part in the German team, which became more stable around 2005, and especially after 2011 with the suspension of the compulsory military service.

With this development and also with the other nations, like Türkiye, Poland and, lately, Greece, becoming stronger, the German dominance diminished. Starting from 2008 and even more so from 2016 Germany had to concede the victory of the team competition more and more often to these teams, most recently in 2024 on the occasion of the 34th Championship in Greece where the host nation reached an impressive score.

Even when Germany won the team competitions henceforth, the outcome used to be very narrow as in 2012 in Brest, France, when Germany tied with Poland and France, and just won due to tiebreak or in 2016 in Shrivenham, United Kingdom, when the German team was less lucky and – tying with Poland and Denmark due to tiebreak – got second just behind the victorious Polish team.

The worst result so far was the fourth place in 2022 in Estonia, behind the teams of Greece, Poland and the USA. Still, in the last few years Germany was able to celebrate team victories in 2017, 2019 and 2023.

Overall, the German results in the 34 NATO Chess Championships are still impressive. Germany was able to win the individual competition 18 times and the team competition even 24 times.

The most successful German players of the time period after the year 2000, with several participations and who would win the individual competition at least once, are presented further in the text.



The German team (from left to right 1. row Oliver Nill, Lorenz Drabke, Michael Cohnen, 2. row Mark Helbig, Guido Schott, Franz Sirch, 3. row Ulrich Bohn, Karl Koopmeiners) celebrating the team victory at the 23rd Championship 2012 in Brest, France; photo by IMCC



The German team (from left to right Tobias Jacob, Robert Stein, Marko Sauer, Ulrich Bohn, Hans-Christoph Andersen, Wilhelm Jauk, Mark Helbig, Guido Schott, Greek Official, Chairman IMCC Sławomir Kędzierski, Honorary Chairman IMCC Hendrik Steffers) winning the team competition of the 33rd Championship in 2023 in Portorož, Slovenia; photo by IMCC

Mark Helbig won the individual championship once and also finished second once and third once. In total he finished in the top 10 15 times. With 20 participations starting from the year 2000 until today he is the most consistent of the stronger players in the team.



FM Mark Helbig with GM Raymond Keene at the Championship 27th 2016 in Shrivenham, England; photo by IMCC

Also very successful was IM Andreas Schenk. Within only six participations he was able to win the contest three times, finish second twice and third once.

Scoring even more victories and being the most successful player of the NATO Chess Championships overall was IM Lorenz Drabke. He won the individual championship four times, gained second place once and third place twice in 13 participations. With this impressive score Lorenz was a key player for the success of the German team in the years from 2004 till 2018. Tragically Lorenz died in 2018 in a car accident only a couple of months after the Championship in Lubbock, Texas, USA. With Lorenz the German team lost its strongest player at that time and a great sportsman.

More recently, Germany would provide the winner of the individual championship with Elijah Everett in 2019 in Berlin and FM Robert Stein in 2023 in Slovenia. The victory of Elijah not only was quite impressive, winning the tournament by a full point ahead of the field, but was also decisive for Germany winning the team competition by just half a point ahead of Poland. This victory one year after the bitter loss of Lorenz Drabke was very special and very important for the German team. Elijah's win in the last round is featured in one of the two games below.

The other game shows Robert's last round win securing him first place in the individual championship in Portorož, Slovenia, 2023. Since Robert has

just started his career, as a professional in the Bundeswehr and as a chess player, the German team has high hopes in Robert for the future.



FM Robert Stein in his last round game in the 33rd Championship 2023 in Portorož, Slovenia, on his way to winning the individual competition; photo by IMCC

Besides the competition in the tournaments the German team often took the opportunity to get to know the country and to strengthen the team spirit. Most remarkable were the tour in 2014 in the province of Quebec, Canada (see the team photo), and the trip from Las Vegas to Lubbock, Texas, where the Championship took place in 2018.



IM Lorenz Drabke at the 23rd Championship 2012 in Quebec City, Canada, where he tied for first place in the individual competition; photo by IMCC



The German team (from left to right 1. row Hans-Christoph Andersen, Lorenz Drabke, Karl Koopmeiners, 2. row Oliver Nill, Mark Helbig, Ulrich Bohn) on its trip in the province of Quebec, Canada, in 2014 right before the 25th Championship; photo by IMCC

33rd NATO Chess Championship (7), Portorož, Slovenia

Stein, Robert, 2419 – Delfino, Luigi, 2240

by Robert Stein

IM Pavlidis, IM Koksai and myself were tied for 1st place before the last round. Therefore, I needed to win my game in order to preserve my chances of winning the tournament.

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Nge2 This is a venomous sideline against the Kings Indian even though it went out of fashion years ago. Great players like Carlsen, Anand and Caruana used it in the past **5...0-0 6.Ng3 Na6** [6...e5] [6...c5] **7.Be2 c5 8.d5 Nc7 9.0-0** [9.a4 +/-] **9...a6!?** This move is too slow. Black needs to play more directly, freeing his position and gaining access to good squares for his pieces.

[9...b5 10.cxb5 a6 11.bxa6 Bxa6 12.Rb1+/- Black has typical compensation as in the Benko-Gambit.]

10.a4 +/- Black is cramped **Nd7 11.Bg5 Rb8 12.a5** [12.Qd2 b6 13.Rae1 Kh8 14.h4 White is much better on both flanks with good attacking chances on the kingside.]

12...b5 13.axb6 Rxb6 14.Qd2 Nf6 15.h3 restricts black's pieces further. It is hard to find good moves for black

[15.e5! dxe5 16.Rfd1! Rb8 17.Nge4 Nxe4 18.Nxe4 f6 19.Be3 f5 20.Nc3 Qd6 21.Na4 Ne8 22.Bxc5 Qf6 23.f3+/-]

15...e5 16.Na2 preparing to break black's structure mechanically with b4 **16...Qe8 17.b4** [17.Qa5 Nd7 18.b4 +/-] **17...cxb4 18.Nxb4 Nd7 19.Nc6**

[19.Rfbl White brings his last piece in the game. Even though the material is balanced, Stockfish shows a decisive advantage for White. Nc5 20.Nd3 Rxb1+ 21.Rxb1 h6 22.Be3 Nxd3 23.Bxd3+- This line illustrates that Black is lost, as his queenside is going to fall sooner or later.]

19...Nc5 20.Rab1 Rxb1

[20...Rxc6 21.dxc6 Qxc6 22.Be7 N7e6 23.Qxd6! (23. Bxf8 Bxf8 24.Rb2 Nd4+- White is much better in this position but there is still some technique required. The coordination of black's pieces seems not to be easy to break.)]

21.Rxb1 f6 22.Be3 Rf7 23.Bxc5 dxc5 24.Rb8 (diagram)

Black resigned. This win secured me first place in the 33rd NATO Chess Championship which took place in Portorož (Slovenia) and is therefore very special to me.

Result: 1-0.



DIAGRAM

30th NATO Chess Championship (7), Berlin, Germany

**Everett, Elijah, 2187 –
Pavlidis, Anastasios, 2338**

by U. Bohn based on notes by E. Everett

In the last round of the NATO Chess Championship 2019 in Berlin the German Elijah Everett had to play the first seed of the field, IM Anastasios Pavlidis from Greece. With his win in this game Elijah not only finished first in the individual championship but also secured the victory of Germany in the team competition. Irony of fate, the year before the same opponents met in the last round of the Championship in Lubbock (USA). At that time the latter secured the individual title with a hard-fought draw.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 d6 6.N1c3 a6 7.Na3 b5 8.Nd5 Black decides to side step the Sveshnikov variation **8... Nf6 9.c4 Nd4 10.Be3 Nxd5 11.cxd5 Be7 12.Bd3 0-0 13.0-0 Bd7 14.Qd2 Rc8 15.Rac1 Qb6?** (diagram 1)

Black had to make a difficult decision. Placing the queen in the hidden attack by the Be3 and pinning the Nd4 looks a bit awkward. The Nd4 respectively after its exchange a black pawn on d4 remains a liability for Black.



DIAGRAM 1

[Better was sacrificing a pawn for the pair of bishops 15...Rxc1 16.Rxc1 16.f5 17.Bxd4 exd4 18.exf5 Bxf5 19.Bxf5 Rxf5 20.Qxd4 Bg5 with sufficient compensation: the black pieces are active whereas the white knight is badly placed and the pawn on d5 tends to be weak.]

16.Nc2 Bf6 17.f3 a5 18.Nxd4 exd4 19.Bf2 g6 20.b4?! opening the a file for Black with a white pawn on a2 gives Black chances of counter play [better is 20.a3]

20...axb4 21.Qxb4 Ra8 22.Rc2 Ra4 23.Qb1 Rb8= Due to his active play Black has equalised **24.Rb2 Qa6 25.f4 Ra3 26.Re1 Qc8 27.e5 Qc3?!**

[After this White keeps a strong pawn on e5 which can eventually be pushed to e6.

Here Black missed the following opportunity to keep the balance. 27...dxe5 28.fxe5 Bxe5! 29.Rxe5 Rxd3 30.Qxd3 Qc1+ 31.Re1 Qxb2 32.Qxd4 Qxd4 33.Bxd4=]

28.Rb3 Rxb3 29.Qxb3 dxe5 30.fxe5 Bg7 31.e6 fxe6 32.dxe6 Qxb3 33.axb3 Be8 (diagram 2)

In time trouble this complicated end game is very difficult to handle for both sides, though white has an easier task as his pieces are more active and the black pawn on d4 is a weakness. **34.Rc1 Rb6 35.Rc8 Kf8** [35...Rxe6? loses for Black in view of 36.Bxb5 Kf8 37.Kf1 and after the exchange on e8 the black pawn on d4 will fall with just the two black squared bishops remaining.]

36.Kf1 Bf6?

[Better is 36...Be5 with the idea of driving away the disturbing white rook with...

Rb8 would have been better.]

37.Be1! Activating the bishop. Now, Black is getting into trouble. **37...Be7 38.Ba5?** trying to exchange the e6 pawn for the b5 pawn and getting rid of the rooks and the light squared Bishop. But here this doesn't work as in the variation after 35...Rxe6? before.

[Better is 38.Bd2 threatening Bh6+ and postponing the aforementioned idea.] **38...Rxe6 39.Bxb5 Bd6 40.Bd2?!**

[The original idea of 40.Rxe8+? Rxe8 41.Bxe8 Kxe8 and winning the

d4 pawn doesn't work because the white pawn on h2 is now hanging, so that White has to lose a tempo.]

[The text move keeps an advantage for White but better would have been to take care of the h-pawn first. 40.h3]

40...Re4?

[Better is 40...Re5! attacking the white Bishop on b5 and thus forcing a decision by White. Exchanging the rooks and the bishops on e8 would lead to a drawn ending, again because of the h-pawn being en prise.]

41.g3 White has gained a tempo to protect the h-pawn. **41...Kf7 42.Rxe8 Rxe8 43.Bxe8+ Kxe8 44.Ke2 Ke7 45.Kd3 Bc5** (diagram 3) Now the pawn on d4 is doomed to fall. The resulting ending with same coloured bishops is winning for White. But he still has to be careful. He should avoid pawn exchanges on the king-side.



DIAGRAM 2



DIAGRAM 3

46.Kc4?! Making his task more difficult. The white king should rather head for the king side to avoid any black threats on that side of the board.

[Most precise would have been 46.b4 Bb6 47.Bf4 Ke6 48.Ke4+- depriving the black king of the square f5. Black is in zugzwang. If his king moves, Bf4-e5 picks up the pawn d4. And 48...Ba7 49.Bc7 doesn't help either]

46...Ba7 47.Kd5 Kf6 Now White should prevent ...Kf5. **48.g4?!** This move helps Black since the exchange of pawns is now easier to achieve for him. [Better is 48.Ke4! and White reaches a position similar to that in the variation after 46.b4] **48...h5! 49.h3 hxg4 50.hxg4 Ke7 51.Bc1 Kd7 52.Bb2 d3 53.Bc1 Bf2 54.Bd2 Kc7 55.Kc4**

[55.Ke6 winning the pawn on g6 isn't enough since the black pawn on d3 is too dangerous

Kc6 56.g5 Kc5 57.Kf6 Kd4 58.Kxg6 Be3=]

55...Kc6 56.Kxd3 Kb5?+-

the final decisive mistake, probably in time trouble again and after nearly five hours of hard work. Now the black pawn on g6 will also fall while the white pawn b3 can't be attacked.

[After 56...Kd5!

Black has good chances to hold the game, though he still needs to be very precise.

Now it's difficult for the white king to advance. If White uses his b-pawn to deflect the Black king in order to win the black g-pawn Black will be able to hold the resulting ending. Just to illustrate the best White can reach if Black plays precisely 57.b4 Bd4 58.Be3 Be5 59.b5 Bc7 60.b6 Be5 the black idea now is to put his king on c6 and prepare the advance... g5 protecting this pawn with his bishop. 61.Bg5 Kc6 the black pieces are optimally placed with the squares d5, e5 and f5 being inaccessible to the white king. 62.Bd8 Bf4 63.Ke4 g5 not necessarily the best move but just to illustrate that the best White can reach is also drawn. 64.Kf5 Be3!. Now when White takes on g6 Black can capture on b6 with his Bishop not losing a tempo with his king which is needed on the king side. 65.Ke5 Kb7 even with the king on b7 Black can hold the position 66.Ke4 Bd2 67.Kf5 Be3!. When White captures the g-pawn Black must be able to take the white pawn on b6. 68.Bxg5 Bxb6 (diagram 5)

This is the best position White can reach and thus the key position which Black is able to hold with precise play!

White has to prevent the black bishop from being sacrificed for the remaining g-pawn. Hence the white king has to stay on f5 which allows the black king to get to the king side in time. 69.Bf4 Bd8 70.Be5 Kc6 71.Bf6 Ba5 72.g5 Kd7 (72...Bd2?? 73.g6 Bh6 74.Bg5 Bg7 75.Ke6 and White wins) 73.g6 Ke8 74.Ke6 Kf8= The black king reaches the g8 square.]



DIAGRAM 4

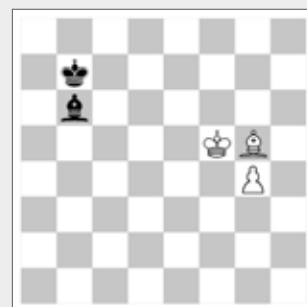


DIAGRAM 5

Now after 56...Kb5? the white win is quite easy. 57.Ke4 Bg3 58.Kd5 g5 59.Ke4 Kc5 60.Kf5 Kd5 61.Bxg5 Be1 62.Be7 Kc6 63.Ke6 Bd2 64.g5 Kb5 65.g6 Bh6 66.Kf7.

Result: 1–0.

After a great fight White got rewarded for his stamina. In fact, the win wasn't even necessary for first place in the individual competition because with this victory Elijah was a full point clear of the field. So a draw would have sufficed. But the win was crucial for the German team to win the team competition by just half a point.



by Anastasios Pavlidis and Petros Rachmanidis

For the first time in the history of the event, the representative Hellenic Chess Team of the Armed Forces participated in the 28th NATO Chess Championship held in Budapest, Hungary, from March 27 to March 31, 2017. The mission, which took part in the competition with the support and assistance of the Supreme Sports Council of Hellenic Armed Forces consisted of: Captain Georgios Tzamakos as the head of the mission, Warrant Officer Spyros Ntalampiras as team leader, and athletes Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Michos, Flight Captain Andreas Nikomanis, Cadet Lieutenant Anastasios Pavlidis, and Constable Aikaterini Pavlidou. The Greek mission achieved an impressive 4th place in the team ranking of the championship with 18.5 points (with 16 member states and 105 chess players participating). Anastasios Pavlidis secured 3rd place in the individual ranking of the tournament, with 5.5 points from 7 games. His performance was excellent in blitz, and with the best score on the second board, earning 9 points from 11 games, he was awarded the gold medal.

In the 29th NATO Chess Championship held in Lubbock, Texas, USA, from June 4 to June 8, 2018, the Greek mission consisted of Warrant Officer Spyros Ntalampiras as player-leader, and athletes Flight Captain Andreas Nikomanis, Cadet Lieutenant Anastasios Pavlidis, Warrant Officer Konstantinos Mouroutis, and Constable Aikaterini Pavlidou. The Greek mission achieved two significant successes at both individual and team levels in its second participation. In the team standings, it secured 3rd place with 19.5 points (with 10 member states and 67 chess players participating). The second major success came at the individual level, as once again, International Master (IM) Anastasios Pavlidis won 1st place in the individual ranking of the tournament, remaining unbeaten with 6 points, achieving 5 victories and 2 draws. The performance was also exceptional for the only woman in the tournament, Woman International Master (WIM) and member of the Women's National Team, Aikaterini Pavlidou, who finished 4th with 5 points.

The 30th NATO Chess Championship was held in Berlin, Germany, from September 16 to 20, 2019. The Greek mission consisted of Flight Captain Andreas Nikomanis as athlete-head of the mission, Warrant Officer Spyros Ntalampiras as athlete-coach,

and athletes Second Lieutenant Alexandros Papasimakopoulos, Cadet Lieutenant Anastasios Pavlidis, Warrant Officer Konstantinos Mouroutis, and Constable Aikaterini Pavlidou. The Greek mission achieved two distinctions at the team level in its third consecutive participation in the NATO Championship, confirming the high chess level of the country among its uniformed personnel and establishing its position in the international military chess arena. In the team standings, it secured 3rd place in the final ranking of the championship with 19 points (with 16 member states and 114 chess players participating). The second major success came in the Team Blitz Championship, where the total time for each game was 5 minutes per player. The Greek team, consisting of Papasimakopoulos A., Pavlidis A., Mouroutis K., and Pavlidou A., finished the championship unbeaten, with 7 wins and 2 draws in 9 matches, taking 1st place and earning the gold medal.

After a mandatory postponement in 2020 due to COVID-19, the 31st NATO Chess Championship took place from October 11 to 15, 2021, in Blankenberge, Belgium. The Greek mission included Warrant Officer Spyros Ntalampiras as head of the mission and athletes Flight Captain Andreas Nikomanis, Second Lieutenant Alexandros Papasimakopoulos, Second Lieutenant Anastasios Pavlidis, Warrant Officer Konstantinos Mouroutis, and Sergeant Aikaterini Pavlidou. The national team achieved 2nd place in the overall ranking of the championship with 20.5 points (with 15 member states and 99 chess players participating). At the individual level, Alexandros Papasimakopoulos tied for places 2–6 and ultimately finished 4th with 5.5 points on tiebreak. The second major success came in the individual blitz tournament with 11 rounds held after the championship, where Papasimakopoulos finished with an impressive score of 10.5 points from 11 games, comfortably taking 1st place among 83 participating players, 2 whole points ahead of all the other competitors.

The Greek mission had a triumphant performance at the 32nd NATO Chess Championship held in Tartu, Estonia, from June 27 to July 1, 2022. The team was the same as in the previous two championships and consisted of Second Lieutenant Spyros Ntalampiras as head of the mission and athletes Flight Captain Andreas Nikomanis,

Second Lieutenant Alexandros Papasimakopoulos, Second Lieutenant Anastasios Pavlidis, Warrant Officer Konstantinos Mouroutis, and Sergeant Aikaterini Pavlidou. In its fifth participation, the Greek mission achieved the highest possible distinction at both team and individual levels, confirming the high chess level of the country among its uniformed personnel. Specifically, in the team standings, it secured 1st place in the championship with 23 points (with 15 member states and 94 chess players participating). Alexandros Papasimakopoulos was the individual champion of the tournament with 6.5/7 points, while another Greek, Anastasios Pavlidis, took 2nd place with 6/7 points. Aikaterini Pavlidou, with 5.5 points, finished 5th in a tie for 3rd to 5th places. The third major success came in the individual blitz tournament with 11 rounds, with a time of 3' + 2" for the entire game. Alexandros Papasimakopoulos finished with an impressive score of 9.5 out of 11 and took 1st place, while Aikaterini Pavlidou, with 8 points, secured 3rd place. Finally, it is worth noting that the game of the 5th round between Greek player Anastasios Pavlidis and his American opponent Eigen Wang was awarded as the best game of the tournament.

At the 33rd NATO Chess Championship, held from September 3 to 9, 2023, in Portorož, Slovenia, the Chess Team of the Greek Armed Forces participated with Lieutenant Commander Petros Kapsomenakis as head of the mission, and athletes Lieutenant Ioannis Teteplidis, Lieutenant Anastasios Pavlidis, Warrant Officer Konstantinos Mouroutis, and Sergeant Aikaterini Pavlidou. The national team achieved 2nd place in the overall ranking

of the championship with 20 points (with 17 member states and 116 chess players participating). Anastasios Pavlidis also recorded a significant personal success, securing 2nd place in the individual ranking with 6 points from 7 games (tied with the 1st and 3rd places).

Greece had the honour and joy of hosting the 34th NATO Chess Championship, which took place from October 20 to 26, 2024, on the beautiful island of Rhodes. The National Chess Team of the Hellenic Armed Forces participated with Colonel Angelos Dimanoudis as the head of the mission, Lieutenant Commander Petros Kapsomenakis as the team leader, Warrant Officer Konstantinos Mouroutis as the coach, and athletes Lieutenant Alexandros Papasimakopoulos, Lieutenant Ioannis Teteplidis, Lieutenant Anastasios Pavlidis, Sergeant Aikaterini Pavlidou, soldier Dimitrios Alexakis and soldier Petros Rachmanidis. The representative national team managed to achieve many distinctions, both at the team and individual levels. Specifically, in the team ranking, they emerged as champions with 24 points (with 17 member states and 118 chess players participating). In the individual championship, Dimitrios Alexakis was crowned champion with 6.5 points in 7 games, while Alexandros Papasimakopoulos took second place with 6 points, the same score as Anastasios Pavlidis, who ranked fourth on tiebreak. Petros Rachmanidis secured sixth place with 5.5 points. The top female player was Aikaterini Pavlidou, who finished with 5 points. Meanwhile, in the parallel blitz event, Alexandros Papasimakopoulos was the champion with 10.5 points in 11 games, followed by Dimitrios Alexandakis with 9.5 points.

Nato Chess Championship, 31.10.2024

Pedersen, Fin, 2282 –

Rahmanidis, Petros, 2219 (A48)

by Petros Rahmanidis

[This is a nice game I played against a strong opponent, FM Pederssen Fin.]

1.Nf3 Nf6 2.d4 g6 3.Bf4 [The London System]

3...Bg7 4.e3 0–0 5.Nbd2 [There are a lot of move orders in this position.]

[5.h3 Is maybe the most flexible, keeping all the options open with the knight on b1. For example: 5...d6 6.c3 Nc6 7.Be2 Nd7 8.0–0 e5 9.Bh2 f5 10.b4]

5...d6 6.h3 Nfd7!? [This is a very interesting and fighting system for Black, who is trying to get some

sort of Kings Indian style play, with e5,f5 and maybe even g5 combined!]

[6...Nbd7 7.Be2 Qe8 8.c3 e5 Is the other option, but in this position the space-gaining move f5 is hard to accomplish 9.Bh2 Qe7 10.0–0÷]

7.c3 e5 8.dxe5 [8.Bh2 Keeping the tension in the centre was an alternative]

8...dxe5 9.Bg5

[My opponent does not want to keep the bishop stuck on h2]

9...Qe8 10.e4 h6 11.Be3 (diagram 1) [Here I took some time to consider my options]



DIAGRAM 1

11...f5!? [After quite some thought I went for the most direct move, fighting for the centre, at the cost of slightly weakening my king]

[11...a5!? Looked natural, in order to stop b4 from White 12.Bc4 This annoyed me, because it made it hard for me to push f5, for example: 12...Kh7 (12...Qe7?! Is a decent alternative, aiming for positional play, and development) 13.h4!? f5? 14.Ng5+!±]

12.Nb3 [An interesting move, protecting against the threat of f4 from Black]

12...f4 [Is a good move, but I regretted this move during the game.]

[12...fxe4?! Is not a great move, White will get a nice outpost on e4. 13.Nfd2 Nf6 14.Nc5.; 12...Kh8!? Keeping the tension in the centre maybe posed more difficult practical problems for White. After all White is not threatening to take on f5 and give Black a massive centre after gxf5.]

13.Bc5! [Only move in my opinion, giving up the Bishop pair]

[13.Bd2 White lacks space in this position; 13.Bcl]

13...Nxc5 14.Nxc5 Kh8 [Prophylaxis]

15.Bc4 Qe7 16.Nd3 a5 [Natural space gaining move, stopping b4. I tried to keep my options flexible with my pieces on the Queenside]

17.Qe2 [White also stays flexible with his king, he is hinting that he might castle Queenside in order to avoid any flank attack on the kingside]

17...Nd7 18.a3 Nb6 19.Ba2 Bd7 (diagram 2)

[19...c5! Is a really nice positional move, gaining even more space. I considered it, but I thought it might be risky to weaken the d5 square. 20.0-0?

a) 20.Nd2 Bd7 Is a better version of what was played in the game;

b) 20.c4 Closes the Bishop and weakens the d4 square 20...Nd7! (20...a4!);

c) 20.0-0-0?! c4 21.Nde1 Be6 22.Nc2 Rac8 And I gained some time with the attack on the Queenside; 20...c4 21.Ncl Be6µ]

20.0-0-0?! [This is a very natural move, which I considered to be the best in the game. In fact White's position is very difficult now as he has no attack on Black's kingside and the placement of his pieces is pretty awkward.]

[20.Rcl! Prophylactic move against Bb5, or c5-c4 ideas from Black was White's best bet]

20...Ba4 [Gaining a tempo and asking a question about the placement of White's Rook]

21.Rd2 [21.Rdgl Was the alternative 21...Rad8 Is the correct move (21...Bb5? 22.Nxf4! (22.Ndxe5? Qxe5 23.Nxe5 Bxe2 24.Nxg6+ Kh7 25.Nxf8+ Rx-f8µ) 22...Bxe2 (22...exf4 23.Qxb5±) 23.Nxg6+ Kh7 24.Nxe7+~) 22.g3 Bb5! Now that the knight on f3 is unprotected 23.Nxf4 (23.Ndxe5 Qxe5 24.Nxe5 Bxe2 25.Nxg6+ Kh7 26.Nxf8+ Rxf8µ Black is much better with the pair of bishops) 23...Bxe2 24.Nxg6+ Kh7 25.Nxe7 Bxf3~+]

21...Rad8 [21...c5!? Is also a decent move, trying for c4; 21...Bb5? 22.Ndxe5! Bxe2 23.Nxg6+ Kh7 24.Nxe7+~]

22.Kb1!? [22.Nde1 Although it seems a bit passive, its maybe the best move for White in this position, trying to exchange a pair of rooks in the d-file to decrease the pressure 22...Rxd2 23.Nxd2 Rd8 24.Nef3 Qe8!~]

22...Bb5! [A nice move, setting a deep trap to White...]



DIAGRAM 2

23.Ndxe5?? [23.Rhd1 Is probably the best, but after. 23...Rd6 Black is much better]

23...Bxe2 24.Nxg6+ Kh7 25.Nxe7 Bxf3 [Threatening the rook on d2]

26.Rxd8 Bxe4+ [This intermediate move is the point behind Bb5!]

27.Ka1 Rxd8~+ 28.Re1 Bc2 29.Rcl Bf6 [29...Rd1 I would like to play, in order to simplify, but 30.Rxd1 Bxd1 31.Bb1+ Kh8 32.Ng6+ Kg8 33.Ba2+ Kh7 34.Bb1 Was annoying me]

30.Ng8 [At this point I got really lucky. I completely forgot about this move...]

30...Bg5 [But thankfully, I have this resource!]

31.h4 [31.Rxc2 Rd1+ 32.Bb1 Kxg8~+]

31...Bxh4 32.g3 fxc3 33.fxc3 Bg5 (diagram 3) [It's a matter of technique now.]

[33...Bxg3? Avoiding this trap... 34.Rxc2 Rd1+ 35.Bb1 Kxg8 36.Rg2!]

34.Rxc2 Rd1+ 35.Bb1 Kxg8 36.Rf2 Kg7 37.Ka2 Rd2 38.Rf3 Nc4 39.Be4 Rxb2+ 40.Ka1 Rb3 41.Rd3 Rxa3+ 42.Kb1 Nd2+ 43.Kb2 Rb3+ 44.Kc2 Nxe4

Result: 0–1.



DIAGRAM 3

NATO-ch 32nd Tartu (5), 30.06.2022

Wang, Eigen, 2293 –

Pavlidis, Anastasios, 2296 (D30)

by Anastasios Pavlidis

1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 e6 3.c4 h6 4.e3 Nf6 5.Nbd2 c5 6.dxc5 Bxc5 7.a3 0–0 8.Be2 Re8 9.0–0 e5 [Probably 9...a5 is more accurate, in order to equalise the position.]

10.b4 Bd6 11.Bb2 a5 [11...e4 12.Nd4 Nc6]

12.cxd5 e4 13.Nd4 axb4 14.Nc4 Bf8 15.d6! Bd7 16.axb4 Rxa1 17.Qxa1 b5 18.Na5 (diagram 1) [18. Na3! Bxd6]



DIAGRAM 1

18...Bxd6 19.Rd1?! [White had to play 19.Nb7!? Bxh2+ 20.Kxh2 Qc7+ 21.Kg1 Qxb7 22.Rc1; or 19.Nxb5 Bxb4 20.Nb3 with a preferable position for White.]

19...Ng4! 20.h3? [20.g3 Qg5 21.Nf5! Qxf5 (21... Nxf2 22.Rxd6 Nh3+ 23.Kg2 Qxf5 (23...Bxf5 24.Rd5) 24.Qf1 Qxf1+=) 22.Bxg4 Qxg4 23.Rxd6 Be6 (23... Rc8) ; 20.Bxg4 Bxg4 21.Nb7 Bxh2+ 22.Kxh2 Qc7+ 23.Kg1 Bxd1 (23...Qxb7 24.Rc1) 24.Nxb5 Qxb7 25.Nd6 Qxb4 26.Nxe8 Qe1+ 27.Kh2 Qxf2 28.Bxg7 Qh4+ 29.Kg1 Qe1+ 30.Kh2 Qh4+=]

20...Nxf2! 21.Kxf2 Qh4+ 22.Kf1 Bg3? [22... Bxh3! 23.Nf5! (23.gxh3 Qxh3+ 24.Ke1 (24.Kg1 Bh2+ 25.Kf2 (25.Kh1 Bf4+ 26.Kg1 Bxe3#) 25...Qg3+ 26.Kf1 Qg1#) 24...Qxe3 25.Rc1 Bxb4+ 26.Bc3 Qg1+ 27.Bf1 Qxd4 28.Bxb4 Qxb4+ 29.Qc3 Qe7–+) 23... Bxg2+ 24.Kxg2 Qg5+ 25.Kf1 Qxf5+ 26.Ke1 Qg5! 27.Rxd6 (27.Bxg7 Rd8!–+) 27...Qg3+ 28.Kf1 Qxd6 29.Bxg7 Qh2!#]

23.Bxb5? (diagram 2) [23.Nf5! Bxf5 24.Rd5! Qg5 (24...Be6? 25.Rh5 Qe7 26.Bxg7,) 25.Bxg7 Qxg7 26.Qxg7+ Kxg7 27.Rxf5 Re5 28.Rxe5 Bxe5 29.Bxb5 Bd6=]



DIAGRAM 2

23...Qf6+ 24.Kg1?! [24.Nf3 Qf5! (24...Bxb5+ 25.Kg1 Qf5) 25.Bd3 (25.Bxd7 Nxd7) 25...Bb5!–+]

24...Qf2+ 25.Kh1 Bxh3 26.Rg1 [26.gxh3 Qh2#]

26...Re5! 27.Be2 Rg5! 28.Qf1 Bg4! 29.Bxg4 [29. Qxf2 Rh5#]

29...Rxg4 30.Nf5 [30.Qxf2 Rh4#]

30...Rg5! 31.Qd1 [31.Nxg3 Rh5+ 32.Nxh5 Qh4#; 31.Nxg7 Qxb2–+]

31...Qxf5

Result: 0–1.

by Capt. Ermes “Kevin” Cavinato based on notes by Capt. (ret.) Enzo Tommasini

When the idea to write this jubilee book was conceived, there was no doubt about the Italian military subject matter expert to give the honoured task of presenting the history of our participation in this annual event since 1989. No figure is more pivotal in Italian military chess history than Captain Enzo Tommasini of the ITA Coast Guard, who attended 21 editions as our Nation’s representative, a true record of participation that will likely never be beaten! From the beginning he has been a key driving element behind Italy’s participation in 70% of all NATO chess tournaments, working tirelessly to guarantee Italian contribution on the NATO stage.

In Italy chess is not a very popular sport as for a long time in the past it was even not considered a sport at all; only recently has it been recognised as an associated sport in the CONI organization (Italian National Olympic Committee).

In Italy there are about 7,300 registered chess players organised under 350 clubs. In 1972 during the “challenge of the century” match between Fischer and Spassky, in our country there was only one G.M., Sergio Mariotti, while nowadays there are about ten.

With regards to military personnel, unfortunately chess players are not considered sport representatives belonging to the CISM, therefore the interest is not relevant at all.

In the Italian Armed Forces, the national military chess championships have been carried out annually for just the last twelve years, initially only for sailors from the ITA Navy and later for all soldiers thanks to the support of the chess club of the city of La Spezia.

1989 Hammelburg, GERMANY

That memorable year much amazement was felt on discovering that there was a chess tournament between NATO soldiers and that there was the will of the Italian Defence Authorities to have a national team participating. The will of the nation was thanks to the passion for chess of Brigadier-General Scaramucci who, not only set the conditions for the identification and the convening of the members of the first team, but also attended in person as the Chief of Mission.

Italy is one of the eleven NATO Allies (actually eight as three Nations took part only with one player) to have participated in the first NATO Chess Championship in Hammelburg (GER) in October 1989.

At that time the teams were composed of 8 players playing seven rounds each, with the risk that not all the strongest players could have had the opportunity to play with equal level competitors.

The Italian team was formed by Masters Fabrizio Benedetti and Enzo Tommasini, by Master Candidates CM Alessandro Suprani, Giuseppe Maxia, Giuseppe Crapulli. Antonio Altieri, Stefano Monti and Angelo Losio completed the team.

For the cultural event there were three options: a visit to Munich, a visit to Bad Kissingen or to the Berlin wall. It was decided unanimously to go to the first two locations; the Italian team thought there would soon be other opportunities to visit the wall but that year it was removed and there has been the need to wait 30 years to see some part of it during the tournament which took place recently in Berlin in 2019.

From that first NATO Chess Championship here is one game from the team Captain at the time:

Schlosser, Philipp, 2420 – Benedetti, Fabrizio, 2250

Opening: D36

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Nc3 Nbd7 5. Bg5 c6 6. cd5 ed5 7. e3 Be7 8. Bd3 O-O 9. Qc2 Re8 10. O-O Nf8 11. Rab1 Ne4 12. Bf4 Nc3 13. bc3 Bd6 14. Bd6 Qd6 15. c4 dc4 16. Bc4 Re7 17. Rfc1 Be6 18. Bd3 Rd8 19. Ng5 h6 20. Ne4 Qd5 21. Nc5 Bc8 22. Qa4 a6 23. Qb4 Rc7 24. a4 Nd7 25. Ne4 c5 26. Qc4 Ne5 27. de5 Qd3 28. Qd3 Rd3 29. Nc5 Rd5 30. Na6 Rcl 31. Rcl Bf5 32. Nc5 b6 33. e4 Re5 34. f4 Re8 35. ef5 bc5 36. Rc5 Re4 37. a5 Rf4 38. a6 Ra4 39. Rc8 Kh7 40. Rc6 Ra2 41. h4 h5 42. Kh2 Ra3 43. Rb6 f6 44. Rc6 Ra5 45. Kg3 Rf5 46. a7 Ra5 47. Rc7 Kh6 48. Kf3 g5 49. g3 Ra4 50. Ke3 gh4 51. gh4 f5 52. Rc6 ½–½

Result: ½–½.

1990 Oslo, NORWAY

The core of the team was pretty much the same with Fabrizio Benedetti, Enzo Tommasini, Alessandro Suprani, Giuseppe Maxia, Giuseppe Crapulli, as well as a new entry Roberto Donati and two other players during their compulsory military service, Master Dario Buzzi and Claudio Sericano (2305). Thanks to their contributions, the Italian team managed to get onto the podium, finishing third in the team standing.

In order to pay homage to a chess player who passed away, below is a game against Ben de Cat, impressing for his unpredictable and imaginative style; invincible in blitz games:

Tommasini, Enzo – De Cat, Ben

Opening: A40

1.d4 b5 2. Nf3 Bb7 3. e3 a6 4. Nbd2 e6 5. Bd3 c5 6. c3 Nf6 7. a4 cd4 8. ed4 Qb6 9. ab5 ab5 10. Ra8 Ba8 11. O-O d5 12. Ne5 Nfd7 13. Ndf3 Nc6 14. Nf7 Kf7 15. Ng5 Kg8 16. Qh5 g6 17. Bg6 Nce5 18. de5 Ne5 19. Bf7 Kg7 20. Qh6 Kh6 21. Ne6 1–0

Result: 1–0.

1991 Cranwell, UNITED KINGDOM

Again the core of the Italian team was composed of Fabrizio Benedetti, Enzo Tommasini, Alessandro Suprani, Giuseppe Maxia, Giuseppe Crapulli with two other players during their compulsory military service, Roccasalva and Alessandro Steinfl. Again, the team finished third in the team standing.

The following game was played against a famous player who is well known nowadays for his chess books and articles:

Tommasini, Enzo, 2126 – Mueller, Karsten, 2425

Opening: D27

1. d4 d5 2. Nf3 e6 3. c4 dc4 4. e3 c5 5. Bc4 Nf6 6. O-O a6 7. a4 Nc6 8. Qe2 cd4 9. Rd1 Be7 10. ed4 O-O 11. Nc3 Nb4 12. Ne5 Bd7 13. Qf3 Bc6 14. Nc6 bc6 15. Be3 a5 16. Rac1 Nbd5 17. Ne4 Qb6 18. b3 Rfd8 19. Nc5 Ne3 20. Qe3 Nd5 21. Qe2 Bg5 22. Rc2 Bf6 23. Qg4 Bd4 24. Ne6 Ne3 25. fe3 Be3 26. Kf1 fe6 27. Qe6 Kh8 28. Rd8 Rd8 29. g3 Qd4 30. Re2 Qd1 31. Kg2 Qg1 32. Kh3 Qf1 33. Rg2 Qd1 34. Re2 ½ – ½

Result: ½–½.

1992 Muenster, GERMANY

Players of the Italian team were Fabrizio Benedetti, Enzo Tommasini, Giuseppe Maxia, Gaudiosi; Alessandro Suprani did not participate as he had left the military to become a doctor in Milan. Part of the team was IM Ennio Arlandi, during his compulsory military service, who was at that time one of the strongest Italian players. Unfortunately, he did not perform in accordance with his rating, finishing 4th in the individual standing. Nevertheless, the Italian team managed to finish in fifth.



Booklets of 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th NCC; from Enzo Tommasini's archive

1994 Breda, NETGERLANDS

Italian team composition: Fabrizio Benedetti, Enzo Tommasini, Giuseppe Maxia, Gaudiosi and two new entries Mastroienni and Fabio Molin.

A performance which scored them eighth in the team standing.

1995 Gausdal, NORWAY and 1996 Viborg, DENMARK

Italy did not participate in these NATO Chess Championships because of national financial issues.

1997 Apt, FRANCE

The Italian team returned with Enzo Tommasini, Roberto Donati, Giuseppe Crapulli, Giuseppe Maxia, Gaudiosi and Mastroienni finishing eighth, but the most important result was the success in getting back to the NATO chess squares.

The following is a very nice game from round 8:

Crapulli, Giuseppe, 1900 – Le Bourhis, Dominique, 2060

Opening: B92

1.e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cd4 4. Nd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Be2 e5 7. Nb3 Be7 8. a4 Be6 9. O-O O-O 10. Be3 Nbd7 11. a5 Rc8 12. f3 Qc7 13. Rf2 Qc6 14. Bf1 d5 15. ed5 Nd5 16. Nd5 Bd5 17. c4 Be6 18. Nd2 Rfd8 19. Qc2 Bc5 20. Bc5 Qc5 21. Ne4 Qe7 22. Qc3 f6 23. b4 Nb8 24. c5 Rd4 25. Rd2 f5 26. Nf2 Rd2 27. Qd2 Rd8 28. Qc3 Nc6 29. Re1 Qh4 30. Nd3 Qc4 31. Qa3 Qd4 32. Kh1 Bc4 33. Rd1 Qe3 34. Qc3 Qd4 35. Qc1 Bd3 36. Bd3 Qb4 37. Bf5 Qa5 38. Rd8 Qd8 39. Be4 Qd4 40. h3 Nd8 41. Qg5 Qd7 42. Qe5 h6 43. Bf5 Qf7 44. Qb8 Qe7 45. Be4 Kf8 46. Bb7 Qb7 47. Qd8 Kf7 48. Qd6 Qe7 49. Qf4 Ke8 50. Qc4 Qe1 51. Kh2 Qe5 52. f4 Qf6 53. c6 Kd8 1–0

Result: 1–0.

1998 Portsmouth, UNITED KINGDOM

This is the only event in which Enzo Tommasini did not participate (so far). The Italian team managed to finish fourth with Fabrizio Benedetti, Roberto Donati, Sandro Falbo, Giuseppe Crapulli, Fabio Molin and Giuseppe Maxia. For Maxia it was his final tournament as he was leaving the Armed Forces, so he outperformed. Just a little anecdote about that participation; Falbo used to join the team by train as he was terrified of flying, but this time he forced himself to fly to the UK in order to avoid the long distance by train plus the Channel Tunnel “challenge”. One of Maxia’s games (9th round) was as follows:

Maxia, Giuseppe, 1900 – Vercauteren, Daniel, 1690

Opening: B50

1.e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. c3 Nc6 4. d4 cd4 5. cd4 Bg4 6. d5 Bf3 7. Qf3 Ne5 8. Bb5 Nd7 9. O-O a6 10. Bd7 Qd7 11. b3 Nf6 12. Bb2 Qg4 13. Qg4 Ng4 14. f3 Ne3 15. Rc1 Rg8 16. Kf2 g6 17. Ke3 Bh6 18. f4 g5 19. Rc7 Rb8 20. Nd2 f6 21. Rac1 Kf7 22. Nc4 1–0

Result: 1–0.

1999 Stetten am kalten Markt, GERMANY

The Italian team was reduced in number, but nevertheless managed to finish fourth with Fabrizio Benedetti, Sandro Falbo, Riccardo Jannello, Roberto Donati and obviously Enzo Tommasini.

One of Falbo games (10th round) is detailed below:

Falbo, Sandro, 2200 – Maes, Patrick, 2109

Opening: B06

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nf3 d6 4. Bc4 Nf6 5. Qe2 d5 6. ed5 Nbd7 7. Bb3 Nb6 8. c4 O-O 9. O-O a5 10. a3 Bg4 11. h3 Bf3 12. Qf3 c6 13. dc6 Qd4 14. cb7 Rab8 15. Be3 Qb2 16. Bb6 Qa1 17. Ba5 Qe5 18. Bb6 Qe4 19. Qe4 Ne4 20. c5 Bd4 21. Bd5 Nc5 22. Bc5 Bc5 23. Rc1 e6 24. Bf3 Ba7 25. Nc3 Kg7 26. Nb5 Bb6 27. Rc4 Rfd8 28. Ra4 Rd7 29. Ra8 Rbb7 30. Bb7 Rb7 31. a4 h5 32. Kf1 Bc5 33. Rc8 Bb4 34. Ke2 Rd7 35. Rc2 g5 36. f3 f5 37. Nc7 Kf7 38. Na6 Ba5 1–0

Result: 1–0.

2000 Leopoldsburg, BELGIUM

The Italian team was slightly reorganised including an excellent player doing his compulsory military service, Marco Corvi, who led the group onto the podium, finishing third in the team standing;

the other players were as usual Fabrizio Benedetti, Enzo Tommasini, Giuseppe Crapulli, Silvio Taranino and Fabio Molin.

One of Corvi’s games as follows:

Corvi, Marco, 2319 – Berrak, Sedat, 1978

Opening: A16

1. c4 Nf6 2. Nc3 c6 3. e4 d6 4. d4 Qc7 5. Nf3 Bg4 6. h3 Bf3 7. Qf3 e5 8. Be3 Qb6 9. O-O-O Qa5 10. g4 h6 11. Kbl Nbd7 12. Be2 Be7 13. Qg3 a6 14. f4 Qc7 15. de5 de5 16. fe5 Qe5 17. Bf4 Qe6 18. Rhe1 Nc5 19. e5 Nfe4 20. Ne4 Ne4 21. Qb3 Nc5 22. Qc2 Bh4 23. Rf1 Qe7 24. Rd6 Ne6 25. Bh2 O-O 26. c5 Qc7 27. Rfd1 Rad8 28. Bgl Be7 29. Bc4 Bd6 30. cd6 Qd7 31. Bb6 Rc8 32. Qf5 c5 33. Rf1 Qe8 34. Bd3 g6 35. Qf6 Rc6 36. Ba5 b6 37. Bd2 Qd8 38. Qf3 Nd4 39. Qd5 Kg7 40. Bc3 Qd7 41. Rf6 Ne6 42. Bg6 Nd4 43. Bf5 Qb7 44. Be4 Rfc8 45. d7 Rd8 46. Qf7 1–0

Result: 1–0.

2001 San Remo, ITALY

This is the only NATO Chess Championship hosted by Italy so far.

The Italian team was really looking to succeed for the first time ever; its composition was at its best with MF Pietro Bontempi (5.5), MF Marco Corvi, Sandro Falbo (4), Roberto Donati (5), Fabrizio Benedetti (5) and again Enzo Tommasini (3.5); nevertheless, at the end of the day the Italian team only managed to finish second even if Bontempi won the individual standing.

Two relevant games are as follows:

Bontempi, Piero, 2302 – Deleyn, Gunter, 2230

Opening: B06

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. Be3 a6 5. Qd2 b5 6. a4 b4 7. Nce2 a5 8. Ng3 h5 9. Bc4 Nf6 10. f3 h4 11. N3e2 d5 12. Bd3 de4 13. fe4 Bb7 14. d5 Ng4 15. Bd4 Bh6 16. Nf4 O-O 17. Qe2 Bf4 18. Qg4 e5 19. Bc5 Bc8 20. Qf3 Re8 21. g3 Bg5 22. Ne2 Qf6 23. Qf6 Bf6 24. c3 bc3 25. Nc3 Na6 26. Ba3 Bg5 27. Bb5 Rd8 28. Bc6 Rb8 29. Nb5 Bd7 30. Bd7 Rd7 31. Ke2 f5 32. gh4 Bh4 33. Rhg1 Kf7 34. Raf1 f4 35. Rc1 Rb6 36. Rc3 Be7 37. Rgcl g5 38. Kf3 Rh6 39. Rc6 g4 40. Kg4 Rh4 41. Kf3 Ba3 42. ba3 Nb8 43. Rc7 Rh2 44. Rc8 Rh3 45. Kg2 Rg3 46. Kf2 Kg6 47. Rb8 1–0

Result: 1–0.

Mai, Philipp, 2274 – Donati, Roberto, 1900

Opening: B80

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cd4 4. Nd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 e6 6. Be3 a6 7. f3 Be7 8. Qd2 Nc6 9. g4 O-O 10. g5 Nd7 11. h4 Nde5 12. Be2 Nd4 13. Qd4 b5 14. f4 Nc6 15. Qd2 Bb7 16. Bf3 Na5 17. b3 Rc8 18. O-O-O Qc7 19. Ne2 d5 20. e5 d4 21. Nd4 Bf3 22. Nf3 Ba3 23. Kbl Nc4 24. bc4 bc4 25. Nd4 Rb8 26. Nb3 cb3 27. ab3 Rfc8 28. Rh2 a5 29. Qd7 Qc3 30. Qd4 Qc6 31. Bcl Bc5 32. Qd7 Qe4 33. Qd3 Qb7 34. Bb2 a4 35. Rh3 ab3 36. Qb3 Qe4 37. Qf3 Qa4 38. Rd3 Bd4 39. Rb3 Bb2 40. Kb2 Ra8 41. Kcl Qd4 42. Rbl Ra2 43. Qc3 Qgl 44. Kd2 Qf2 45. Kdl Rc2 0-1

Result: 0-1.

2002 Brest, FRANCE

A classic composition of the Italian team with Enzo Tommasini, Fabrizio Benedetti, Benedetti, Roberto Donati, Sandro Falbo, Giuseppe Crapulli, Teodono and Fabio Molin; the Italian team did not perform very well, finishing in just tenth.

One of Crapulli's games is as follows:

O'Neill, Steve, 1400 – Crapulli, Giuseppe, 1882

Opening: E12

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 e6 3. Bf4 b6 4. e3 Bb7 5. c4 Be7 6. Bd3 O-O 7. O-O c5 8. Nc3 cd4 9. ed4 d5 10. b3 Nc6 11. Rcl dc4 12. Bc4 Nb4 13. a3 Nbd5 14. Nd5 Nd5 15. Bd5 Bd5 16. b4 Rc8 17. Rel Rcl 18. Bcl Qc7 19. Ne5 Rc8 20. Bf4 Qb7 21. Qg4 Rc3 22. Bh6 Bf8 23. h4 Ra3 24. h5 Kh8 25. Bd2 Ra2 26. Bc3 Rc2 27. Re3 Qc7 28. Qg3 Bd6 29. Nf7 Qf7 30. Qd6 Qf2 0-1

Result: 0-1.

2003 Copenhagen-Hovelte, DENMARK

Nothing significant to report; below is one of the games of Crapulli, again a member of the Italian team:

Crapulli, Giuseppe, 1843 – Lebrun, Roger, 2099

Opening: B06

1. e4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. f4 e6 5. Nf3 Ne7 6. Be3 Nd7 7. Qd2 b6 8. O-O-O Bb7 9. Be2 a6 10. h4 Nf6 11. e5 Ng4 12. h5 Nf5 13. Bgl Ng3 14. Rh3 Ne2 15. Qe2 Qd7 16. Ng5 Nh6 17. d5 ed5 18. ed6 Kf8 19. hg6 hg6 20. dc7 Nf5 21. Rh8 Bh8 22. Qd2 d4 23. Ne2 Qc7 24. Nd4 Nd4 25. Bd4 Bd4 26. Qd4 Bg2 27. Qh8 Ke7 28. Rel Kd7 29. Qf6 1-0

Result: 0-1.

2004 Hague, NETHERLANDS

Again another edition with nothing significant to report; just a new entry, Capezza; one of his games is below:

Capezza, Marco 2121 – So, Kam, 1666

Opening: D30

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 c6 4. Qc2 Bd6 5. Bg5 f6 6. Bh4 Nd7 7. e3 Qc7 8. Bd3 Nf8 9. Nc3 g5 10. Bg3 Bg3 11. hg3 Qg7 12. O-O-O Bd7 13. e4 dc4 14. Bc4 O-O-O 15. Na4 b6 16. Rd3 Ne7 17. Ra3 Kc7 18. Nc3 Ra8 19. Rdl Nfg6 20. d5 ed5 21. ed5 Kd8 22. dc6 Nc6 23. Qe4 Rc8 24. Be6 Re8 25. Bd7 Re4 26. Bc6 Kc7 27. Ra7 Kc6 28. Rg7 Rc4 29. Nd4 Kc5 30. Nb3 Kc6 31. Rd4 Rd4 32. Nd4 Kc5 33. Nb3 Kc6 34. Rh7 b5 35. Rf7 b4 36. Rf6 1-0

Result: 0-1.

2005 Kołobrzeg, POLAND

The Italian team managed to get sixth even though they only had four players: Fabrizio Benedetti (5), Enzo Tommasini (4,5), Luigi Delfino (3,5) and Roberto Donati (3,5). Below is one of Delfino's games:

Delfino, Luigi, 2084 – Rytis, Ermalis, 1942

Opening: B05

1. e4 Nf6 2. e5 Nd5 3. Nf3 d6 4. d4 Bg4 5. Be2 Nc6 6. e6 fe6 7. c4 Bf3 8. Bf3 Nf6 9. g4 g6 10. g5 Nd7 11. Be3 Bg7 12. Bg4 e5 13. d5 Nd4 14. Nc3 c6 15. h4 Qb6 16. Bd7 Kd7 17. O-O Rhf8 18. Qg4 Rf5 19. Ne4 Kc7 20. Rad1 Raf8 21. Bd4 ed4 22. Ng3 Rf3 23. Qe6 R8f7 24. Rd3 Be5 25. Rf3 Rf3 26. Qe7 Kc8 27. Qe6 Kc7 28. Ne4 c5 29. b4 Qb4 30. Qe7 Kc8 31. Nd6 Bd6 32. Qd6 Qb6 33. Qe5 Rf5 34. Qh8 Qd8 35. Qh7 Qe8 36. d6 Qf7 37. Qh8 Kd7 38. Qb8 Kc6 39. Rbl Rf2 40. Qb7 Kd6 41. Qa6 1-0

Result: 0-1.

2008 Brussels, BELGIUM

The Italian team was able to get sixth again with the participation of only four players because of some national financial issues: Fabrizio Benedetti, Roberto Donati, Enzo Tommasini and Saverio Gerardi, who performed really well; below is one of his games:

Gerardi, Saverio, 2176 – Picart, Laurent, 2114

Opening: C42

1. e4 e5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. Nf3 Bb4 4. Bc4 d6 5. O-O O-O 6. d3 Bc3 7. bc3 Nbd7 8. Rel Nc5 9. Bg5 Be6 10. Bb3 h6 11. Bh4 Qe7 12. d4 Nb3 13. ab3 Bg4 14. h3 Bf3 15. Qf3 g5 16. Bg3 Rfe8 17. de5 de5 18. Red1 a6 19. h4 g4 20. Qe3 Kh7 21. Ra5 Rad8 22. Rd8 Qd8 23. Re5 Qd1 24. Kh2 Re5 25. Be5 g3 26. Kg3 Qg4 27. Kh2 Qh4 28. Kgl Ng4 29. Qf4 Qe7 30. Qf5 1-0

Result: 0-1.

2009 Hammelburg, GERMANY

The Italian team did not perform very well, finishing just tenth with only four players again: Saverio Gerardi, Enzo Tommasini, Roberto Donati and Fabrizio Benedetti.

2011 Kaunas, LITHUANIA

The Italian team was authorised to participate by the national authorities but without any financial support and being forced to take formal leave from their duty station. Without any sort of incentives again only four players were able to attend: Enzo Tommasini and Giuseppe Crapulli as usual plus Giuseppe Troia and Alessandro Almonti. They finished in ninth.

2015 Amsterdam, NETHERLANDS

As in 2011, again the Italian team participated but without any sort of incentives. Again, the members of the Italian delegation were Enzo Tommasini, Giuseppe Crapulli, Paolo Tocco, Alessandro Almonti and, after a long absence, Fabio Molin. Not a very good result as they finished in tenth.

2019 Berlin, GERMANY

As in the last two participations, the Italian team took part just thanks to the passion and the enthusiasm of the players, managing to get fourth with Enzo Tommasini, Giuseppe Crapulli, Luigi Delfino (fourth also in the individual standing), Paolo Violini, Paolo Tocco, Alessandro Almonti and the new entry from the ITA Navy Giovanni Abbate. Truly touching was the moment of silence following the death of Lorenz Drabke, his passion for chess very well-known in the Italian chess federation.



30th NATO Chess Championship in Berlin, Italian team (from left) – Luigi Delfino, Paolo Tocco; Alessandro Almonti, Giovanni Abbate, Enzo Tommasini, Giuseppe Crapulli, Paolo Violini; photo by IMCC

2021 Blankenberge, BELGIUM

The Italian team participated without any financial support but finally without the need to take formal leave to attend the event. Five members took part with Enzo Tommasini as Chief of Mission, Luigi Delfino, Giuseppe Crapulli, Paolo Violini, Alessandro Almonti and Paolo Tocco. A good enough performance resulted in a seventh-place finish. One of the Chief of Mission's games follows:

Tommasini, Enzo, 2111 – Pavlidis, Anastasios, 2343

Opening: E92

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. d4 O-O 6. Be2 e5 7. de5 de5 8. Qd8 Rd8 9. Bg5 Re8 10. Nd5 Nd5 11. cd5 c6 12. Bc4 cd5 13. Bd5 Nc6 14. Bc6 bc6 15. O-O-O Be6 16. Kbl f5 17. Nd2 h6 18. Be3 Red8 19. f3 Rd3 20. Rhe1 Rad8 21. Kc2 Bf8 22. b3 Bb4 23. Nbl R3d7 24. Rd7 Rd7 25. Rd1 Rc7 26. Bd2 c5 27. a3 Bd2 28. Nd2 Rd7 29. Nc4 Rd4 30. Rd4 ed4 31. Kd3 fe4 32. fe4 Kf7 33. b4 cb4 34. ab4 Ke7 35. Kd4 Bd7 36. Ne5 Be8 37. Kd5 a6 38. Nc6 Kd7 39. Nb8 Kc7 40. Na6 Kb6 41. Nc5 Kb5 42. Kd6 Kb4 43. e5 Kc4 44. e6 g5 45. Nd7 Kd4 46. Nf6 Bg6 47. e7 Ke3 48. Ng4 Ke2 49. Nh6 Kf2 50. g4 1–0

Result: 0–1.

2023 Portorož, SLOVENIA

That year there was the need to reorganise the Italian team with some new entries so, in addition to Enzo Tommasini, Luigi Delfino, Paolo Tocco, Paolo Violini and Giovanni Abbate, for the first time participated Damiano Lami, Giuseppe Dino, Ermes “Kevin” Cavinato and Raffaele Cardillo. The team managed to get eighth.

One of the games of Lami, who comes from the Carabinieri Armed Force, follows:

Lami, Damiano, 2128 – Bublys, Vaidotas, 1781

Opening: B21

1. e4 c5 2. d4 cd4 3. c3 d3 4. Bd3 Nc6 5. Nf3 Nf6 6. O-O d5 7. Nbd2 Bg4 8. h3 Bh5 9. e5 Ne5 10. Ne5 Bd1 11. Bb5 Nd7 12. Bd7 Qd7 13. Nd7 Kd7 14. Rd1 e6 15. c4 dc4 16. Nc4 Kc7 17. Bf4 Kc6 18. Rac1 f6 19. Rd3 Be7 20. a4 Rhd8 21. Na5 Kb6 22. Bc7 1–0

Result: 0–1.



33rd NATO Chess Championship in Portorož, Italian team (from left) – Raffaele Cardillo, Giuseppe Dino, Luigi Delfino; Paolo Violini, Enzo Tommasini, Ermes “Kevin” Cavinato, Giovanni Abbate, Damiano Lami, Paolo Tocco; photo by IMCC



34th NATO Chess Championship in Rhodes, Italian team (from left) – Diego Spatrisano, Enzo Tommasini (outgoing Chief of Mission), Valerio Mautone, Giovanni Abbate, Giuseppe Dino, Paolo Violini, Paolo Tocco, Ermes “Kevin” Cavinato (incoming Chief of Mission); photo by IMCC

2024 Rhodes, GREECE

The reorganisation continued with two other new entries: Valerio Mautone from the ITA Army and Diego Spatrisano from the ITA Air Force. Two games of some new members of the team follow:

Mautone, Valerio, 2117 – Smit, Jan, 1866

Opening: B07

1. e4 d6 2. d4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. Be3 Nf6 5. Qd2 c6 6. Bh6 O-O 7. Bg7 Kg7 8. Bd3 e5 9. Nge2 Qc7 10. O-O b5 11. a3 a6 12. Kh1 c5 13. de5 de5 14. Ng3 Nc6 15. f4 c4 16. fe5 Qe5 17. Be2 Nd4 18. Rael Be6 19. Bd1 Rad8 20. Qc1 h5 21. Rf4 g5 22. Rff1 h4 23. Nf5 Kg6 24. Nd5 Bd5 25. ed5 Qe1 26. Re1 Nf5 27. c3 Kh6 28. Rf1 Rd5 29. Bc2 Kg6 30. Bf5 Rf5 31. Qc2 1–0

Result: 0–1.

Dino, Giuseppe, 1884 – Wells, Daniel J., 2036

Opening: B20

1. g3 g6 2. Bg2 Bg7 3. e4 c5 4. f4 Nc6 5. c3 d6 6. Nf3 e5 7. O-O Nge7 8. d3 O-O 9. Na3 d5 10. ed5 Nd5 11. Ne5 Ne5 12. fe5 Be5 13. Qf3 Be6 14. Bh6 Bg7 15. Bg7 Kg7 16. Nc4 b5 17. Nd2 Rc8 18. Ne4 f5 19. Nf2 Rc7 20. Rael Bg8 21. Re5 Nf6 22. a3 Re8 23. Rfe1 Rce7 24. Re7 Re7 25. Re7 Qe7 26. Qc6 Qe1 27. Bf1 Nd5 28. h4 Qe3 29. Kg2 Qe5 30. d4 cd4 31. cd4 Qd4 32. Qb5 Ne3 33. Kgl Ng4 34. Qb7 Kf6 35. Qf3 Ne5 36. Qc3 Qb6 37. b4 Bd5 38. Bg2 Qb7 39. Nd3 Bg2 40. Qe5 Kf7 41. Nf4 Be4 42. Qh8 Qb6 43. Kf1 Qe3 44. Qh7 Ke8 45. Qg6 Kd7 46. Qe6 Kd8 47. Qd6 Ke8 48. Qe5 Kd7 49. Qb5 Kd8 50. Ne6 Ke7 51. Qc5 Qc5 52. Nc5 Bf3 53. Kf2 Bh5 54. Ke3 Kd6 55. Kf4 Bg4 56. h5 Bh5 57. Kf5 Kc6 58. Nd3 Kb5 59. Nb2 a5 60. ba5 Ka5 61. g4 Bf7 62. Kf6 Ba2 63. g5 Kb5 64. g6 Kc5 65. g7 Kd4 66. Ke7 Kc3 67. a4 Kb2 68. a5 1–0

Result: 0–1.

After a very long period, this year the Italian team has been experiencing the biggest generational turnover starting from the Chief of Mission. Capt. (N) Enzo Tommasini, one of the founding members since 1989, is being replaced by Capt. (N) Ermes “Kevin” Cavinato at his third participation, with the hope that in the future the younger players will not only continue to take part to this wonderful and unique event but they will also be able to achieve better results than in the past 35 years. *Fair Winds and Following Seas!*



Capt. Enzo Tommasini last year in Rhodes. He has participated in the NATO chess championship as Italian representative 21 times and has the title of LTM



Valerio Mautone, winner of the last two Italian military chess championships (2024 and 2025, both in La Spezia) and member of the ITA team since 2024

Latvia has some great chapters of chess history – everyone knows the name Mikhail Tal, the eighth World Chess Champion. We have had other outstanding individuals, such as Hermanis Matisons and Aron Nimzowitsch who was born in Riga.

However, the history of Latvian military chess begins in the year 2005. The 16th NATO Chess Championship in Poland, Kołobrzeg is the first NATO tournament involving the participation of a Latvian team. The Latvian team that year had six players and finished 10th from 14 teams. The best player was Vairis Kurpnieks who recorded 4 points, good for 26th place overall.

After 2005 there was a huge gap until Latvia joined again as a regular NATO chess participant which finally happened in 2015 (the 26th NATO Chess Championship held in Amsterdam, in the Netherlands). If you compare the Latvian NATO chess teams from 2005 and subsequent championships, we have some great experienced leaders – captain Gundars Meiers and sergeant first class Māris Noviks. Due to their efforts, Latvia has been participating in every NATO chess championship since 2015 (except in 2018 – USA, Lubbock).

**LATVIAN SOLDIERS AND NATIONAL GUARDS
THAT OVER THE YEARS HAVE BEEN A PART OF
NATO CHESS HISTORY**

Vairis Kurpnieks	Jānis Valeinis
Andrejs Sivačenko	Mārtiņš Ivbulis
Aivars Laizāns	Eira Sarnovska
Aleksandrs Hrenovs	Aleksejs Ivanovs
Gundars Meiers	Dana Reizniece
Māris Noviks	Kaspars Circenis
Aleksandrs Jakovļevs	Jānis Kooops
Valērijs Rižihs	Artis Alainis
Edgars Dūmiņš	Evelīna Stikāne
Jānis Slaidiņš	Juris Briedis
Roberts Lejnieks	



28th NATO Chess Championship in Budapest, Hungary
Latvian team (from left) – Roberts Lejnieks, Gundars Meiers, Valērijs Rižihs, Jānis Valeinis, Māris Noviks with his wife, Mārtiņš Ivbulis, Jānis Slaidiņš with his wife; photo by IMCC



Dana Reizniece



Kaspars Circenis



Mārtiņš Ivbulis



Evelīna Stikāne

Since 2015 team Latvia is slowly but surely going upwards. Our greatest individual score is 4th place – 5.5 points by Jānis Valeinis in 2017 (Hungary, Budapest), which for him was quite a disappointment because of “what if” scenarios. If he had won his game in the last round that finished as a combative draw... But that is the beauty of sports – and one of the reasons for our shared love of chess. In recent years the Latvian team has changed almost completely, led by woman grandmaster Dana Reizniece. Latvia finished 5th in 2023 and 2024, our best results so far.



33rd NATO Chess Championship in Portorož, Slovenia
Latvian team (from left) – Mārtiņš Ivbulis, Aleksejs Ivanovs, Dana Reizniece, Valērijs Rižihis, Kaspars Cirčenis, Matiss Caune (team official), Jānis Kooops, Jānis Valeinis; photo by IMCC



34th NATO Chess Championship in Rhodes, Greece
Latvian team (from left) – Kaspars Cirčenis, Artis Alainis, Mārtiņš Ivbulis, Jānis Kooops Dana Reizniece, Evelīna Stikāne, Juris Briedis; photo by IMCC

The leadership of Latvian National Armed Forces supports chess, recognising that a good soldier is not defined solely by physical strength and athleticism. A well-trained mind and a strong fighting spirit are just as essential – often even more so – for winning battles or a game. We have a huge opportunity – in 2026 Latvia will host the NATO chess championship to further strengthen our alliance – in this case with chess.

28th NATO Chess Championship 2017 (Budapest, Hungary)

Bohn, Ulrich, 2167 – Valeinis, Jānis, 2214

Jānis Valeinis is a brilliant chess player who loves to think about chess ideas. He also was our coach until 2023 when he retired from the Latvian National guard. The 28th NATO Chess Championship in Hungary was his first NATO event. After the first 5 games Jānis had 3 wins and 2 draws, and in the 6th round he faced a strong opponent with the black pieces.



Jānis Valeinis

As usual, before the game Jānis did a great job preparing for his next opponent. He always aims to find some deep ideas and asks his opponent to make some hard choices in order to get an initiative or possible long term advantage, as we see in the game below. Jānis prepared a variation in the Scotch opening, trying to avoid main lines that could be better for his opponent because of Mr Bohn's knowledge and experience.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nxd4 Bb4+ 5.c3 Bc5 6.Be3 Bb6 (This is a side variation prepared by Jānis before the game. After the following exchange on c6 black is fine.) **7.Nxc6** (If white wants to fight for an advantage then 7.Nf5 Bxe3 8.Nxf5 with 0–0 and f4 gives white an edge.) **7...bxc6 8.Qf3 Ne7 9.Nd2 O-O 10.Nb3?!** (After this move black has opportunities for an initiative.) **10...d6 11.O-O-O Be6** (Black finds the best move – now black has completed development and has some attacking ideas.)

12.e5 Nd5 13.exd6 Nxe3 14.fxe3 cxd6 15.Qxc6 Bxe3+ (Knowing Jānis, at this moment he was probably very happy to have two bishops as a long term advantage and also open lines for a possible attack against the white king. Black is slightly better.) 16.Kb1 Rb8 17.Bd3 (With some threats, as 18.Qe4) 17...g6 18.Bc2 Rb6?! (Seeking activity on the semi-open b file, but this is a slight mistake as white can now equalize. 19...d5 was another option) 19.Qe4 Bh6 20.Nd4 Qb8 21.Bb3 (Now the position is almost equal.) 21...Bxb3 22.Nxb3 Re8 23.Qc4 Re6 24.h4 Qb7 25.h5 Bg7 26.hxg6 hxg6 27.Qh4 (Black can exchange queens on e4, but decides to keep more pieces on the board, keeping more chances to play for a win.) 27...Bf6 28.Qf2 Qe7 29.Nd4 Re4 30.Qc2 d5 31.Nb3 (Inaccuracy by white, as black can infiltrate into the 2nd rank and gain an advantage.) 31...Re2! 32.Qd3 (White must play Re2 as the only move to try and counter blacks activity on the e file.) 32...Qe4 (32...d4 is another great option with complications but better for black, as white has a weaker king and a weakness on d4, but black goes for a safer option.) 33.Qxe4 dxe4 34.Rhg1 Be5 35.g4 a5? (35...Rf6 gives black a clear advantage, but this move gives white counterplay, as the position is equal (according to the computer).) 36.Rde1 Rxe1+ 37.Rxe1 f5 38.gxf5 gxf5 39.Rf1 Rf6 40.Nxa5 Kg7 41.Nc4? (However, anyone can make mistakes, and after this move black has a clear winning plan. A better plan for white was to generate counterplay with a4, Nb3, a5 and Ra1.) 41...Bg3!! 42.Kc2 f4! 43.Kd2? (the final mistake, as in this position white can still try some counterplay with his a pawn.) 43...Kg6 44.Rd1 (The following black moves are natural.) 44...Kf5! 45.Ke2 f3+! 46.Ke3 Bf4+! 47.Kf2 Rh6 48.Rd5+ Ke6 49.Rd8 Rh2+ 50.Kg1 Re2 51.Rf8 Bg3 with an inevitable checkmate, and white resigned.

Result: 0–1.

With this win Jānis Valeinis put himself in a great position in the tournament standings, allowing him to fight for medals. However, in the next and final round Jānis could not find a win with the white pieces in a complicated position with a small advantage – that game ended with a draw, giving Jānis Valeinis 4th place individually. For him that was a disappointment, showing his passion and grit. For Team Latvia this was a great result, because the best NATO chess team coach led by example, reaching the best individual result by a Latvian player in the NATO Chess championships.

33rd NATO Chess Championship 2023 (Portorož, Slovenia)

Koops, Jānis, 1643 – Tocco, Paolo, 2056

Jānis Koops is a relatively new player in the Latvian military chess team. He is a good chess player who loves dynamic, attacking chess, and few people share his dedication to chess. Although Jānis Koops has great experience both participating as a chess player and organising chess events, this was



Jānis Koops

his first NATO chess championship. Going into the final round, Jānis had 3.5 points in 6 games and in the last round played against a very good opponent – Paolo Tocco.

Playing with the white pieces, Jānis did his best to follow the good old advice by Mikhail Tal: “You must take your opponent into a deep dark forest where 2+2=5, and the path leading out is only wide enough for one”. This was a very dynamic game where both players had chances, but in the end Jānis Koops was more successful. He was always playing for a win and even after a few mistakes his confidence remained intact.

1.c4 Nc6 2.e4 e5 3.d3 (Objectively black is fine or even better from the opening, but Jānis is very experienced playing with this structure.) 3...Bc5 4.Be2 Nf6 5.Nf3 d6 6.O-O Be6 7.Nc3 a6 8.Nd5 (Position is equal.) 8...h6 9.Be3 Nd4? (With this exchange black allows white to gain the initiative.) 10.Nxd4 exd4 11.Bd2 c6 12.Nf4 (12.b4 Ba7 13.Nxf6 with Bg4 was an interesting way to play against a bad dark-squared bishop.) 12...Bd7 13.Nh5 g6?! (Black weakens his king side squares, giving white good attacking targets.) 14.Nxf6 Qxf6 15.f4?! (15.b4 seems better, as white has a huge initiative with better pieces.) 15...Qe7?! (15...a5 was a good idea to prevent white's expansion.) 16.b4 Ba7 17.f5 (17.Bg4 is another option, exchanging white's bad bishop.) 17...gxf5 18.Bh5 O-O-O 19.exf5 Rdg8 (19...Qf6 was better to prevent the next move.) 20.f6 Qd8 21.Qf3 (21.Bxf7 gives white a bigger advantage.) 21...Be6 22.b5? (22.Rae1 or 22.a4 keeps white's initiative. However, after 22...axb5 23.cxb5

Bd5 black is close to equalising.) **22...Qd7 23.bxc6 bxc6 24.Bf4 d5 25.c5?! (with clear attacking intentions, opening lines for a queenside attack) 25...Bxc5 26.Rab1 Bd6 27.Rb2 Kc7 28.Rfb1?? (After 28.Re1 white is very close to winning with many tactical options for white. For example, 28...Rb8 29.Rxb8 Rxb8 30.Bxf7!! However, the move that was played by black was a blunder, and the position is equal). 28...Rb8 29.Qg3 Rxb2 30.Rxb2 Rd8 31.Bxd6+ (Now black is slightly better with an extra pawn and out of immediate danger). 31...Qxd6 32.Qe1 Rb8 33.Re2 Qb4? (The computer suggests a crazy move 33...Kb6, preventing Qa5+ and giving black a serious advantage. In the game black decided to exchange queens and bishops, probably to avoid white's queenside activity and attack against the weakened king.) 34.Qxb4 Rxb4 35.Bxf7 Bxf7 36.Re7+ Kd6 37.Rxf7 (Now the position is equal, but white's f6 pawn is scary. Black should look for counterplay by moving the c pawn.) 37...Rb8 38.Rh7 Rf8 39.Rxh6 Ke5 40.f7 c5 41.Rh5+ Ke6 42.Rh6+ Ke5 43.Rh7 c4 44.Kf2 c3 45.Ke2 Rc8 46.Kd1 Kf4?? (Until this move the position is equal. Now moves like 47.Rg7 or 47.g4 give white a winning advantage.) 47.Rh3? (A missed opportunity.) 47...Rf8 48.Rf3+ Kg4? (48...Ke5 with an equal position.)**

49.h3+ Kh4 50.Rf4+ Kg3 51.Rxd4?! (51.Rg4+ with 52.Rg7 is winning for white.) 51...Kxg2 52.h4 Kf3 (52...Rxf7 was better, but white is very close to winning anyway.) 53.h5 Ke3 54.Rxd5 Rxf7 55.a4? (55.h6 was winning, but now black equalises.) 55...Rf2! 56.a5 Rh2 57.Kc1 Ra2?? (57...c2 seems to be the only possibility to equalise.) 58.h6!! Rh2 59.Rd6! Ra2 60.h7 Rh2 61.Rd7 Kf3? (After this move white's win is inevitable. 61...Kf4 was a better choice, marching closer to white rook.) 62.Re7 Kf4 63.d4 Kf5 64.d5, and black resigned.
Result: 1–0.

Jānis Koops got 4.5 out of 7 points (32nd position in the individual ranking) with a performance rating of 2051. Moreover, with this win Jānis Koops greatly contributed to Team Latvia finishing in 5th position in the teams ranking, just two points away from the 1st placed team Germany.

This was a game where Jānis Koops showed that everyone in Team Latvia must remain calm, stick to our strengths and keep believing, and together we can achieve big things in chess as well as in our daily lives, including in the military. Everyone matters, especially as a part of the bigger team.

Lithuania joined NATO on 29 March 2004 and participated in the NATO Chess Tournament for the first time in 2005 in Kołobrzeg, Poland. Lithuania has hosted the tournament once – the 22nd official championship, which was held in Kaunas in 2011. The most important achievements of the

Lithuanian military chess team were fifth place in the team standings in 2011 and 2022, individual gold medals in 2007 and 2021, individual bronze medal in 2009 and special events: blitz tournament gold medal in 2007, silver medal in 2011 and 2021 and bronze medal in 2009.

Lithuanian Organisations



2011 – Kaunas;

Tournament directors: Majoras Kacevicius Dangiras Championships were judged by three members: Chief Justice – an international referee from Belgium Luc Cornet, referee assistant Rauduve Algirdas national judge (Lit) and chess grandmaster Sarunas Sulskis (Lit); photo by IMCC

TEAM RESULTS	
2005	14 th place ■
2006	12 th place
2007	7 th place
2008	10 th place
2009	13 th place
2010	14 th place
2011	5 th place
2012	12 th place
2013	11 th place
2015	13 th place
2016	15 th place
2017	16 th place
2019	19 th place
2021	6 th place
2022	5 th place ■
2023	9 th place
2024	10 th place

Kołobrzeg, Poland;
Rytis Ermalis, Vaidotas Bublys,
Vytautas Remeika,
Aurimas Dikmonas, Kostas Maciokas,
Vilius Vaitiekunas;
photo by IMCC



Tartu, Estonia
Arturas Voroblievas,
Vytautas Janulionis,
Martynas Skaburskis,
Mingaudas Giedraitis,
Eduardas Brusokas, Vaidotas Bublys,
Diana Pazerienė;
photo by IMCC



Lithuanian NATO Chess Champions and their most memorable games

28th NATO Championship

Taffinder, Douglas – Vaznonis, Vytautas

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 Bb4 The Classical Variation of the French Defence. Black immediately pins the knight and applies pressure to the centre. **5.e5 h6 6.Bd2 Bxc3 7.bxc3 Ne4** Black exchanges the light-squared bishop, then immediately occupies the central square e4, provoking imbalances. **8.Qg4 Kf8!?** (diagram 1)

A rare and creative idea. Black avoids castling and prepares to play aggressively on the kingside. **9.h4 c5 10.Bd3 Nxd2 11.Kxd2 Nc6** The white king is now stuck in the centre and Black starts building pressure with ...c5 and ...Nc6. **12.Nf3 c4 13.Be2 Qe7 14.a4 a5** Both sides prepare for long-term plans. Black stops a4–a5 and solidifies the queenside.

15.h5 Bd7 16.Nh4 Rg8 Black prepares ...g5 or to double rooks for an attack. White's pieces are uncoordinated. **17.f4 Ke8 18.Qh3 Kd8 19.g4 Kc7** Black is slowly repositioning the king to safety, anticipating an endgame while keeping attacking chances alive. **20.Qg3 g6 21.hxg6 fxg6 22.Nf3 Qf8 23.Qh2 Rh8** Black doubles up to pressure h5 and maintain dominance on the kingside. **24.Nh4 Ne7 25.Rhf1 Kc8 26.Ra2 Qe8 27.Rfa1 Ra6** Black begins regrouping rooks for pressure on the queenside, showing positional flexibility. **28.Qf2 Kb8 29.Qg3 Ka8** The king finds perfect shelter on a8. Black's coordination is now clearly superior. **30.Bf1 Nc8 31.Bh3 Rf8 32.Qe3 Ne7 33.Qg3 Rf7** White repeats, but Black calmly improves piece placement and prepares for decisive actions. **34.g5 Qh8 35.Nf3 h5 36.Nh4 Rc6 37.Ng2 Rb6** Black steadily increases pressure on both flanks. The kingside pawns become dangerous. **38.Qh4 Qe8 39.Ne3 Nc8 40.Nd1 Rc6 41.Nb2 Rc7 42.Ke3 Bc6** A critical point. Black slowly manoeuvres and prepares the final break. **43.Rf1 Nb6 44.Kd2 Rf8 45.Ke3 Kb8** King is optimally placed, and the attack is ready to launch. **46.Qe1 Bxa4!** (diagram 2)

Vytautas Vaznonis is a Lithuanian International Master (IM); He has participated in several NATO chess championships and won the title of NATO Chess Champion in 2007



DIAGRAM 1



DIAGRAM 2

A breakthrough sacrifice! Black activates the rook and unbalances the position decisively. **47.Nxa4 Nxa4 48.Bxe6 Qxe6 49.Rxa4 Rcf7** Black now has powerful coordination, and White's king is exposed. **50.Rxa5 Rxf4 51.Rxf4 Qh3+ 52.Kd2 Rxf4 53.Qe2 Rg4 54.Qe1 Qh2+** A well-executed mating net. White resigns as mate is inevitable.

Final Position: White cannot stop threats like ...Rg2+ and ...Qf4 leading to mate.

Result: 0–1.

31st NATO Chess Championship

Stauskas, Lukas – Andersen, Hans-Christoph

This was the final round of the tournament, and I was tied for 1st–5th place. A win in this game was essential to secure a top finish.

1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.c4 c6 4.Qb3 dxc4 5.Qxc4 Bg4 (diagram 1)

I had already played this opening twice in the same tournament. I was aware that my opponent would likely be prepared for it, but I still felt very comfortable going into this system. In my previous games, I had encountered 5...Bf5, so facing 5...Bg4 here was a small but interesting surprise. **6.Nbd2 Nbd7 7.g3 e6 8.Bg2 Be7 9.O-O O-O 10.Qb3 Qb6 11.Nc4** This is one of the main ideas of this system. White is not concerned about doubled b-pawns, as they are difficult for Black to target effectively. More importantly, the knight on c4 can later jump to a5, exerting significant pressure on Black's queenside pawns. It is not entirely clear how Black should best deal with this plan. **Qa6 12.Re1 b5?!** (diagram 2)

Black aims to seize some initiative on the queenside, but this has the downside of weakening the c5 square. This plan could be justified if Black had time to immediately play c5 to resolve the weakness, but here, Black lacks sufficient time to do so. **13.Nce5 Bh5 14.Bg5 Bxf3 15.Nxf3 Rac8 16.a4** Black was preparing the c6–c5 break, so White must act quickly. The move a2–a4 is very natural, increasing pressure on Black's position and creating new targets that Black will need to defend. **Qb6 17.axb5 cxb5 18.Bd2!** (diagram 3)

This move controls the important a5 and b4 squares and also prevents Black from stabilising the queenside with a7–a5. White's plan becomes very clear at this point: double rooks on the a-file and attack the a7-pawn. **Ne4 19.Ba5 Qb8 20.Qd3 Nd6 21.Bb4 Nf5 22.Bxe7 Nxe7 23.Ra5 Rc4** Black attempts to defend the b5-pawn, but as a result, the rook becomes awkwardly placed on b4, with no clear escape route. **24.b3 Rb4** Black now faces a serious problem. Despite the a7 weakness, White can shift focus to targeting the rook on b4, which is difficult for Black to defend. White is winning. **25.Rea1 Nc6 26.Ng5!** (diagram 4)

Lukas Stauskas is a Lithuanian chess player; He participated in the NATO chess championship in 2021 and won the title of NATO Chess Champion



DIAGRAM 1



DIAGRAM 2



DIAGRAM 3



DIAGRAM 4

Last mistake. At this point Black was already short on time and facing a lot of pressure. But after Ng5 with a double attack there is no defence.

Re8 27.Qxh7+ Kf8 28.Bxc6 Rxc6 29.Rxa7.

Result: 1–0.

Players who have participated in the NATO chess championships for their country at least 8 times are awarded Life Time Member status (LTM). Four Lithuanian players have achieved this status.

Lithuanian LTM games and their comments

27th NATO Chess Championship

Rosenkilde, Alexander – Bublys, Vaidotas

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 c5 4.d5 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.Nc3 g6 7.Nf3 Bg7 8.Bg2 0-0 9.0-0 Bublys challenges his Danish opponent with the Modern Benoni set-up. Black has allowed the enemy pawn to enter his territory on d5. On the other hand, the black rook may engage in action down the e-file. **9...a6 10.a4 Re8 11.Nd2 Nbd7 12.h3 Ne5** Quite a rare move. Despite its limited use, it fails in comparison to the next move by Black...12...Rb8; 12...Qc7; 12...Nh5 are usual Black's responses. **13.f4 Nh5?! A** bold knight sacrifice by the Lithuanian officer, which shouldn't have worked, but... it did! **14.fxe5 Nxe5 15.Rf3 Bxe5 16.Nde4** [On 16.Nf1 Nf5 Captain Bublys would have kept the game going; On 16.Nc4 Black's assault is running out of steam, though – 16...Qh4 17.Nxe5 Rxe5 18.Bf4+–] **16...Nxe4 17.Nxe4 Qh4** Bublys commands his major piece into the attack. White must beware of his knight now. **18.Ng5 Bf5** Bublys brings his best pieces into the battle. In terms of material however, the odds are clearly on Rosenkilde's side. **19.Rb3?** The Danish officer is going to bitterly regret this rook swing from the kingside. [He shouldn't have so greedily clung on his material gain. A little investment by 19.Rxf5 would have helped him to curb Lithuanian's powerful bishop pair. 19...gxf5 20.Nf3 Qg3 21.Ra3+/- and Black's attack is over, when White is about to start his own one.] **19...Bd4+ 20.Kh1?** Rosenkilde doesn't sense danger and retreats his king to the wrong square. [20.e3 would have still kept a tangible advantage in both lines 20...Bc2 20...Qxg5 21.exd4 Qh4 22.Be3+/- 21.Qxc2 Qe1+ 22.Bf1 but not 22.Kh2?!, of course – 22...Be5#] **20...Bc2!!** A game-changer shot by Bublys – both beautiful and powerful! **21.Qf1** [Suddenly Rosenkilde discovers that 21.Qxc2 allows

Capt. Vaidotas Bublys is a chess player from the Lithuanian military; He has participated in the NATO chess championship 15 times and has the title of LTM



a lethal penetration of the black queen 21...Qe1+ 22.Kh2 Be5+-+ and it's curtains for White.; Too late is 21.Nf3 Bxd1 22.Nxh4 Bxb3+–] **21...Bxb3 22.Qxf7+ Kh8** It turns out the black queen is a strong defender too, protecting her king from checkmate on h7. **23.Ra3** Rosenkilde is desperately trying to reinforce his attack. **23...Bxd5!!** All of a sudden, Bublys sets off a powerful blast which leaves Rosenkilde's position beyond the hope of salvation. **24.Nf3** [On both 24.Bxd5 Qe1+ 25.Kg2 Qg1+ 26.Kf3 Qf2+ 27.Kg4 h5#; and 24.Qxd5 Qe1+ 25.Kh2 Bg1+ 26.Kh1 Bf2+ 27.Kh2 Qg1# retaliation comes in quickly.] **24...Bxf7 25.Nxh4 Rxe2+–** Putting the last nail in White's coffin. **26.Bf4 Bxb2** Rosenkilde's position is completely devastated. Black's superiority is so overwhelming that even a few inaccuracies by the Lithuanian officer didn't prevent him from winning this remarkable game. **27.Rd3 d5 28.Rb3 b5** A blunder, but the rolling avalanche of black pawns on the queenside is going to bring the victory for him anyway. [28...Be5 29.Bxe5+ Rxe5 30.Rxb7 Kg8+– would have been an easy job for Black.] **29.Rxb2! Rxb2 30.Be5+ Kg8 31.Bxb2 b4 32.Nf3 Re8 33.Ne5 c4 34.Bd4 c3 35.Kg1 c2 36.Nd3 Re1+!** This last sacrifice is meant to deflect the white knight. **37.Kf2** [37.Nxe1 c1Q] **37...Rd1** and White resigned. A magnificent display of military prowess by an officer of the Lithuanian Army!

Result: 0–1.

18th NATO Chess Championship

Voroblievas, Arturas – Hole, Oystein

Arturas Voroblievas “Before the game, everyone said don’t prepare because you lose anyway, because he is IM with 2400 rating, but I managed to win and I got a prize for the most beautiful game” **1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Bf5 5.Ng3 Bg6 6.Nf3 Nd7 7.h4 h6 8.h5 Bh7 9.Bd3 Bxd3 10.Qxd3 Qc7 11.Ne4 Ngf6 12.g3 Nxe4 13.Qxe4 e6 14.Bf4 Bd6 15.Bxd6 Qxd6 16.0-0-0 Nf6 17.Qe2 Qd5 18.Kb1 Nxh5 19.Ne5 Nf6 20.Rhe1 h5 21.f3 Rf8 22.c4 Qd6 23.d5 cxd5 24.cxd5 Nxd5 25.Qb5+ Kd8 26.Qxb7 Rc8 27.Nxf7+ Rxf7 28.Qxf7 Rc6 29.Qxg7 Rb6 30.Ka1 Qc5 31.Rc1 Qf2 32.Red1 Qxf3 33.Rf1** Black resigns.

Result: 1–0.

Private Arturas Voroblievas is a chess player from the Lithuanian military; He has participated in the NATO chess championship 10 times and has the title of LTM



33rd NATO Chess Championship

Mingaudas, Giedraitis – Glatty, Zbigniew

1.d4 Nf6 2.Bf4 e6 3.Nf3 d5 4.e3 c5 5.c3 The London System offers a versatile approach that can be employed against various defences by Black **5...Nc6 6.Nbd2** In the game this move was chosen, because it is more flexible than Be2 or Bd3 because, in the majority of the cases, White is going to develop his knight to this square, but we can’t say the same about the bishop because, in some positions, the bishop is better on b5 or even, in some tactical positions, Ba6! can be played in one single move. **6...d6 7.Bg3** White keeps the tension which is normally good. **7...O-O 8.Bd3 Qe7** This is one of the most popular moves here. Black’s plan is to push e5 and open up the centre. **9.Ne5** preventing e5. **9...Nd7 10.Nd7 Bd7?!** [10...Qd7! A key move which is impossible to play without understanding the tactical nuances 11.Bd6 Qd6 12.dc5 Qc5 13.Bh7 Kh7 14.Qh5 Kg8 15.Ne4 g6 15.Qg5 the only move to force a draw. Everything else loses (16.Kc5 gh5 compare this to what happened in the game, there would be the bishop to capture on d7 and white would be happy. In this case, white is sad)] **11.Bd6** The beginning of a beautiful tactical sequence **11...Qd6 12.dc5 Qc5?** [12...Qc7 the best move, but hard to figure out] **13.Bh7+!!** (diagram) White gains a decisive advantage.

Maj. Mingaudas Giedraitis is a chess player from the Lithuanian military; He has participated in the NATO chess championship 9 times and has the title of LTM



DIAGRAM

13...Kh7 14.Qh5 Kg8 15.Ne4! Qb6 16.Ng5 Rfd8 17.Qf7 Kh8 18.Qh5 Kg8 19.O-O-O Qa5 20.Kb1 d4 21.Qh7 Kf8 22.Qh8 Ke7 23.Qg7 Kd6 24.Nf7 Kc7 25.Nd8 Rd8 26.ed4 Qf5 27.Ka1 Rf8 28.f3 Rf7 29.Qg4 Qf6 30.Qe4 Kc8 31.Rde1 Ne7 32.Qe5 Qg6 33.Rhg1 Rf5 34.Qd6 Qf7 35.Re5 Ng6 36.Rc5 Rc5 37.Qc5 Kb8 38.c4 b6 39.Qd6 Kc8 40.c5 bc5 41.Rc1 Ne7 42.Rc5 Kd8 43.Qc7 Ke8 44.Qb8 Black resigns.

Result: 1–0.

33rd NATO Championship

Pazeriene, Diana – Hof van Run, Rieke

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 Nbd7 5.Bg5 Be7
6.e3 0-0 7.Rc1 c6 8.Bd3 Re8 9.0-0 Nf8 10.Qe2
N6d7 11.Bf4 Bf6 (diagram)

12.Rfd1 White has more active pieces. The black rooks are passive. White is better. Nb6 13.b3 g6
14.Bb1 Nbd7 15.e4 dxc4 16.bxc4 Qa5 17.e5 Bg7
18.h4 b6 19.Ne4 Ba6 20.Nd6 Re8 21.Ng5 f5
22.Ngf7 Rdb8 23.Bd2 Qa4 24.Qe3 c5 25.Nh6+
Bxh6 26.Qxh6 cxd4 27.Bg5 Qc6 28.Bf6 Nxf6
29.exf6 Qc7 30.Rxd4 e5 31.Rd5 Ne6 32.Rxe5
Qxd6 33.Rxe6 Qf8 34.Qg5 Re8 35.Bxf5 Kh8
36.Bh3 Rad8 37.h5 gxh5 38.Re7 h6 39.Qe5 Qf7
White took control after the opening. Artfully played.
Result: 1–0.

Capt. Diana Pazerienė is a chess player from the Lithuanian military; She has participated in the NATO chess championship 9 times and has the title of LTM



DIAGRAM

LITHUANIAN PARTICIPANTS		
Eduardas Brusokas	Kestutis Girdziusas	Vladas Lukjanovas
Aurimas Dikmonas	Vytautas Janulionis	Kostas Maciokas
Rytis Ermalis	Dangiras Kacevicius	Donatas Mankauskas
Sergejus Gaiducis	Ieva Kuzminaite	Kostas Marciokas
Kestutis Muzas	Kazimiras Preiksas	Vytautas Remeika
Egidijus Rolius	Gytis Segzda	Martynas Skaburskis

Chess is considered the oldest military game still played today. Chess promotes the development of many essential military skills, such as analytical thinking, planning, decision-making, tactical spirit, and perseverance. Donald Erwin Knuth is an American computer scientist and mathematician.

Computers are certainly great at chess, but for Lithuanian military chess players, the game of chess is not just a science, it is an art, and each game is a masterpiece in its own right.

Science is everything we understand well enough to explain to a computer. Art is everything else.

Donald Erwin Knuth



by Lt. Cdr. Rieke Hof-van Run

The involvement of The Netherlands in the NATO Chess Championships (NCC) started in 1989. At that time the Office of International Military Sports had no interest in mind sports. The Netherlands had a military chess player who played in the highest division of the national competition, Gert-Jan Ludden. Having noticed the NCC appeal in the magazine of the national chess federation, he was denied permission by the Office of International Military Sports to set up a team for participation. A second try at the Chief Staff of the Department however, was successful. The performance of the team at the NCC convinced the Office of International Military Sports to support chess as a military sport. Now Chess is one of the 27 sports that are supported by the Dutch military sports community.

Together with the efforts of another chess player at the department, Brig. General Hendrik Steffers, The Netherlands decided to organise a NATO Chess Tournament in 1993, to keep the memories of the tournament alive. The Netherlands organised this tournament in Breda at the Royal Military Academy.

The following year, 1994, The Netherlands again organised the championship, again in Breda. At this tournament, The Netherlands came second and Lucas van der Linden came first in the individual classification.

In 1995, the Dutch team came first in the team standings in Norway for the first time. They had a points difference of 2.5. At the same time, FM Harmen Jonkman (now GM) won the individual tournament by a margin of 1.5 points. In Viborg in Denmark, the Netherlands managed to extend their dominance by coming first ahead of Belgium with a minimal difference. Around this period, Johan Engelen became team leader of the Dutch team.

In 1997 it was noticeable that the field of participants in the tournament was getting stronger. The Netherlands did not get further than sixth place.

England has always been a great country for The Netherlands to play in, with the team achieving many good results there. Firstly, in 1998 when the NLD team came third and Gert-Jan Ludden finished third in the individual tournament.

The following year, The Netherlands came second in Stetten am Kalten Markt in Germany. Jan Peter van Zandwijk was the best performing player, finishing fourth in the individual rankings.

In 2001, the tournament was organised in Italy, where The Netherlands finished third in the team competition. Ornett Strok finished as top Dutchman with a shared fifth place. In 2002 the Dutch team came 8th in Brest. In Copenhagen, 2003, the team finished 7th in Copenhagen.

In 2004, The Netherlands organised the NATO championship in The Hague. This was a great tournament with a nice relaxed program on Wednesday, which included a visit to the Peace Palace in The Hague that afternoon. This tournament also marked the first time that a woman participated in the NATO championship, Dutch player Rieke van Run. Looking at the field of participants and the number of women, it is good to see at least 4–6 women now participate every year.

The following year, 2005, the tournament was organised in Poland. Fine memories exist of the cultural outing on Wednesday. Especially the barbecue in the evening, where all countries were talking to each other, dancing and having a drink. Everyone had a great time this evening, although the morning after there were a suspicious number of draws on the chessboards. In the speed chess tournament, Rieke van Run finished fourth individually.

After the bad 2006 tournament in Crowthorne, England where The Netherlands finished last, 2007 was a high point. The Dutch team came third in Ankara. Although this was a tournament with many physical challenges, not only because of the olive oil that flowed freely over the food, there were two team members who briefly needed medical attention. Fortunately, this did not affect the team performance. Wouter van Rijn finished joint second in speed chess.

In 2009, The Netherlands finished fifth in the team standings. Eric de Haan was the best Dutch player, sharing third in the individual standings.

Køge showed us around in their beautiful little miniature village, on our visit in 2010. The cultural outings are one of the highlights and added values of the NATO chess tournaments. The Netherlands



finished 8th in this tournament. In 2011 it was held in Lithuania, a first. The Netherlands came 10th, as in 2012. This year marked a return to Brest.

Poland again organised the tournament in 2013. The team came fourth. This was also the year that Rieke van Run took over as team leader from Johan Engelen. This allowed Johan to organise the championship in 2015.

2014 saw the NATO Championship be hosted across the Atlantic Ocean for the first time, in Quebec, Canada. The tournament was well organised. Many players took the opportunity to enjoy a holiday afterwards. The Netherlands finished a creditable 7th. All team members were impressed by the match location.

In 2015, the Netherlands organised the tournament again, this time in Amsterdam. Before the tournament, Jan Cheung organised a bicycle tour for the people who were interested (see Jan Cheungs story). The Amsterdam tournament was the first tournament with more than 100 players in the championship. During the opening, General Hendrik Steffers received the Polish Army Medal for all his efforts for NATO chess in general. The Netherlands came fourth on home turf.

In 2016 the tournament was held in Shrivenham. The Netherlands played well there and finished fifth. What everyone still remembers, however, was Diederick Casteleijn playing the piano. It suddenly calmed everyone down. That was necessary, since there was one round where a number of players were almost late due to having the wrong time, which was a bit stressful.

Budapest 2017 meant roadtripping for Tonnie van den Heuvel and Jan Smit. They arrived in good spirits after a few days. Many stories were shared and wonderful memories were made during this tournament. The tournament went well for the Dutch team, finishing 5th, with Jan Cheung individually tied for 8th.

In 2018 we crossed the Atlantic Ocean again. Getting there was a challenge as for a large part of the team there were no direct flights to the tournament location. Another roadtrip by rental car was the solution. Fortunately, the team arrived just in time. We came 7th in the team tournament.

A nice tournament was played in Berlin in 2019, at a base near the city centre. In addition, it was handy that everything on the base was within walking distance. Many games were played in the bar.

The Netherlands finished in equal fourth. In addition, the original gift of a blue towel was very useful considering towels had been forgotten.

In 2021 the tournament was held very close to home in Belgium. After the COVID pandemic, everyone was looking forward to playing a 'normal' tournament again. Analysing played games and playing card games made for enjoyable evenings. It was a pity that almost the entire team was struck by COVID.

2022 was a tough tournament due to the high temperatures in Tartu, Estonia. The Dutch couldn't master the heat and finished 11th in the tournament.

A tournament on the beach, with a beautiful view, describes the championship held in Portorož, Slovenia in 2023. Due to the timing of the tournament and the location, many players took a holiday leading up to the tournament and started well-rested. Unfortunately, the Dutch team were unable to convert this into results and ended up in a share of 12th place in the tournament.

The tournament in Rhodes 2024 was not the best tournament as a Dutch team and we finished 9th. There was individual success in the veterans classification, where Ard Dekker came third. Also impressive were the world martial arts championships, being held in the same hotel. It's remarkable to walk down after a game of chess and see people covered in blood.

The annual NATO Chess Championship is a great opportunity for military and civilian defence personnel to meet their NATO partners. Not only in the battle on the chessboard, but also in conversations and creating strong mutual bonds outside of chess. In addition, the bond within the Dutch team is extremely strong and pleasant. In recent years, various friendships have developed between Dutch players. Friendships between Dutch players and foreign players too. This is what NATO stands for.

In a very uncertain world, we, as a NATO chess family, show how we can treat each other. Friendship starts with reciprocal trust, followed by respect and acceptance of each other's differences and embracing common denominators. As chess players we are fortunate that despite different languages we all speak the same 'chess language'. As a Dutch team, we look forward to the future of the NATO chess championship and the cooperation yet to come.

'We are NATO'

ALL DUTCH PLAYERS DURING THE YEARS		
Bob Hoos	Henk Vedder	Jan Peter van Zandwijk
Peter Belts	Fitzgerald Krudde	Marc Horchener
Marco de Waard	Ronald van Doorn	Minko Pieters
Gert Jan Ludden	Mark de Waal	Jan Cheung
Han Jansen	Albert Riemens	Ard Dekker
Marinus van Hal	Gert de Rooij	Ornett Stork
Bob Jansen	Pieter Smeele	Rob van de Walle
Paul Kramer	Olger van Dijk	Rieke Hof-van Run
Bernard Bannink	Lucas van der Linden	Tonnie van den Heuvel
Rob Duijn	Ferry Daamen	Wouter van Rijn
R.J. Bakker	Henk van Diermen	Eric de Haan
Simon Duindam	Erik Dignum	Jan Smit
Hans Uytenbroek	Erik Kruit	Diederick Casteleijn
Hendrik Steffers	Harmen Jonkman	Arie Werksma
Bas van Esch	Bas van der Lijn	Arjan Drenthen
F. Hoekstra	Harm-Theo Wagenaar	Johan Jansen
H. Stam	Johan Engelen	Rik van Drie
Kresna Soeriadi	Jan den Besten	



Dutch team in San Remo (Italy), 2001; photo by IMCC



Dutch team in Brest (France), 2002; photo by IMCC



Dutch team in Ankara (Türkiye), 2007; photo by IMCC



Dutch team in Shrivenham (United Kingdom), 2016;
photo by IMCC

{is the only way to stop Whites attack:} {All of Whites pieces are already standing at their best squares, so a pawn move can be made:} 26.a4 {Which gives Black a chance to stop the attack with} Rc7 27.Rxc7 {After} Qxc7 28.Nf2 g5 29.Qh5 Nxf2+ 30.Rxf2 Kg7 {Black is a sound pawn up.}

26.Qxh2 Nxh2 27.Kxh2 fxe4 28.Rxf8+ Kxf8 29.Rxh7 (diagram 2)

{Due to the activity of the rook, White succeeds in drawing the game.}

29...Rc5 30.Kg3 Rg5+ 31.Kf2 e3+ 32.Kf3 e2 33.Rh1 Rb5 34.Kxe2 Rxb2 35.Kd2 Ra2 36.Rh3 Ra1 37.Rc3 Kf7 38.Ke3 Kf6 39.Kd4 Rg1

40.g3 Kf5 41.Kxc4 Rd1 42.Rf3+ Ke5 43.Kc5 g5 44.c4 Rd8 45.Rc3 Rc8+ 46.Kb4 Kd4 47.Rc1 Rb8+ 48.Ka5 Rc8.

Result: 1/2–1/2.



DIAGRAM 2

15th NCC – 2004

Cheung, Jan, 2100 – Nill, Oliver, 2212

annotated by Jan Cheung

1.d4 g6 2.c4 Bg7 3.Nc3 d6 4.e4 Nf6 5.f3 0-0 6.Be3 c5! {In this situation, the right decision is to challenge the pawn on d4, based on the fact that the diagonal b2-g7 has been weakened by the absence of White's dark coloured bishop.}

7.d5 e6 8.Nge2 exd5 9.cxd5 {With a move order, the Benoni is reached. In this position, White is the defender of the centre. Black can only attack this centre with tactical play, with the risk that a minor error can be punished severely. If this is not your cup of tea, then you should stay away from this opening.}

9...Nbd7 10.Ng3 h5 11.Be2 h4 12.Nf1 Re8 {Nowadays Black wants to play f7-f5 as fast as possible with 12...Nh7 13.Nd2 f5 14.exf5 Qe7 15.Bf2 Ne5 16.0-0 g5 a complicated position has arisen}

13.Bg5 h3 14.g4 Qa5 {with 14...b5!? 15.Nxb5 Ne5 Black could create counterplay (14...Ne5!? 15.Ne3 c4 is another method to create counterplay)}

15.Nd2 Ne5 16.Be3 Qd8

17.0-0 (diagram) {The King is safe and White can think about building up an attack on the Queenside.}

17...a6 18.a4 b6 19.Qc2 Ra7 20.Rab1 Bd7 21.b4 Qa8 22.a5? {It was safer to close the c-file. After 22.bxc5 bxc5 23.g5! (23.Rb6? Qd8! 24.Rxa6 Nfxg4! 25.fxg4 Rxa6 26.Bxa6 Nxg4 27.Bf2 Be5 with a strong attack.) 23...Nh5 24.Rb6 White has a lasting advantage.}



DIAGRAM

22...cxb4! {After 22...b5 23.Bxc5 White can win a pawn. dxc5 24.Bxc5 However both players underestimated Black's chances after Rc7 23.Bb6 Rec8! White can win an exchange but the dark squares remain weak and the Knight on c3 is vulnerable. After 26.Rb3 Qb7 27.Kh1 b4! 28.Bxc7 Qxc7 29.Rxb4 Qxc3 30.Qxc3 Rxc3 31.Rb2! A position has emerged that is difficult to assess. I had not seen this variation during the analysis in 2004 so 22.a5 was first seen as a strong move. (31.Bxa6? Rc2! 32.Rd4 Nh7 and Black has too many threats)}

23.axb6! bxc3 24.bxa7 Bh6 25.Qxc3 Nexg4 26.fxg4 Nxd5 27.exd5 Bxe3+ 28.Qxe3 Rxe3 29.Rb8+ Re8 30.Rxa8 Rxa8 31.Ra1 Rxa7 32.Rxa6 Rxa6 33.Bxa6 Bxg4 34.Kf2.

Result: 1–0.



by Lt. Col. Alexander Flaata

Otto Ibenfeldt: The Founding Father of Norwegian Military Chess

No figure is more pivotal in Norwegian military chess history than Otto Gurth von Ibenfeldt. Born in Trondheim on January 15, 1925, Ibenfeldt had a distinguished career in both the Norwegian Armed Forces and local politics. After studying theology at the University of Oslo, he pursued a naval career, ultimately working in the Armed Forces High Command and playing an instrumental role in the Norwegian Commanders' Association within the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO).



Otto Ibenfeldt

A passionate advocate for military chess, Ibenfeldt was a key driving force behind Norway's participation in NATO chess tournaments, helping to establish the country's presence on the international stage. His efforts culminated in Norway organising the NATO Chess Championship in 1990 and 1995. His influence extended beyond the chessboard – he was an active figure in Frogn's local politics for over three decades, serving on the municipal council, the presidency, and numerous committees. Though he never became mayor, he remained a principled leader, advocate for equality, and champion of working-class values.

Ibenfeldt passed away in November 2005 at the age of 80, but his legacy in both politics and Norwegian military chess remains profound. His contributions ensured that Norway would continue competing strongly in NATO Chess, even after his passing.

Simen Agdestein: The Grandmaster Who Conquered NATO Chess

While Magnus Carlsen is Norway's most famous chess player, Simen Agdestein is widely regarded as the country's second-best player and a pioneer in Norwegian chess history. Not only a former world-class player and coach of Carlsen, but Agdestein also dominated NATO Chess in the 1980s, winning back-to-back individual gold medals in the 1986 and

1987 NATO Chess Championships. His victories helped establish Norway's reputation as a force to be reckoned with in military chess.

Agdestein's unique career also included playing professional football for Lyn Oslo, making him a rare athlete excelling in both intellectual and physical sports. His contributions to Norwegian chess, both as a player and coach, remain invaluable, and his triumphs in the NATO Chess Championship are a proud chapter in Norway's military chess legacy.



Simen Agdestein

Norwegian Victory in the 1994 NATO Chess Championship

One of Norway's greatest triumphs in NATO chess history came in the 5th NATO Chess Championship in Breda, Netherlands (26 November – 3 December 1994). After six consecutive victories by Germany, Norway emerged victorious, securing the gold medal for the first time since 1987. The tournament followed an individual Swiss system format, with up to eight players per team, where the top four scores counted toward the team result.



Norwegian Victory Team; photo by IMCC

In a dramatic and nerve-wracking final round, Norway clinched first place with 19.5 points, edging out the Netherlands by just half a point. Notable performances included:

- ▲ Nils R. Grotnes – 5.5 points
- ▲ Steinar Moen – 5 points
- ▲ Kai Ørtoft and Tommy Indbryn – 4.5 points each

The team standings were:

- 1) Norway – 19.5 points
- 2) Netherlands – 19
- 3) Denmark – 18.5
- 4) UK – 17.5

This victory cemented Norway's status as a formidable chess nation in the military chess scene.

Harald Borchgrevink's Individual Gold in 2003

In 2003, Norway made another mark on NATO Chess history when Harald Borchgrevink won individual gold in the NATO Chess Championship held in Høvelte, Denmark. The championship, organised by the Royal Danish Life Guards, featured a strong Norwegian team. The players travelled to Copenhagen early, following a "Grandmaster-style" preparation period before the tournament.



Harald Borchgrevink's during a game; photo by IMCC

The format of the tournament consisted of a 7-round Swiss system, with no players from the same country facing each other. Norway's team was strong and competitive, with hopes of dethroning Germany, a frequent team champion.

Borchgrevink's exceptional performance saw him score 6 out of 7 points, narrowly securing first place ahead of FM Seel from Germany by just half a Bergerbucholtz point. His victory was celebrated enthusiastically by the British team, who shared a table with Norway at the post-tournament banquet.

The Norwegian team also performed admirably, securing the bronze medal in the team competition:

- ▲ Harald Borchgrevink – 6 points (1st place overall)
- ▲ Carl Fredrik Ekeberg – 5 points (5th place)
- ▲ Øystein Hole & Steinar Moen – 4.5 points each

Final team standings:

- 1) Germany – 21 points (Gold)
- 2) Poland – 20.5 (Silver)
- 3) Norway – 20 (Bronze)

Consistent Achievements and Recent Resurgence

Over the years, Norway has consistently performed well in the NATO Chess Championship, with multiple team and individual podium finishes:

- ▲ Gold Team Medal – 1994
- ▲ Silver Team Medals – 1990, 2009
- ▲ Bronze Team Medals – 1995, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006
- ▲ Gold Individual Medal – 1986, 1987, 2003
- ▲ Silver Individual Medal – 1990
- ▲ Bronze Individual Medals – 1992, 1994, 2002

Norway's active participation in the tournament continued until 2009. After a long absence, the Norwegian team made a much-anticipated return to the NATO Chess Championship in 2022, demonstrating renewed enthusiasm and determination to reclaim their position among the tournament's top contenders.

Recent Highlights and Future Prospects

In the main tournament of the 2022 NATO Chess Championship, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Flaata delivered an impressive performance in the



Alexander Flaata

Norwegian comeback, securing 9th place. His result showcased Norway's readiness to compete at a high level once again after more than a decade of absence.

Additionally, Flaata also impressed in the NATO Blitz Chess Tournament 2023, where he achieved a 9th place finish, proving Norway's strength in both classical and fast-paced formats.

Furthermore, Norway's chess team has expanded, showing promising growth in the competition. With increased participation and commitment, Norway aims to field a full team of four players in the 2025 NATO Chess Championship, set to be held in Poland.

With Norway back in the NATO Chess Championship, the country's military chess tradition continues, and its players are poised to achieve new milestones in the coming years. As the legacy of Otto Ibenfeldt, Simen Agdestein, Harald Borchgrevink, and past champions endures, Norway looks ahead to future triumphs on the NATO chessboard.

TWO GAMES OF VIKING CHESS FROM THE NORWEGIAN TEAM IN 2003 AND 2022

14th NATO Chess 2003

**Gorchgrevink, Harald, 2197 –
Pioch, Zygmunt, 2242**

comments by Harald Gorchgrevink

**1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 b6 4.a3 Bb7 5.Nc3 d5
6.Bg5 dxc4 7.e4 Be7 8.Bxf6**

Since I have not played many Queens Indians before (I am an old Fanagutt – ergo disciple of the Torre system!) This was an idea I found during the game. In retrospect, I found only four games on ChessBase, three of which were played by GM Loek van Wely, though with 3 out of 4 for white (no loss). The idea of playing e5 without black getting a knight planted on d5 right away.

8...Bxf6 9.Bxc4 0-0 10.0-0

Deviates from van Wely. Best Loek (sure the theory) plays e5 before, but I did not want to ruin the flexibility of my backward pawn by choosing e-or d5 yet.

10...Nd7

Here probably 10...c5 is better. Then 11.d5 must be played, admittedly it becomes a dangerous passed

pawn, but it frees up the e5 square for the black knight, and the black Bishop is undeniably better at f6 than at e7. Now white stands better.

**11.e5 Be7 12.Re1 a6 13.d5 exd5 14.Bxd5 Bxd5
15.Qxd5 Nc5 16.Rad1 Qc8 17.Qc6**

Black's white squares are a sad sight.

17...Qe6 18.Nd5 Rfe8 19.Nd4

The theorist John Watson has, as far as I remember, written a chapter in his "Modern Chess Strategy" about the strength of the jumping pair. What a school example that takes place here.

19...Qxc6 20.Nxc6 Bd8 21.Nxd8

Time to clean up and win the end game.

21...Rexd8 22.Nxc7 Rac8 23.Nd5

Not 23.b4 Nd3! And Black wins.

**23...Rb8 24.b4 Ne6 25.f4 g6 26.g4 Kf8 27.f5 Ng5
28.Kg2 gxf5 29.gxf5 h6 30.h4 Nh7 31.e6 fxe6
32.fxe6 Rdc8 33.Rf1+ Ke8 34.Rf7 Rc2+ 35.Kf1
Nf8 36.Nf6#.**

Result: 1–0.

32nd NATO Chess 2022

**Tustanowski, Mateusz, 2002 –
Flaata, Alexander R., 2033**

comments by Alexander Flaata

I knew my young polish player probably was a tactical attacking player. We both needed a win in the last round for a good result. **1.d4 Nf6 2.Bf4 c5 3.e3 Qb6
4.Na3 Qxb2 5.Nb5 Nd5** (diagram 1)

White must now prevent ...Qb4+. A very risky move, probably dubious. However, the computer evaluates the position as equal. **6.Rb1 Qxa2**

Threatens to win with ...Qa5+. **7.Ra1 Qb2 8.Nf3**
The position is equal.

8...Na6 9.Rb1 Qa2 10.Ne5 Qa5+ (diagram 2)
0.96/29

[10...d6= 0.00/29 remains equal.

11.Ra1 Qb2]

11.c3!±Hoping for Bc4. **11...Nxf4 12.exf4 d6?**
2.97/31 Black is in trouble, but this is too much.



DIAGRAM 1



DIAGRAM 2

He should be content to survive after 12...g6 that gives chances of survival.

[12...g6± 0.93/28 was called for.]

13.Ra1+- Qb6 14.Qa4

[14.Nxa? Bd7 15.Nxd? Kxd7 16.Bxa6 Rxa7 17.Bb5+ Kc? 18.Rxa? Qxa7=]

14...dxe5 I thought to take all his pieces and hope to survive. I knew it would be hard, considering my king position and whites strong attack.

15.Nc7+! Kd8 16.Nxa8 Qb2 17.Bxa6 Qxc3+ (diagram 3)

18.Ke2!

[18.Kf1 Bd7 19.Qa2 bxa6 20.Qxa6 Bb5+ 21.Qxb5 Qxa1+ 22.Ke2 Qa2+ 23.Ke1 f6 24.dxc5 e6=]

18...Bd7? 6.14/27 Another inaccuracy. Better but still lost was 18...Qb2 with a big advantage for white.

[18...cxd4? 19.Rhcl Bd7 20.Rxc3+]

[18...Qb2+ 3.02/28 19.Kf1 Bd7 20.Qa5+ b6]

19.Qa5+? 0.12/21 White goes wrong in the chaos. It is understandable that he wants to trade queens, but this plays into blacks hands. 19.Qa2 wins easily.

[White has to play 19.Qa2+- 6.14/27]

19...Qxa5= 20.Rxa5 bxa6 21.Rxc5

Bb5+ 0.44/29 With equality.

[21...exd4= 0. 00/39 22.Rd 1 (22.Rd5? e6+ 22...e6)]

22.Kd2 (diagram 4) -0.81/31

[22.Kf3~ 0. 44/29 keeps the upper hand. e6 23.Rc? exd4 24.Rhcl (24.Rd1 d3t)]

22...e6!+ 23.Rc7 Bb4+

[Don't do 23...exf4 24.Rxa? Bb4+ 25.Kc2+]

24.Kc1 -1.76/25

[24.Kc2; -0.55/29 exd4 25.Kb3]

24...exd4+ 25.Rxa7 (diagram 5)

25...d3? (diagram 6) 0.00/37 A mistake. Gives white the chance to escape with 25.Ne?! Correct was the "passive" 25.Rf8

[Better is 25...Rf8 !+ -1 . 79/30...Bc5 is the strong threat. 26.Ne 7 Bc5 27.Nxb5 Bxa7 28.Nxa? Kc?]

26.Nc7!= d2+ (diagram 7)

27.Kb2? -2.15/31 Another Error. Correct was trying to blockade the free pawn with Kdl. Then I will not win a complete rook, as is the case in the game.

[27.Kdl != 0.00/36 and White stays safe. Ba4+ 28.Ke2]

27...Bc5!+ 28.Nxe6+ (diagram 8)

[28.Ra8+ Kxc7 29.Rxh8 Ba4]

28...fxe6 29.Ra8+ (diagram 9)

29...Ke7! 30.Rxh8 And now Kc2 would win. **30...Ba4 31.Kc3 d1 Q 32.Rxd1 Bxd1 33.Rxh7 Kf6** A technically won ending.



DIAGRAM 3



DIAGRAM 5



DIAGRAM 7



DIAGRAM 9



DIAGRAM 4



DIAGRAM 6



DIAGRAM 8

[Worse is 33...Bxf2 34.Rxg?+ Kf6 35.Rg5+-]

34.Kd2 -3.55/23

[034.Rh8 -2. 08/35]

34...Bb3 35.g4 -4.69/26

[035.Kc3 -3.28/29 Bd5 36.f5]

35...a5 36.Kc3 Bd5 37.h4 -9.03/24

[o37.Rh3 -4.39/27 a4 38.Kb2]

37...a4 aiming for ...a3. **38.h5 a3** Weighted Error Value: White=0. 70/ Black=0.33 A game that shows the importance to fight even in the most dire and hopeless circumstances.

Result: **0-1.**



by Col. Sławomir Kędzierski

The Polish Armed Forces have participated in NATO Chess continuously since 2002, in many cases finishing on the podium in the team competition. Like many other teams, we aim to maintain our unbroken streak of participation.

Below you will find detailed information on team results. Three golds, several silvers and bronzes and only finishing off the podium three times makes a decent record, particularly given the strength of the opposition, especially the power houses Germany and Greece recently.



Gold Team 2021; photo by IMCC

TEAM RESULTS OF THE POLISH ARMED FORCES TEAM

2002	Brest, FRANCE	Germany 20.5, USA 18, Norway 17.5, Poland 15.5 (6 th place)
2003	Høvelte, DENMARK	Germany 21, Poland 20.5 , Norway 20
2004	Hague, NETHERLANDS	Germany 21, Poland 19 , Norway 18.5
2005	Kołobrzeg, POLAND	Germany 22.5, Poland 20 , United Kingdom 18.5
2006	Crowthorne, UNITED KINGDOM	Germany 23, Poland 18 , Norway 18
2007	Ankara, TÜRKİYE	Germany 21, Poland 17.5 , Netherlands 17.5
2008	Brussels, BELGIUM	Türkiye 20.5, Germany 18.5, Poland 18.5
2009	Hammelburg, GERMANY	Germany 21, Norway 20, Poland 19.5
2010	Køge, DENMARK	Germany 21, Poland 18 , Türkiye 17.5
2011	Kaunas, LITHUANIA	Türkiye 21, Germany 20, Denmark 19, Poland 17 (4 th place)
2012	Brest, FRANCE	Germany 19, Poland 19 , France 19
2013	Warsaw–Rynia, POLAND	Germany 21, Denmark 18.5, Poland 18
2014	Quebec, CANADA	Germany 21.5, Poland 20 , USA 17.5
2015	Amsterdam, NETHERLANDS	Germany 21, Poland 20.5 , Denmark 18.5
2016	Shrivenham, UNITED KINGDOM	Poland 20.5 , Germany 20.5, Denmark 20
2017	Budapest, HUNGARY	Germany 20, Denmark 20, Poland 19.5
2018	Lubbock, USA	Poland 20.5 , Germany 20, Greece 19.5
2019	Berlin, GERMANY	Germany 21.5, Poland 21 , Greece 19
2021	Blankenberge, BELGIUM	Poland 21 , Greece 20.5, Germany 19
2022	Tartu, ESTONIA	Greece 23, Poland 19.5 , USA 19
2023	Portorož, SLOVENIA	Germany 21, Greece 20, USA 20, Poland 19 (5 th place)
2024	Rhodes, GREECE	Greece 24, Germany 20, Poland 20

However, individual results are less impressive, with no individual gold wins yet.

MEDALS IN CLASSICAL CHESS		
Silver	2005	Rafał Przedmojski
	2009	Mateusz Sypień
	2014	Dariusz Sycz
	2018	Damian Graczyk
Bronze	2003	Saturnin Skindzier
	2012	Mateusz Sypień
	2016	Rafał Przedmojski
	2019	Damian Graczyk
	2024	Mateusz Tustanowski

MEDALS IN BLITZ		
Gold	2017	Poland II: IV board – Kamil Cichy
	2005	Adam Karbowski
Silver	2010	Piotr Bieluszewski
	2012	Adam Karbowski
	2013	Sławomir Krański
	2016	Damian Graczyk
	2017	Poland I: II board – Mateusz Sypień; III board – Damian Graczyk
	2019	II board – Dariusz Sycz; IV board – Marcin Pietruszewski
Bronze	2005	Piotr Bieluszewski
	2013	Adam Karbowski
	2014	Daniel Michalski
	2015	Piotr Bieluszewski
	2017	IV board – Marcin Pietruszewski
	2019	III board – Damian Graczyk; IV board – Aleksander Stańkowski
	2021	Marcin Pietruszewski

Additionally, it should be noted that Pte Mateusz Bobula won the “Lubbock Open” friendly tournament in 2018, which was held alongside NATO Chess.

The need to field the strongest possible team was in 2003 the direct cause of the reactivation of the Polish Armed Forces Championships, which also became the qualification tournaments for NATO Chess – the top three players are nominated to the national team. The remaining squad is chosen based on Elo rating, results from other tournaments, and their psychological and physical condition. Before traveling to the competition, the team occasionally participates in a week-long training camp.

The Polish Chess Federation (PZSzach) recognized the achievements of military chess players at the alliance level, awarding the ‘Hetman’ (the equivalent of an Oscar in the film industry) to the Polish Armed Forces team in honour of their victory in NATO Chess on the 100th anniversary of Poland regaining independence. The representatives of Lubbock–2018 were also awarded honorary badges from the federation (6 silver and two bronze). The federation has supported military chess in every possible context from the very beginning.



Hetman (in chess Queen) of Polish Chess Federation (PZSzach); photo by IMCC



Winners of the Hetman awards 2018; photo by IMCC

At this point, it is worth noting that the Ministry of National Defence funded the “Friend of Chess” medal, which is awarded to representatives of the tournament organisers.

Poland had the honour of hosting the best NATO chess players twice during the 16th and 24th editions of the competition (respectively in Kołobrzeg in 2005 and Warsaw–Rynia in 2013), during which they had the opportunity to see more of Poland, learn some of the culture and the rich military traditions.

A circular silver medal is shown inside a red presentation box. The medal has a dark, possibly engraved, design on its surface. The box is open, showing a white interior lining.

A gold medal is shown inside its red presentation box. The medal is circular and features a profile of a person. The box is open, showing the medal resting on a white cushion.

The annually held Polish Armed Forces Championships are not only a great showcase of chess skills but also a motivation for year-round training and improvement of individual abilities. All players would also like to see their names written on a chessboard kept in the hall of tradition of the 1st Bridging Engineers Regiment in Brzeg near Wrocław.



Up to 2024, 36 soldiers and civilian employees of the MoD have represented Poland, with some participating multiple times; photo by IMCC

For a few years the championships have been preceded by a rapid Minister of National Defence Cup also open to civilians which gathers many strong players. All of this would not, of course, be possible without the financial support of the Ministry of National Defence, and above all, the goodwill of military unit commanders, in whose units the representatives serve or work on a daily basis. Much appreciated therefore are the Ministry of National Defence Office, the War Studies Academy, the 1st Bridging Engineers Regiment, and the Military Association “Sport – Tourism – Defence” for their long-standing organisational support. Individual credits must

also go to Col. Tomasz Malinowski, a long-year head of delegation and the IMCC Chairman in the years 2012–2021. Lt. Col. (ret.) Jerzy Kufel contributed enormously in terms of organisational matters, making sure that the paperwork was done on time. Col. Sławomir Kędzierski has also had a strong influence on chess matters, first as the Polish Team Captain, then the IMCC Secretary (2012–2021), and finally the IMCC Chairman (since 2021 up until the present). Finally Maj. Dariusz Sycz and Lt. Marcin Pietruszewski as IMCC Secretaries did and still do their share for NATO Chess.

Polish competitors played many interesting games.

Kędzierski, Sławomir, 2146 – Schott, Guido, 2127 (Lubbock 2018)

by Sławomir Kędzierski

1.d4 d6 2.c4 Nf6 3.Nf3 Bf5 4.Nc3 Nbd7

In my opinion, this is an impulsive move that gave White the opportunity to obtain the pair of bishops, while Black's pawn structure is slightly weakened. Therefore, the natural follow-up occurred:

5.Nh4 Bg6 6.Nxg6 hxg6 7.g3

I concluded that the white-squared bishop would have the best prospects on the h1–a8 diagonal.

7...c6 8.Bg2 e5

I thought that building a wall with c6–d5–e6 would be better, trying to limit the bishop on g2.

9.O-O Be7 10.b3 Qc7

A very passive place for the queen – a more active Qa5 would have been better.

11.Bb2 O-O-O

My opponent offered a draw, which I rejected because White's position is very promising due to the possibility of a quick pawn attack on the queenside. Furthermore, it was the last round, and I wanted to encourage my teammates to make maximum effort with my uncompromising play. It's worth noting that I had previously beaten my opponent in 2009 so the psychological advantage was on my side.

12.a4 Ng4 13.h3 Nh6 14.a5 Nf5

During the game, I thought that f5 would be more promising for Black, with the attempt to launch counterplay. However, a6 followed by d5 and after

Black's c5 Nb5 leads to a huge advantage for White because Black's queen is out of play.

15.e3 exd4 16.exd4 Bf6 17.Ne4 Kb8 18.b4 Rde8 19.a6

I thought for quite a long time about this move, seeing no satisfactory defensive continuation for my opponent. The greatest threat is breaking through the king's pawn shield, which should lead to a very strong attack.

19...b6 20.b5 c5 21.Qf3 Kc8 22.Nxf6 gxf6 23.dxc5 dxc5 24.Rfd1

It was necessary to bring the f rook to the file because the rook on the a file was meant for an attack on the a7 square.

24...Re6 25.Qb7+ Qxb7 26.axb7+ Kc7 27.b8Q+

Surely my opponent did not see this pawn sacrifice in his earlier calculations.

27...Nxb8 28.Rxa7+ Kc8 29.Bb7+ Kc7 30.Ba6#
(diagram)

Checkmate on the board, which is rarely seen at this level of play. This position deserves to be on a diagram. This was also the game between the captains of the teams fighting for the highest laurels.

Result: **1–0**.



DIAGRAM

**Andersen, Hans-Christoph, 2213 –
Pietruszewski, Marcin, 2198 (Lubbock 2018)**

by Marcin Pietruszewski

I played the following game against a German player, who was a direct competitor for the team gold. Interestingly, the previous year in Budapest, we played with the same colours in the penultimate round. The game ended in a draw, and in the end, the Germans finished ahead of us by half a point. This time, I had to win the full point to reverse the situation. The task was difficult because my opponent, playing White, is known for his solid positional style, and I had to search for complications at all costs.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.e3 a6

Using my experience from a game played the previous year, I knew Andersen likes to deviate from the main lines with the move Qc2. I hoped that after 5.Qc2 Bg4 6.Ne5 Bh5, I could reach a position similar to the game Gelfand – Chajrullin, Dagomys 2010, or the beautiful initiative from the game Azmaiparashvili – Kasparov, Crete 2003. Another solid option is 4...Bf5 5.Nc3 e6 6.Nh4 Bg6 7.Nxg6 hxg6, but it is hard to seek a win here. The main line is 4...e6 5.Nc3 Nbd7. **5.Nbd2**

More popular is 5.Bd3 Bg4 6.Nbd2 e6. **5...Bg4?!**

This is an overly persistent attempt to find complications. A better choice is 5...Bf5 6.Be2 e6 7.O-O Nbd7.

6.h3 Bh5

6...Bxf3 7.Nxf3 and White has no problems.

7.g4 Bg6 8.Ne5!

A series of good moves allowed White to seize the initiative.

8...Nfd7

A weaker move was 8...Nbd7 9.h4! dxc4 10.Bxc4 Nxe5 11.dxe5 Ne4 12.e6!

9.Nxg6 hxg6 10.Bg2 e6 11.e4 (diagram)

11...dxc4!

Compared to the position after 4...Bf5, White has a knight on d2 and has already pushed pawns on the kingside, which led me to make an unconventional complication. From a positional perspective, giving up the strong d5 point is incorrect, but the specific plan carried out in the game was unpleasant for White, and instead of calm, positional play, it forced concrete actions. The weaker move would have been:

11...Nb6 12.c5 N6d7 13.O-O Be7 14.b4 a5 15.Qa4 b5 16.Qa3 Ra6 17.bxa5 Rxa5 18.Ne3 Ra4 19.e5 Na6 20.Nb3 Nc7 21.Bd2 Qa8 22.f4 1-0 (56) E. Gareyev – A. Morozewicz, France 2001.

12.Nxc4 b5

At first glance, this seems like a terrible move, but the computer evaluates it only slightly worse than the more natural 12...b6. From a practical point of view, the move chosen in the game is much more ambitious and does not lead to the typical passive position, where White would threaten a d5 breakthrough and have an advantage with the pair of bishops in the open position.

13.Ne3 Nb6 14.O-O c5 15.d5

This is the position I was aiming for when I played 11...dxc4. I felt my opponent would make this move, although practically speaking, transitioning to the endgame would have been better. Although White's position is better in both cases, I managed to win a small psychological battle. Now, White must show concrete, dynamic play to avoid letting the black pieces regroup. A better move would have been 15.dxc5! Qxd1 16.Rxd1 Bxc5 17.b3 Nbd7 18.Bb2 O-O 19.Rac1 Rfc8 20.Nc2! Ra7 21.Ne1 Rac7 22.Nd3, and Black's knights lack good outposts. Only patient defence remains.

15...e5 16.b3!

White must quickly make contact with the black pieces. Otherwise, the manoeuvre played in the game would give Black a positional advantage. Nothing came of 16.a4 N8d7 17.axb5 axb5 18.Bd2 c4! with an unclear position.

16...N8d7 17.a4 Rb8 18.Qe2 18...Nc8!

Analysing this position with the Komodo 11 engine is pure pleasure. The cold computer recommends 18...Be7?! 19.axb5 axb5 20.Bd2 (20.Qxb5? Nxd5 21.Qc6 Nc3!! and Black has no problems) 20...O-O, and only after further analysis does it see the obvious



DIAGRAM

21.Ra5!, which I had foreseen before move 18, because it forces a positional concession associated with the move 21...b4 22.Rfa1 Bg5 23.Ra7. If Black had a knight on d6, transferring it to d4 via b5 would give a positional advantage, but this is unrealistic with good play from White.

19.axb5 axb5 20.Bd2 Nd6 21.Ra6 Ra8 22.Ba5?

The prospect of exchanging the knight on d6 was so tempting that White forgot the classical principles. It was necessary to maintain the “a” file. A better move was the natural 22.Rfa1! Rxa6 23.Rxa6 Qc8!

22...Qc8

Perhaps White was hoping for 22...Qxa5? 23.Rxa5 Rxa5 24.Qb2 Be7 25.Ra1 Rxa1+ 26.Qxa1 O-O 27.Qa7+.

23.Rxa8?!

The computer recommended 23.Rc6 Qb7 24.Bc7 Ra6 25.Qd2!!

23...Qxa8

24.Bc7?!

It is instructive that White could have still corrected everything and found a beautiful plan to create and exploit weaknesses around the black king. However, for a human, this was unreachable.

24.Bc3! Be7 25.Qb2! f6 26.Qe2! (26.g5 O-O 27.gxf6 Bxf6 28.Ra1 Qb7 29.Ng4 b4 30.Bd2 Nb5 31.Bf1 Nd4 32.Be3)

26...O-O 27.g5 Qa3 28.gxf6 Bxf6 29.Qc2 c4 30.bxc4 b4 31.Bb2 Qa7 32.Ng4 Rc8 33.Ra1 Qc5 34.Bf1 Nxc4 35.Qxc4 Qxc4 36.Bxc4 Rxc4 37.Ra7 Nc5 38.Rc7 Rc2 39.Kg2! with a better endgame.

24...Qa6 25.Qb2 Qb7 26.Bxd6 Bxd6 27.Ra1 Ke7 28.Bf1 Qb6 29.Qd2 Rb8 30.Ra5

30...c4!!

A textbook breakthrough turning White’s active pieces into awkwardly placed forces around the supported, passed b-pawn.

31.bxc4 b4 32.Rb5 Qd4 33.Qc2?

A better move was 33.Qxd4! exd4 34.Nd1.

33...Rxb5?

A blunder in mutual time trouble. Of course, it was necessary to block the pawns as quickly as possible with 33...Nc5! 34.Rxb8 Bxb8 35.Qa2 b3 36.Qa8 Bd6 37.Qa7+ Qd7 38.c5 Bxc5 39.Qb7 b2, and the threat of Qd2 will seal the victory for Black’s strategy.

34.cxb5 Nc5 35.Nc4 b3 36.Qb1? Qxc3?

36...Nxe4 37.Qb2 Qxb2 38.Nxb2 Bc5-+

37.b6 Qc2 38.Qa1 Qa2 39.Qb2 Na4 40.Qd2

Result: 0–1

At this point, White ran out of time. There could have been 40...Qxd2 41.Nxd2 b2 42.Bd3 Nxb6, and realising the advantage requires finding a plan with Bb4 and f5.

The above game is an excellent example of how sometimes it is better to look for worse positions with practical chances than to follow computer recommendations that are evaluated better but lack perspectives.



Slovenia boasts a rich chess heritage dating back to the 19th century, with grandmasters such as Milan Vidmar and Vasja Pirc contributing to global chess theory. Within the SAF, chess was formally organised in 2009 with the formation of a dedicated team under the Sports Unit. Composed of military personnel, the team participates in national tournaments and the annual North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Chess Championship. Key players like Igor Mestek and Matej Keršič have represented Slovenia with distinction, including notable performances in blitz events. The SAF also hosts an internal championship that acts as a proving ground for NATO team selection. In 2023, Slovenia hosted the 33rd NATO Chess Championship in Portorož – a historic venue that once welcomed Bobby Fischer. With participation from 17 NATO countries and over 100 players, the event was a significant milestone for the SAF. Beyond competition, chess serves as a mental discipline within the military, paralleling strategic and tactical thinking essential to command. The paper underscores the dual role of chess as both a sport and a tool for cognitive development, reflecting its continued relevance in military culture.

1. Slovenia Chess History

Slovenian chess has a rich history that dates back to the 19th century and has produced notable players, composers, and historians. The game gained popularity in the region through Austro-Hungarian influence, with local clubs and competitions emerging in the early 20th century.

One of the most prominent Slovenian chess figures was Dr. Milan Vidmar (1885–1962), a grandmaster, engineer, and chess theoretician. Vidmar was among the world's strongest players in the early 20th century, competing against legends like Emanuel Lasker, José Raúl Capablanca, and Alexander Alekhine. He finished high in several major tournaments, including second place at the strong "San Sebastián 1911 tournament". His positional

and strategic play earned him recognition as one of the best players of his era. Despite his success, Vidmar never pursued chess professionally, instead focusing on his career in electrical engineering[†].

Another key Slovenian chess grandmaster was Vasja Pirc (1907–1980), best known for his contribution to opening theory. Pirc developed and popularised the Pirc Defence (1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6), a dynamic and flexible response to 1.e4[‡]. He was a five-time Yugoslav champion and competed in several Chess Olympiads. His legacy in chess opening strategy remains influential, with the Pirc Defense still played at the highest levels today.

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, Slovenia has maintained a strong chess tradition, annotated in press articles written by the main players and addressed the sport, arts and science side[§], with many players achieving international recognition. The country has hosted various tournaments and produced grandmasters such as Alexander Beliavsky and Luka Lenič. Chess remains an important part of Slovenian culture, supported by clubs, schools, and national organisations.

Chess in the military is hardly a novel concept. Prussian officers honed their battle strategies through the game in the 19th century, and Soviet military academies treated chess as a core component of officer training. For Slovenia, the practice is as much about mental resilience as it is about battlefield applications.

2. Chess in Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF)

The Slovenian Armed Forces have long embraced chess as a means of strategic development, organising an annual SAF Blitz Championship where the country's best military minds face off in high-speed battles of wit. The championship serves as a proving ground for selecting the country's NATO Chess Team, ensuring that only the most skilled and disciplined minds represent Slovenia on the international stage.

* Peter Papler, Captain(N), Slovenian Armed Forces, peter.papler@mors.si, ORCID-ID: 0009-0000-8362-4123.

† Vidmar Milan (1946): Pogovori z začetnikom. Državna založba slovenije; Ljubljana, 5.

‡ Stupica, Janez (1982): Šah skozi stoletja. Državna založba Slovenije, Ljubljana, 17.

§ Tratar, Marko (2003): Šah v slovenskem časopisu. Diplomsko delo, Ekonomska fakulteta, Ljubljana, 4.

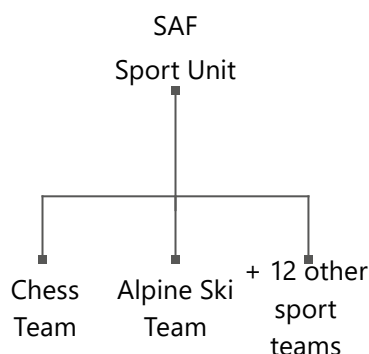
2.1. Chess Team in the structure of the SAF Sport Unit

Chess in the Slovenian Armed Forces began in 1994 with an initial tournament organised by Franci Cirkvenčič, who also contributed articles related to chess to the Slovenian Armed Forces Magazine. The first winner was Igor Mestek. After a brief pause, organised chess resumed in 2008 with the first “NATO Chess Championship” appearance.

A milestone was the 1998 employment of Aljoša Grosar, an international master with a 2500+ rating, though only for one year. Since then, no similarly high-level player has joined.

The Slovenian Armed Forces established a Sports Unit within their structure in 1994, which, in addition to supporting sports activities, is responsible for planning, leading, and organising the work of various military sports teams. These teams consist of top-level athletes employed by the military, who achieve strong results internationally, as well as regular military personnel who excel in certain sports disciplines at national civilian championships. There are currently 14 active sports teams, with the chess team operating for the past 16 years (since 2009).

Chess Team within the SAF Sports Unit.



For the members of the Slovenian Military Chess Team, the game is more than a pastime – it is a discipline as rigorous as any military drill. Comprised of officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted personnel, the team represents a unique fusion of tactical acumen and martial precision.

Each year, the Chief of the General Staff appoints the heads of each sports team. The team leader selects team members and prepares an annual activity plan. So far, the leaders of the chess team have been:

- ♣ Peter Papler (2009–2010, 2014–2016)
- ♣ Aleš Lazar (2011–2013)
- ♣ Cveto Ivšek (2017–present)

Regular players have included Igor Mestek, Matej Keršič, Matjaž Pirš, Franci Cirkvenčič, and Aljaž Dušak. Currently, Cveto Ivšek is employed at the Sports Unit’s command, which facilitates better organization and logistics for the chess team.

Based on the annual activity plan, each team may participate in 15–20 days of training or competitions. The chess team prioritises participation in the annual “NATO Chess Championship”, and also competes in two civilian 7-day chess tournaments in Slovenia, typically:

- ♣ Nova Gorica (average rating ~2000)
- ♣ Portorož (~1830)
- ♣ Ljubljana (~1930)

Among 15 military sports competitions held annually, one is the Slovenian Armed Forces Chess Championship, with 20–40 participants from various units. This has been held since 2009. It follows the 9-round Swiss system with 10-minute games.

“SAF Chess Championship” winners from 2012–2025:

1st place:

- ♣ Matej Keršič (7x)
- ♣ Igor Mestek (5x)
- ♣ Matjaž Pirš (2x)



SAF Chess Championship, Slovenska Bistrica, 2022; photo by Vojko Leva

Players who score well, have a rating around 1700 and are employed by the Ministry of Defence may be invited to join the Armed Forces Chess Team. Women have participated in smaller numbers (2–4), but none have yet achieved sufficient ratings (~1600) to join the team or participate in the “NATO chess championships”.

The team was officially formed in 2009 following its debut at the 19th “NATO Chess Championship” in Belgium (2008).



SAF 33th "NATO Chess Championship" Team; <https://www.slovenskavojska.si/en/in-the-service-of-peace/international-sports-competitions/33rd-nato-chess-championship-2023/>, photo by Zvone Vrankar [accessed 20.3.2025]

Core team members and NATO Chess Championship attendance:

- ♣ Igor Mestek (13)
- ♣ Matej Keršič (12)
- ♣ Matjaž Pirš (11)
- ♣ Peter Papler (9)
- ♣ Cveto Ivšek (8)
- ♣ Franci Cirkvenčič (7)
- ♣ Aljaž Dušak (3)
- ♣ Aleš Lazar (3)

SAF Chess Team best results at "NATO Chess Championship":

- ♣ Denmark (2010): 5th (17 pts)
- ♣ Lithuania (2011): 6th (16.5 pts)
- ♣ Canada (2014): 6th (15.5 pts)
- ♣ Netherlands (2015): 5th (16 pts)
- ♣ Hungary (2017): 6th (17 pts)
- ♣ USA, Texas (2018): 7th (14 pts)

Individual performances at "NATO Chess Championship"

Standard chess:

- ♣ Best: Igor Mestek – 10th place (Lithuania, 2011), 12th place (Canada, 2014)

Blitz:

- ♣ 1st: Igor Mestek (Canada, 2014)
- ♣ 2nd: Igor Mestek (Netherlands, 2015)
- ♣ 3rd: Igor Mestek (USA/Texas, 2018)

2.2. Highlighted Game assessed as best of NATO Chess Tournament in Amsterdam

Mestek, Igor, 2095 – Nielsen, Morten Majlund, 2004

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Nb3 Bb4 7.Bd3 d5

8.exd5 Nxd5 9.Bd2 Nxc3 10.bxc3 Be7 11.0-0 0-0 12.f4 Bf6 13.f5 Bg5

14.Qh5 h6 (diagram)

15.f6 Bxd2 16.Nxd2 Qd7 17.fxg7 Kxg7 18.Rf3 Qd6

19.Ne4 Qe6 20.Bc4 Qxc4 21.Rg3+ Kh7 22.Nf6+ Kh8 23.Qxh6#.

Result: 1–0.



A sharp Sicilian battle unfolds as White sacrifices material for a kingside assault. Black's 14...h6 weakens key dark squares, allowing White's powerful f6 thrust. Coordination between queen, rook, and knight leads to a decisive attack. The game ends with a beautiful mating net: 23.Qxh6#. A brilliant tactical display!

Slovenian Authorities organised the Championship in Portorož as one of chess's famous historical sites. Bobby Fisher[¶], one of the most well-known chess players of all time, made his international debut in the Slovenian seaside resort town of Portorož, where he became a grandmaster at the age of just 15.

The year was 1958 and Portorož was the site of the "Interzonal Tournament", a prestigious event where the best chess players from around the world went head-to-head with each other. Among the world's grandmasters, formally attired in suits and ties, was a lanky, Chicago-born Bobby Fisher, wearing only a sweater. His biographer later remarked that Fischer "dressed atrociously" at major chess events. Fischer was invited to Portorož because he had become U.S. champion, the youngest in history,

[¶] <https://www.rtvsllo.si/news-in-english/slovenia-revealed/bobby-fischer-shocked-the-world-from-slovenia/340627> [accessed 20.3.2025].



33th "NATO Chess Championship Portorož" 2023 group photo; <https://www.slovenskavojska.si/en/in-the-service-of-peace/international-sports-competitions/33rd-nato-chess-championship-2023/>, photo by Zvone Vrankar [accessed 20.3.2025]

just a few weeks earlier. Still, few observers expected the unassuming kid to make major waves at Slovenia's most famous seaside resort.

At the 33th "NATO Chess Championship" 116 players from 17 NATO countries took part. The National Teams competition was won by Germany with 21 points, second was Greece and in third place the United States of America both with 20 points. The Slovenian Team played according to expectation and took 10th place out of 21 Teams**.

2023 champion was Fide Master (FM) Robert Stein from Germany, second was International Master (IM) Pavlidis Anastasios from Greece and third, IM Ege Koksall from Türkiye††. The best Slovenian player at the home championship was staff sergeant Igor Mestek in 25th place with 4.5 points.

The blitz Tournament was won by FM Aizpurua Patric Emilio with 9.5 points, in second place was Grandmaster (GM) Firat Burak with 9 points and in third place IM Edge Koksall with 8.5 points both from Türkiye. Staff sergeant Matej Keršič was the best Slovenian player in 32nd place with 6 points.

Hosting the 33rd NATO Chess Championship in 2023 was a moment of pride for Slovenia.

Portorož, a coastal town famed for its Venetian architecture and sweeping Adriatic views, played host to teams from across the alliance. The championship was a week-long test of intellect and endurance, with grandmasters and military strategists locking horns in an event that proved as intense as any war game simulation.

I will leave with a SAF Chess Team saying: "Chess mirrors military command – positioning, timing, and knowing when to attack or retreat".

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** https://www.slovenskavojska.si/fileadmin/user_upload/Slike/V_sluzbi_miru/mednarodni_sporti/sah/33rd_NATO_Chess_2023_Team_Ranking_R7.pdf [accessed 20.3.2025]

†† https://www.slovenskavojska.si/fileadmin/user_upload/Slike/V_sluzbi_miru/mednarodni_sporti/sah/Final_ranking_after_R7.pdf [accessed 20.3.2025].

As one of the long-established members of NATO, Türkiye first participated in the NATO Chess Championship in 1990, in Oslo (Norway). Nine years later, we proceeded to join this unique competition 15 years in a row (1999–2013). Finally, (ten years later) we competed in Portorož, Slovenia in 2023. Let's have a look at some memories of these years.

MEDALS IN CLASSICAL CHESS		
Gold	2008	Serkan Yeke
	2011	Kivanc Haznedaroglu
Silver	2011	Yakup Erturan
Bronze	2023	Ege Koksall

MEDALS IN BLITZ		
Silver	2023	Burak Firat
Bronze	2010	Doga Cihan Goksel
	2011	Kivanc Haznedaroglu
	2023	Ege Koksall

TEAM RANKINGS	
1990	8 th place
1999	8 th place
2000	4 th place
2001	7 th place
2002	7 th place
2003	9 th place
2004	11 th place
2005	9 th place
2006	4 th place
2007	5 th place
2008	Champion
2009	6 th place
2010	3 rd place
2011	Champion
2012	5 th place
2013	5 th place
2023	4 th place

TÜRKİYE ON NATO CHESS CHAMPIONSHIPS

12th NCC 2001, San Remo (Italy)

I was there in San Remo (Italy). It was the first time I qualified as a national team player, I got on a plane, I was abroad... What an honour! I still keep the booklet of that tournament, which our Italian friends prepared well and gave us.

Booklet of 12th NCC;
from the author's archive



13th NCC 2002, Brest (France)

Results of 13th NATO Chess Championship, Brest (France)

TEAM RANKING		
Rank	Final listing	Points
1.	Germany	20.5
2.	USA	18
3.	Norway	17.5
4.	France	17.5
5.	UK	17.5
6.	Poland	15.5
7.	Türkiye	15.5

TEAM RANKING		
Rank	Final listing	Points
8.	The Nether-lands	15
9.	Italy	14.5
10.	Canada	14.5
11.	NATO	13.5
12.	Belgium	13.5
13.	Denmark	13

<https://www.natochess.com/championship2002.html>

INDIVIDUAL RANKING			
Rank	Player	Country	Points
1.	Mark Helbig	GER	6
2.	Andy Hammond	UK	6
3.	Daniel Hersvik	NOR	5.5
4.	Harald Borchgrevink	NOR	5
5.	Narciso Victoria	USA	5
6.	Lawrence Cooper	UK	5
7.	Florian Grafl	GER	5

INDIVIDUAL RANKING			
Rank	Player	Country	Points
8.	Holger Fiedler	GER	5
9.	Fabrice Wantiez	BEL	5
10.	Rudy Tia	USA	5
11.	Jan Peter Zandwijk	NED	4.5
12.	Glenn Morin	CAN	4.5
13.	Neset Daler	TUR	4.5

<https://www.natochess.com/championship2002.html>

16th NCC 2005, Kołobrzeg (Poland)



Turkish Armed Forces Chess Team, 2005, Kołobrzeg (Poland);
<https://www.natochess.com/championship2005.html>

17th NCC 2006, Crowthorne (England)

Narman, Gokhan – Wantiez, Fabrice
(2/08/2006, Round 2)

annotated by Gokhan Narman

1.c4 Nf6 2.g3 g6 3.Bg2 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.Nc3 Nb6 6.Nf3 Bg7 7.0-0 0-0 8.d3 Nc6 9.Be3 e5 10.Rb1 [10.Qd2 better] 10...Nd4 11.Qd2 Bg4 12.Ng5 Qe7 13.h3 (diagram 1) I didn't like the idea of giving up the Queen [13.Bxb7 Rad8 14.Bg2 Nc4 15.dxc4 Nxe2+ 16.Qxe2 Bxe2 17.Nxe2

13...Bc8 If Rad8 is played, it does not lose three minor pieces but rather one rook and two minor pieces. 14.b4 Rd8 15.a4 (diagram 2) We are planning a queen-side attack, but the method is wrong. First, by playing Rfcl, it is necessary to disrupt the structure of the black pawns.

[15.Rfcl c6 16.a4 would be better]

15...a5 16.b5 Qa3 My opponent is trying to complicate the game. 17.Nge4 [17.Qb2?? Qxc3! 18.Qxc3 Nxe2+ 19.Kh2 Nxc3] 17...Be6 18.Qb2 Qe7 19.Ng5 Bd5 20.Rfcl I wanted to develop the rook that hadn't entered the game. However, according to Fritz:

[20.Nxd5 Nxd5 21.Ne4 Nxe3 22.fxe3 Nf5]

20...Bxg2 21.Kxg2 h6 22.Nge4 f5 23.Qa2+ Kh7 24.Nd2 Qd6 25.Nc4 Nxc4 26.Qxc4 Ne6 27.Nd1 (diagram 3) I didn't like the position of my knight,



DIAGRAM 1



DIAGRAM 3



DIAGRAM 2

so I began manoeuvring it toward the c4 square. 27...b6 [27...f4 28.Bc5]

28.Qc6 f4 29.Bd2 Nc5 30.Qxd6 cxd6? [30...Rxd6 31.Rc4 f3+ 32.Kxf3 e4+ 33.Kg2 exd3 34.exd3 Rxd3= 35.Be3] 31.gxf4 Nxa4? [31...exf4 32.Bxf4 g5 33.Bg3 Nxa4] 32.Rc6 Rab8 [32...d5 33.Ral Nc5 34.fxe5

Bxe5 35.Ra2 Rd6] **33.Nc3?! We can't seem to make Fritz approve of anything. [33.fxe5 dxe5 34.Be3]**

33...Nxc3 34.Bxc3 Rb7 35.Kf3 A critical moment. Both sides have become very tired by this point. Wantiez was trying to force a win. In this position, I thought for a long time about how I could secure the victory. Then, I decided to burn the boats. **35...**

Rf8 36.Ke4 Rxf4+ 37.Kd5 Bf8?! (diagram 4) [37... Rxf2! 38.Rxd6 Rc7 39.Rc6 (39.Bxa5 Rc5+ 40.Ke6 Rf6+ 41.Kd7 Rxd6+ 42.Kxd6 Bf8+ 43.Kd7 bxa5 44.b6 Rd5+ 45.Kc6 Rd6+ 46.Kb5 Rd4 47.Kxa5 Bd6 48.b7 Bb8 49.Rcl) 39...Rd7+ 40.Ke6 Rd8 41.Ke7]

38.Rc8 Rxf2 [38...Rff7 39.Kc6 Kg8 40.8d2 Kg7] 39.Kc6 Rff7 [39...Rbf7 40.Kxb6 a4 41.Ka6 d5 42.b6 R2f6 43.Ka5 a3 44.Bxe5 Rf5] 40.Rf1 Rxf1 41.Kxb7 Fighting to the last drop of their blood. **41...g5** (diagram 5) [41...a4 42.Kxb6 Rcl 43.Rc7+ Kg8 44.Bb2 Rb1 45.Rc2 d5]

42.Kxb6 h5 43.Rc4! Safety comes first. **43...g4 44.hxg4 h4 45.g5 Rf4! 46.e4** [46.Kxa5 h3 47.b6 h2 48.b7 h1Q 49.b8Q Qd5+] **46...h3 47.Bxa5 h2 48.Rcl got it!!! 48...Rf2 49.Rh1!** Fritz says Kc7 is good here, but who cares, I won't play it.

[49.Kc7? Rec2+ 50.Rxc2 h1Q 51.b6 Qh3]

49...Be7 50.Kc6 Rc2+ 51.Kd7 Bxg5 52.b6 Be3 53.b7 Ba7 54.Bc7 Rb2 55.Kc8 Kg6 56.Bxd6



DIAGRAM 4



DIAGRAM 5



DIAGRAM 6

No need to rush. Just take and back **56...Rc2+ 57.Bc7 Kg5 58.Kd7 Kf4 59.d4 Kxe4 60.Bxe5 Rb2 61.Kc8 Rc2+ 62.Bc7 Kxd4 63.Rxh2** First, he intended to play Rc4, then he noticed Kh4 was winning after trading rooks Bb6! winning. **63...Rc3** (diagram 6) **64.Ra2.**

Result: 1-0.

19th NCC 2008, Brussels (Belgium)

Results of 19th NATO Chess Championship, Brussels (Belgium)

TEAM RANKING		
Rank	Final listing	Points
1.	Türkiye	20.5
2.	Germany	18.5
3.	Poland	18.5
4.	Italy	17.5
5.	Belgium	17.5
6.	France	16
7.	Norway	15.5
8.	United States of America	15
9.	The Netherlands	14.5
10.	Lithuania	14
11.	Slovenia	14
12.	Spain	13.5
13.	United Kingdom	11.5
14.	NATO	11.5
15.	Canada	9.5

INDIVIDUAL RANKING			
Rank	Player	Country	Points
1.	Serkan Yeke	TUR	6.0
2.	Andreas Schenk	GER	5.5
3.	Fabrice Wantiez	BEL	5.5
4.	Mateusz Sypień	POL	5.5
5.	Vytautas Vaznonis	LIT	5.5
6.	Oystein Hole	NOR	5.0
7.	Gökhan Narman	TUR	5.0
8.	Necmettin Korkmaz	TUR	5.0
9.	Saverio Gerardi	ITA	5.0
10.	Morales Carrascoso	SPA	4.5
11.	Enzo Tommasini	ITA	4.5
12.	Wouter van Rijn	NED	4.5
13.	Alfred Kertesz	GER	4.5
14.	Mark Helbig	GER	4.5
15.	Devrim Alaslar	TUR	4.5

21st NCC 2010, Køge (Denmark)

As the Turkish Armed Forces Chess Team, we prepared for the 21st NATO Chess Championship for seven weeks at the Gendarmerie Training Command in Beytepe (Ankara), including one week at the Turkish Chess Federation (Ulus) with the National Team Coach, GM Mikhail Gurevich (Photo 4). On the morning of Sunday, October 17, 2010, we set off early: First, we travelled from Beytepe to Esenboga Airport and then took the 6:00 AM Turkish Airlines flight to Ataturk Airport in Istanbul. Upon arrival in Istanbul, we were greeted by the Gendarmerie. We were lucky because our delegation commander had served as the commander there the previous year, and the current commander was his classmate.



With GM Mikhail Gurevich Ankara (Türkiye);
photo by IMCC



Opening Ceremony, 2010, Køge (Denmark);
photo by IMCC

Results of 21st NATO Chess Championship, Køge (Denmark)

TEAM RANKING		
Rank	Final listing	Points
1.	Germany	21
2.	Poland	18
3.	Türkiye	17.5
4.	Denmark	17.5
5.	Slovenia	17
6.	France	16
7.	United States	15
8.	The Netherlands	15
9.	NATO-Team	15
10.	Hungary	14
11.	Belgium	13.5
12.	United Kingdom	13.5
13.	Canada	9.5
14.	Lithuania	8.5
15.	Luxembourg	3

INDIVIDUAL RANKING			
Rank	Player	Country	Points
1.	Lorenz Drabke	GER	6.0
2.	Fabrice Wantiez	BEL	6.0
3.	Andreas Schenk	GER	5.5
4.	Doga Cihan Goksel	TUR	5.0
5.	Finn Pedersen	DEN	5.0
6.	Mark Helbig	GER	5.0
7.	Devrim Alaslar	TUR	5.0
8.	Frederic Giua	FRA	4.5
9.	Hans-Christoph Andersen	GER	4.5
10.	Sławomir Kędzierski	NATO	4.5
11.	Rene Ole Nielsen	DEN	4.5
12.	Wouter van Rijn	NED	4.5
13.	Guido Schott	GER	4.5
14.	Wilhelm Jauk	GER	4.5
15.	Andrzej Szcześniak	POL	4.5

The NATO Chess Championship was one of the most important competitions in my life. First of all, I participated in this competition as a soldier. Since the tournament was a team competition, every player in our team was very important. Our team was magnificent in terms of both their chess level and their

personalities. It was a great chance for me to participate in this competition with such a team. Before the matches started in the tournament, each player would make a small gesture to the opponent with a gift representing their country, which helped the match to start with a nice friendly atmosphere.

Ozkan, Ervin, 2221 –

Kiss, Istvan Gyorgy, 2161 (19/10/2010)

1.d4 d5 2.Bf4 Nf6 3.e3 Bg4 (diagram 1) [This bishop move is a bit premature.]

4.f3 Bh5 [Black continues with the wrong plan. The correct square for the bishop would be d7 to defend the queenside.] **5.c4 c6 6.Qb3** [White thematically gains the initiative on the queenside.] **6...Qb6 7.Nd2** [My plan is to move c5, force Black to move Qxb3 and open the a-file.] **7...Qxb3 8.axb3** [My plan is simple. Put pressure on the queenside. The bishop on the h5 square is still useless.] **8...e6 9.c5 Bg6 10.h3** (diagram 2)

At this point I could have given the powerful London bishop and gained a pawn, but since my queenside pawns were doubled I didn't feel the need to do so. [10.Bxb8 Rxb8 11.Rxa7 b6 12.b4 bxc5 13.bxc5] **10...Nbd7 11.b4 a6 12.Nb3 Be7 13.Ne2** [First of all, I plan to complete my development and gain the initiative in the centre with Na5 or e4 when the time is right.] **13...Nh5 14.Bh2 Bd3 15.Nbc1!** (diagram 3) [This move could be my only mistake in the game. I should have simply played Na5.]

15...Bb5 16.g4 Nh6 17.Bg2 [Black's white bishop was transferred from h5 to the b5 square, yes it is a slightly more correct square. However, I think the initiative is still with me with the second phase of my plan, which is to advance from the centre.] **17...0-0 18.Nc3 Rfe8 19.Kd2 Rec8 20.Nb3 Bd8 21.Rhe1** [All my pieces are on the right squares. My plan is to press Na5 with b7 at a suitable moment and after e4 I plan to drag Black into a completely passive position with the e5–f4–f5 plan.] **21...Ne8 22.Bg3 Bc7 23.Bxc7 Nxc7 24.e4** [At this point, Black's position may seem solid. However, since it is a human game, it has always been difficult to play in a passive position. Black's pieces are in a very passive position and are only defending.] **24...e5?** (diagram 4)

Black makes a serious mistake while looking for counterplay. He should have continued to defend with Nf8. **25.exd5 exd4 26.Nxd4 Nxd5 27.Nxd5 cxd5 28.Re7 Re8 29.Rxe8+ Rxe8 30.Nxb5 axb5**



DIAGRAM 1



DIAGRAM 2



DIAGRAM 3



DIAGRAM 4



DIAGRAM 5

31.Ra7 31...Ne5 32.Rxb7 Nc4+ 33.Kd3 [Re3 attempts will fail due to black's last horizontal weakness.] **33...Kf8 34.f4** (diagram 5) [The d5–b5 pawns will also fall.]

Result: 1–0.

22nd NCC 2011, Kunas (Lithuania)

Results of 22nd NATO Chess Championship, Kaunas (Lithuania)

TEAM RANKING		
Rank	Final listing	Points
1.	Türkiye	21
2.	Germany	20
3.	Denmark	19
4.	Poland	17
5.	Lithuania	17
6.	Slovenia	16.5
7.	France	16.5
8.	United Kingdom	16
9.	Italy	15
10.	Netherlands	14
11.	Belgium	14
12.	NATO	14

INDIVIDUAL RANKING			
Rank	Player	Country	Points
1.	Kivanc Haznedaroglu	Türkiye	6.0
2.	Yakup Erturan	Türkiye	6.0
3.	Alexander Rosenkilde	Denmark	5.5
4.	Finn Pedersen	Denmark	5.5
5.	Marcello Malloni	Italy	5.0
6.	Fabrice Wantiez	Belgium	5.0
7.	Hans-Christoph Andersen	Germany	5.0
8.	Lorenz Maximilian Drabke	Germany	5.0
9.	Mark Helbig	Germany	5.0
10.	Igor Mestek	Slovenia	5.0
11.	Bernhard Lutz	Germany	5.0
12.	Vytautas Vaznonis	Lithuania	5.0

Year 2022

Team selection in 2022 was unique compared to the past because the team had been determined based on Turkish Armed Forces' internal tournaments until then. Thanks to this new team selection system Turkish Armed Forces' qualified chess players found an opportunity to play against Türkiye's civilian titled players in Türkiye's biggest chess organisation, Türkiye Cup. Every team member was very excited. Before this nice and competitive civilian-military confrontation, of course the Turkish Armed Forces got together in the organisation hotel and met each other. Everyone was very excited because after 9 years, the Turkish Armed Forces' chess team would be formed again.

Before I was appointed as a lieutenant in the Turkish Armed Forces, while I was still undergoing military training, I discovered the website nato-chess.com. In 2013, Türkiye placed 5th, which wasn't a bad result at all. Despite previous successes, I was wondering why Türkiye hadn't participated in the NATO Chess Championship since 2013. After becoming a lieutenant, I looked into this, and that's when Lieutenant Kaan found me. He was the 2022 Turkish Armed Forces Champion and held the title of National Master. That year, Türkiye didn't participate in the NCC either. It was disappointing not to go to the NATO tournament, especially with such strong players around, but this year, our chances looked more promising. This year, for the first time, I participated in the Turkish Armed Forces Chess Championship. It was a great tournament for me,



From the gathering day of Turkish Armed Forces Chess Team Members 2022 Sakarya (Türkiye); photo by IMCC

At this point, I would like to send my gratitude to our esteemed Navy Captain Ozgur Can Kaygisiz whose consistent recommendations played a great role in the reestablishment of the Turkish Armed Forces Chess Team and this gathering following nearly a decade's gap.

Written by Ihsan Cenk Yuzsever



Team selection in 2023 took place in Balıkesir; From 2023 Turkish Armed Forces Chess Team Selection Balıkesir (Türkiye); photo by IMCC

and I managed to draw the last round with Lieutenant Kaan, finishing in 2nd place. This earned me the chance to go to the NATO tournament. The top three were from the Air Force. 1st Lt. M. Kaan Bacak became champion, I came in second, and Capt. Yigit Kamisli came in third.

33rd NCC 2023, Portorož (Slovenia)

Slovenia was also my first experience abroad. When we landed, a team greeted us and took us to Portorož by minibus. The city was beautiful and peaceful, with a small population despite having a sea. It was my first time seeing such a place. The next day, the opening ceremony took place, and the Slovenian army prepared a wonderful show. While the cocktail reception was ongoing at the Bernardin Hotel, I saw a piano. As someone who loves and is very interested

in the piano, I immediately went to play. I hope I can qualify in the 2025 Turkish Armed Forces Chess Championship too. It would be nice to play the piano in Chopin's hometown in Poland.

In the classical section Ege Koksall finished 3rd.

In the Blitz Section Burak Firat finished 2nd, while Ege Koksall finished 3rd.

Hope to see you in Poland, in August.

Gens Una Sumus.



First day of Portorož (Slovenia); photo by IMCC



First round, Portorož (Slovenia); photo by IMCC



Tolga Akin performing Chopin – Nocturne 20. Portorož (Slovenia); photo by IMCC



From Prizegiving day, Portorož (Slovenia); photo by IMCC

As a first-time participant in the NATO tournament, I must mention how much I appreciated the tradition of starting the first round in uniform and the custom of exchanging gifts before every round. It was a very nice gesture and added a unique touch to the tournament. I finished the tournament with a score of 4.5 out of 7, with 1 loss, 3 wins, and 3 draws. All my opponents had higher ELO than me. After my draw with my 2000+ Elo opponent, Robert Keough, he jokingly said, "You're not really 1600, are you?"

We both laughed about it.

Written by Tolga Akin



From Prizegiving day Portorož (Slovenia); photo by IMCC

Peace At Home, Peace In The World.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

The UK can claim to have been the creators of the NATO Chess Championship. The idea of a NATO championship was conceived over four decades ago by an Englishman – Ken Moore. Whilst working as a Forces Liaison Officer for the Danish Tourist Board back in 1978, Ken invited chess players from the British Army on the Rhine (BAOR) and Germany's Armed Forces to participate in a team chess tournament in Northern Denmark, resulting in the first unofficial championships being held that October. The UK have always been enthusiastic contenders and have the proud distinction of being the only nation to have played in every NATO championship since its inception.

The UK have acted as hosts of the tournament on 4 occasions, the first being the 3rd Official Championships which took place at Cranwell in 1991, an event that also played host to the formation of the International Military Chess Committee. The converted gymnasium made an excellent venue, festooned with the national flags of the competing nations. With the two Wing Commanders, Bob Kermeen and Paul Watson busy organising the event, a weakened UK team enlisted the help of IM Andrew Martin as team coach and promptly finished last! A 5-a-side football tournament provided a break from the chess although whether the UK team managed to get their revenge on the pitch is not documented. Grandmaster Jonathon Speelman gave an excellent simultaneous display but found the allies a tough prospect, finishing with a score of 19–7, totally exhausted!

The second time the UK hosted the NCC was at HMS Nelson in the historic Portsmouth Dockyards, an event that was noteworthy for being the first time



The UK team and organising officials – Cranwell '91; photo by IMCC

that the event was covered 'live', with John Henderson providing daily updates on Teletext. A visit to the historic HMS Victory was a highlight for the players, whilst, on the chess board Germany notched another win, whilst Holland snatched second ahead of France.

In 2006 the tournament was hosted at Eton College and the UK finished in a respectable 6th position.

In 2016 the UK hosted the Championships at the Defence Academy at Shrivenham where Poland managed to gain their first victory in the team championships and the UK again finished solidly mid-table. This event was the first time the games were broadcast live, via the website Chess24. The tournament featured well-known British Grandmaster Raymond Keene, who made the first symbolic move as round one began and gave a witty speech at the closing ceremony in English, German and French! UK team member Dave Tucker's victory over his Hungarian opponent in the sixth round is featured later in the chapter.



The Defence Academy, Shrivenham, venue for the 2016 NCC; photo by UKAFCA

Chess in the UK

The UK Armed Forces Chess Championships is played annually using the same format as the NCC (a seven round Swiss tournament). The tournament determines the Single Service Champions of the RAF, Army, Royal Navy and MOD. It also acts as the selection tournament for the NCC. Competition is fierce amongst the participants and following the recent chess boom, numbers are up to nearly 100 entrants as of 2025. UK military chess players also compete in teams as part of the 4NCL – a national league, take part in an online inter-services competition and compete in a separate rapidplay championship later in the year.

The popularity of chess in the UK is sadly below the level of some of our NATO allies and accordingly the UK team has rarely had the strength required to challenge for the NATO team title. However, one of the most notable competitions for the UK was that of the 7th Championships, held in Viborg, Denmark, the reason being that the UK finally managed to shed the reputation of an ‘also-ran’, finishing for the first time in the medal positions in third place with 16.5 points. At the same competition UK competitor Andy Hammond finished at the top of the individual rankings with 6 points. This is a feat the UK team has only managed once since, at the 16th Champi-

UK's most regular players

As participants in every NCC since its inception, the UK consequently has many players who have proudly competed in many championships. A particular mention must go to Alec Toll, a participant in 21 separate NATO championships and someone who was influential in helping to keep the tournament going during periods where it looked like interest for the tournament may be beginning to wane. Many others have also participated in numerous events, the list of UK life-time members is below:

Andy Foulds	9 appearances
Andrew Hammond	15 appearances
Neil McInnes	12 appearances
Munroe Morrison	12 appearances
David Onley	13 appearances
Stephen O'Neill	9 appearances
Daniel O'Byrne	13 appearances
David Ross	13 appearances
Alec Toll	21 appearances
David Tucker	11 appearances



The UK team being presented with the third palace trophy in Kołobrzeg, Poland; photo by IMCC



Third Place Team Trophy; photo by IMCC

onships in Kołobrzeg, Poland when a score of 18.5 points was again enough to clinch 3rd place, behind Germany and Poland. More recently veteran Dave Tucker proved that British players are still a force to be reckoned with by clinching the silver medal in the veteran's category at the 34th NCC in Rhodes.



LTM Danny O'Byrne at the 2016 NATO Championships at Shrivenham



LTM and 21-time participant – Alec Toll

ALL UK PARTICIPANTS IN NATO CHAMPIONSHIPS

A. Aspin	George Crockart	 Logo of UKAFCA; photo by UKAFCA
William Bradley	Philip Denner	
Chas Chapman	Karl Emmins	
Lawrence Cooper	Andy Foulds	
David Dawson	Frazer Graham	
Chris Dunlop	Duncan Harwood	
Michael Fielding	Steve Hunter	
Dick Geddis	Richie Kelly	
Andrew Hammond	Robert Kermeen	
Holroyd	Stephen Lefevre	James Galloway
Daz Johnston	Richard Millener	Katie Hale
James Kenyon	Allen Nelder	Jerry Hendy
PD Lane	Stephen O'Neill	Peter Johnson
Neil McInnes	Glen Parker	Paul Kemp
Craig Murray	Francis Pearce	Sameer Kohli
Daniel O'Byrne	Carl Portman	Andrew Martin
Maresh Palungwa	Michael Redman	Munroe Morrison
Miles Patterson	Anatol Rweyemamu	Anthony O'Brien
Edwin Podolski	Bryan Smith	David Onley
Bijay Pun-Magar	Aleksander Tenin	AJ Parrott
N. Ruff	David Tucker	Tristan Pearce
Ngadi Sherpa	Daniel Wells	Alexander Poyser
Harry Taylor	Scott Bower	David Ross
Alec Toll	Laurie Brokenshire	Geoff Sage
Paul Watson	Neil Clifford	Gordon Stables
Jimmy Blair	Scott Crockart	Jacob Thomas
Arthur Brameld	Michael Donkin	James Ward
Edward Chwieseni	Simon Field	Ben Woolf

NATO 2016, Round 6

**Oltean, Gusztav, 2082 (Hungary) –
Tucker, Dave, 2009 (UK)**

**1.c4 c5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e6 5.Nc3
Nc6 (diagram 1)**

This is a commonly occurring position in this opening. White has several good moves available which can lead to very complicated play. I have faced recently both 6.Ndb5 and 6.a3. Also 6.g3 has a good reputation but can become highly tactical after Geller's 6...Qb6. I had spent quite some time in the past studying continuations for Black here but as White cogitated I thought how should I meet 6.Nbd5?. For example 6...Bb4 6...Bc5 or 6...d5 are all playable but which is best?. Anyway I was pleased to see his



DIAGRAM 1

next move which seems to me to be an error because if he was angling for a Maroczy bind after a subsequent e4, he didn't get it.

6.Nc2? Bc5 7.e3 This locks in his Queen's bishop. **7.g3 Qb6 8.e3 O-O** is good for Black. Fritz suggests **7.Be3 7...O-O 8.Be2 d5 9.O-O dxc4** It would have been better for White to have exchanged pawns

last move. I do so now and avoid an IQP position. **10.Bxc4 Qe7 11.Qe2 a6 12.a3 b5 13.Ba2 Bb7** Black's pieces are much better placed and the Bishops are already eyeing the White kingside. **14.b4 Bd6** (diagram 2)

15.e4? It would have been more prudent to defend the loose knight on c3 by 15.Bb2. **15...Rac8** Fritz prefers 15...Be5! and rates Black as much better. My move develops the rook to a good square and I already envisage moving my Queen to c7 lining up against h2 and increasing pressure on the c file.

16.Bb2 Qc7 17.h3 17.g3 may be a bit better. **17...Rfd8 18.Rfd1 Be5** (diagram 3) The computer prefers to preface this by 18...Bh2+, I didn't see the benefit.

19.Rxd8?? A fatal blunder which loses a piece **19...Nxd8!** Here it is the reverse capture. Now both White knights are in the firing line. **20.Rc1 Bxc3 21.Ne3** Perhaps White thought he could regain the piece due to the pin on the c file but the tactics all work for Black. **21...Nxe4 22.Nd1 Qc6!**



DIAGRAM 2



DIAGRAM 3

Setting up a deadly battery against g2. **23.Qf3 Qd7** White threw in the towel here because he has no reasonable move. Fritz rates the position +7.5 to Black. Result: 0–1.

NATO 2024 (5), 24.10.2024

**Dekker, Ard, 1963 (NED) –
Onley, Dave, 2040 (UK)**

An old advisor and a good friend. I remember chatting to Ard after a game we drew a few years ago and he kindly pointed out that he knew exactly what I was going to play as I never changed my repertoire. He managed to equalise easily and the game ended in a draw. Little did he realise that those words resonated deeply and the Dutchman was about to get “Dutched Up”!

1.c4 f5! 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 e6 4.d3 Be7 5.Nc3 0–0 6.e4 fxe4 7.dxe4 e5 (diagram 1)

e5 is an important move even though it is the second time the e pawn has moved. It supports the outpost on d4, restricts the range of white's light square bishop and opens up black's own bishop. Black should have a comfortable and promising middlegame ahead.

8.Nf3 Bb4 9.Bd2 d6 10.0–0 a5 11.a3 Bc5 12.Qe2 Nc6 13.Qd3 h6 14.Be3 Nd7 15.Rab1 a4 16.Rbcl Bxe3 17.Qxe3 Nc5 18.Rfe1 Be6 (diagram 2)



DIAGRAM 1



DIAGRAM 2

Black has come out of the opening with a positional edge and a very nice game. I was not entirely sure how to capitalise though and thought it best to play against the white squares. A better plan would have been to stop any of white's counterplay with f4 ideas and play g5 and Qf6, then white is pretty much paralysed.

19.Nd2 Nd4 20.Ne2 Nxe2+ 21.Rxe2 Qd7 22.f4
exf4 23.gxf4 Rae8 (diagram 3)

White has managed to complicate the position and the game is very much in the balance. I knew I would probably still be better if I survived the upcoming attack as white's structure would not do well in the endgame. I also had good counter attacking chances if white over stretched. Time was getting low for both of us and this was going to be tense!

24.Rf2 b5 25.Qd4 Bh3 26.Bxh3 Qxh3 27.Rc3
Qh5 28.Rg3 Ne6 29.Qc3 Qc5 30.f5 Nd4 31.Kf1
Re5 32.Rfg2 Rf7 33.cxb5?? (diagram 4)

Black survived the onslaught and his pieces have found good outposts for defensive duties but also maintain good attacking prospects. Ard loses the thread now induced by time trouble and any clear ideas to break through.

33...Qxb5+ 34.Rd3 Nb3 35.Nxb3 axb3 36.Kg1
Rxe4 37.f6 Rc4! (diagram 5)

White is busted. His king has been left too exposed and will now end up in the middle of the board in a mating net. Happy days!

38.Qxb3 Qc5+ 39.Kf1 Rxf6+ 40.Ke2 Kh7 41.Qd1
Rc2+ 42.Rd2 Qe5+ 43.Kd3 Qf5+ 44.Ke3

Result: 0–1.



DIAGRAM 3



DIAGRAM 4



DIAGRAM 5

The NATO Championships is a tournament in which the opposing countries take their chess extremely seriously. Games are often won or drawn before a move is made. I learnt a few years back that to stand any chance of success you have to vary your repertoire.



by Col. (ret.) Jon Middaugh

For the players from the United States who have participated in two or more of the annual NATO Chess Championships, there are three interwoven components that make the event so special. The first is the competition. This element is of course fundamental for any chess tournament, but it emerges as even more significant because of the high level of preparation of so many NATO competitors and because of the other two components of each championship: the people and the place. For at every tournament a comradeship quickly rekindles after meeting the old friends representing our NATO allies. Each year new players also join the mix, however, and then quite soon – in just another tournament or two – the formerly unfamiliar faces often have become warm and friendly visages. Third, for most American players the adventure of travelling to and playing in a splendid new locale for nearly a week is an experience that ultimately yields vivid and intertwined memories of people, places, and competitive battles.

During their first twenty-five appearances in the NATO Chess Championship, U.S. teams demonstrated their relative strength by winning a medal every twelve tournaments. Things began well with a silver medal at the 1st Championship in Hammelburg, Germany in 1989, when FM Emory Tate, Andrew Rea, and Charles Crook each scored 4.5 points.

But the next medal – another silver – came not until 2002 and the 13th Championship in Brest, France, where Narcisso Victoria and Rudy Tia each notched five points. After twelve more years the United States team then garnered its third medal, a bronze at the 25th Championship in Quebec City, Canada in 2014, as FM Dharim Bacus first joined the team.



An early photo from the U.S. Air Force of FM (later IM) Emory Tate; photo by Tate Family Archives

With the opposing teams at the top of the standings typically having one or more titled players on their rosters, the U.S. squads felt they had a fighting, if outside, chance to earn a medal whenever they



FM Dharim Bacus

too could field at least one master. Even when it had no master, the team often maintained a realistic aspiration for finishing somewhere from third to sixth place, but nearly as frequently the actual result was in the middle of the pack. Eventually the U.S. roster would have two FM's on it, but that was still years into the future.



Logo of 29th NCC; photo by IMCC

In the meantime, a unique opportunity and a true honour for the Americans came through hosting the 29th Championship in Lubbock, Texas in 2018. Thanks to the determined organizational inputs of David Hater and John Farrell, plus the wholehearted effort in Lubbock made by GM Alexander Onischuk and his talented Texas Tech University chess players, we could share high-quality playing conditions, authentic barbecue, and the “wide open spaces” of Texas with our NATO guests. Meanwhile the competition over the board proved just as memorable, with the U.S. finishing fourth behind the stalwarts, Poland and Germany, and the newest powerhouse, Greece, which respectively won the gold, silver, and bronze medals. For the majority coming from Europe, it certainly was a long journey, but that distance itself likely left a lasting impression on many who participated.



The U.S. team in Berlin, 2019; photo by IMCC

In recent years several American players have had noteworthy performances in their first appearance in the NATO event. In Budapest in 2017, Abiye Williams entered without having an established FIDE rating but scored five points and finished in tenth place. At the 30th Championship in Berlin in 2019, FM Eigen Wang scored 5.5 points and won the individual silver medal. Wang's 5.5 points and fourth place finish in Tartu, Estonia in 2022 enabled the team to win the bronze medal. The following year at the 33^d Championship in Portorož, Slovenia, the first in which the United States brought two FMs, FM Patrick Aizpurua scored 5.5 points and finished fourth in the Championship. FM Wang also scored 5.5 points once again, finishing just behind his teammate, and the U.S. team earned the bronze medal. In the blitz tournament that followed, FM Aizpurua scored 9.5 out of 10 and won the gold medal. Most recently at the 34th Championship in Greece, Andrew Jeselson began the tournament with a FIDE rating of 1858 but scored five points and finished in twelfth place.

The vast expanse of the United States and the worldwide network of military bases at which its service members and Defence Department civilians serve mean that the NATO Chess Championship affords many American players the one chance per year



The U.S. team in Portorož, Slovenia, 2023; photo by IMCC

to see each other as well as their NATO colleagues. Nevertheless, it is not always possible for those who qualify to participate. Although in some years one or two American players stationed in Europe can take a train or a short flight to the host location, the majority of those selected must fly from six to ten time zones away and sometimes from as far away as Korea or Hawaii. As a result of the expense this travel would require, or because of requirements to complete an operational deployment or other service commitment, the U.S. squad often fields a few lower-rated players who fill in for those who otherwise were higher on the qualification list but were unable to attend. But for those who can make it, the experience almost always is one they long will treasure.

Annotated Games

Always looking for an opportunity to launch an attack, FM (later IM) Emory Tate was famous for pushing his h pawn to create pressure and to open up his opponent's kingside. Here is one such example from 1989 and the 1st NATO Championship in Hammelburg, Germany.

Becker, Marc, 2300 – Tate, Emory, 2345

annotation by Jon Middaugh

Opening: A25

1.c4 g6 2.Nc3 Bg7 3.g3 e5 4.Bg2 d6 5.d3 Nc6 6.Rb1 f5 7.e3 Nf6 8.Nge2 a5 9.a3?! [White had a modest advantage to this point, but here he should have played O-O.] 9...h6 10.b4 ab4 11.ab4 Ne7 12.Nd5? [Qb3]...Nfd5 13.cd5 b5? [Weakening the queen side; 0-0 is better.] 14.0-0 0-0 15.Qb3 Qe8 16.Bb2 Qf7 17.Ba1 Bb7 18.Nc3 f4 19.e4 f3? [It was better to maintain the tension on the kingside and instead play c6 to defend b5. Now white is better, momentarily.] 20.Bh3 Bc8 21.Bc8? [21.Be6! Be6 22.de6 Qe8 23.Nd5 Nd5 24.ed5 would leave black cramped.] 21...Nc8 22.Rfc1 [22.Nb5?? loses a piece to Qd7.] Qd7 23.Qd1 h5! [Typical Tate.] 24.Qf1 h4 25.Rc2 Ne7 26.Bb2 g5 27.Bc1 Bh6? [Bf6 avoids the pin.] 28.d4? [White misses his chance to play gh4.] 28...hg3 29.hg3 ed4 30.Nb5 Qg4 31.Nd4 Rf7 32.Bb2? [34 Rc7] Bg7 [Now black threatens Bd4 followed by a repositioning of his queen and rook to the open h file.] 33.Nf3 Qf3 34.Bg7 Kg7 35.Rc7 Ra2 [35...Rh8!] 36.Qg2 Qg2 37.Kg2 Raf2 38.Kg1 Ng6 39.Rf7 Rf7 40.Ra1 Kf6 41.Rf1

Result: 0–1.

This was my game from the last round of the 2023 NATO Chess Championship in Portorož, Slovenia. I played against FM Finn Pedersen, the 2016 NATO Chess Championship gold medallist.

Opening: D94

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.e3 g6 5.Nf3 Bg7 6.Be2 O-O 7.O-O this position is mostly closed and quiet so far, with no weaknesses for either side. **a6 8.a4 a5** now black has induced a weakness on b4, which he can use to restrict White's chance at the initiative. At the same time, White has opportunities to seize the light squares and put pressure on the c-file. **9.b3 Bg4 10.h3** (An interesting attempt was 10.cd5. If 10...cd5?! 11.Ne5 Be2 12.Qe2 White has a clear advantage on the queenside and in development. Instead, Black should play 10...Bf3 11.Bf3 cd5, after which White does not have the initiative and the bishop pair does not give White an edge.) **10Bf3 11.Bf3 e6 12.Ba3 Re8 13.Qd2 Na6 14.Rfd1** seemingly aimless, but I wanted to dissuade any possibility of e5. **14...Qb6 15.Rab1** At this point, both sides have exerted the maximum possible pressure on each other. Black then proceeds to take advantage of his control of b4. **15...Rad8 16.Qe1 Bf8 17.Bc1** (I did not want to trade the bishop pair away. Bf8 Rf8 18.Na2 was possible, with Black being unable to extend too much with a weakened kingside.) **17...Nb4 18.Bd2 Qc7 19.Qf1 Rd7 20.Rbc1 Red8 21.Be1 Bg7 22.Qe2 h6 23.Na2 Na2 24.Qa2** At this point, I felt more comfortable since the knight trade freed my position slightly and weakened Black's control of the queenside. **24...dc4?!** This unnecessarily gives White a superior structure in the centre and opens the position in favour of the bishops. **25.bc4 e5 26.Bc3?** (White should play d5! While the advanced pawn is not strong, this move opens the position in a way that weakens the queenside. 26...e4 27.Be2 b6 28.c5! Rd5 29.cb6 Qb6 30.Rb1 Even though White is a pawn down, White's pieces are perfectly coordinated and Black has a very difficult time defending a5, c6, and e4.) **26...ed4 27.ed4**

Now White's pawn on d4 is even weaker than it would have been on d5 and Black's queenside remains solid. **27...Ne8?!** (Black gives me a chance to escape the pressure. Nh7! would have made the defense more difficult.) **28.Qe2 c5 29.d5 Bc3 30.Rc3 Re7 31.Re3 Re3 32.Qe3 Nd6 33.Qf4?!** (I should have played Qh6 Nc4 34.Qc1 weakening Black's King and ridding myself of the weak c-pawn. I was worried about the passed c-pawn, but I have counterplay on the kingside. In the game, I had no counterplay.) **Qe7 34.Rb1 (Qh6!) Kg7 35.Qd2 Ra8 36.Rb6 Qe5** (an interesting idea was Qf6!? with the possible threat of Nc4) **37.Be2 Rd8 38.Bf1** My bishop was doing nothing on f3, so I decided to place it on f1 where it protects c4 and shields my king against back rank threats. **Ra8 39.g3 Kh7 40.h4 h5 41.Rb1** I have improved my position as much as possible, placing my kingside pawns on opposite colour squares of my bishop. Now Black makes a huge mistake. **Qe4?** This seemingly harmless move loses control of the dark squares, after which White can gain a huge advantage. A waiting move with the King was best. **42.Re1 Qf5 43.Re7?** White gives Black a chance to get back into the game. (Qb2! was best, targeting both b6 and the kingside.) **Qf6 44.Rd7 Ra6??** Black should have neutralised White's pressure with Rd8! after which the game is even again. The idea of Rb6 is too slow, as White's rook ties down Black's pieces just enough so that the White queen's pressure becomes overwhelming. **45.Qe3!** The winning move. **Rb6 46.Qc5 Ne4 47.Rf7!** A final blow, winning material and squashing Black's counterplay against f2. **Qf7 48.Qb6 Nd2 49.Qe3 Nf1 50.Kf1 Qd7 51.Qe6 Qe6 52.de6 Kg7 53.Ke2 Kf6 54.Ke3 Ke6 55.Ke4 b6 56.f3 Kd6 57.Kd4 Kc6 58.g4 Kd6 59.gh5 gh5 60.f4 Ke6 61.Ke4 Kd6 62.f5 Ke7 63.Ke5 Kf7 64.f6 Kg8 65.Ke6 Kf8 66.f7.**
Result: 1–0.

Not only was this my last game in this tournament; it was also my last tournament game ever. I was happy to finish my journey in chess with such a tough fight in which I had to play with maximum effort against a formidable opponent.

8th NATO Chess Championship, Apt, France, 1997

**Steffers, Hendrik, 1900 –
Hater, David, 1990 (C54)**

The last game is not so much of a game as it is a story. BGen. Hendrik Steffers is the longtime chair of the IMCC. Here he is paired against the USA IMCC representative then Captain Hater. The opening was an Italian game. This was the favourite opening of both players, but neither knew that about his opponent. Both players were confident they would win because they assumed they knew this opening better than their opponent. Both players were surprised and slightly frustrated that their opponent knew the opening as well as they did and after 23 moves of theory, they agreed to a draw – a fitting result for two longtime members of the IMCC. These two players have now been friends for decades and that more than anything else is what the NATO Championship is really all about.

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.c3 Nf6 5.d4 exd4
6.cxd4 Bb4+ 7.Nc3 Nxe4 8.0–0 Bxc3 9.d5 Bf6
10.Re1 Ne7 11.Rxe4 d6 12.Bg5 Bxg5 13.Nxg5 h6
14.Qe2 hxg5 15.Re1 Be6 16.dxe6 f6 17.Re3 d5
18.Rh3 Rxh3 19.gxh3 g6 20.Bd3 Qd6 21.Bxg6+
Nxg6 22.Qh5 0–0–0 23.Qxg6 Qe7**

Result: ½–½.



Two long-time promoters of competition at the board and comradery away from it, Col. (ret.) David Hater and BGen. (ret.) Hendrik Steffers; photo by IMCC

SIMULTANEOUS EVENTS IN THE NATO CHESS CHAMPIONSHIPS

by Jan Cheung

In the Friday afternoon program, after the final round of the NCC, a blitz tournament was organised. In the past, there were times that a simultaneous tournament was held at the same time, often by a local grandmaster. I took part in all them but the first in 1991. I had good memories of the event in 2000. It was obvious that Hort enjoyed the invitation. At the start he said to all participants that they have to play 1.d4! His level of play was high. He took practical decisions quickly and I had no chance. My next event was in 2002 in France. After a blunder early in the opening, I got wiser about how to keep more resistance against grandmasters.

As years went by, the average strength of the NCC participants got higher. I heard that in 2003, Lars Bo Hansen was so disappointed with his result that he decided not to show up at the prize giving ceremony. More years went by and GMs stated that the level was too high to play against the opponents.

Still, in 2018 one such event was organised, against the guest team leader of the USA, who had succeeded to participate in the qualification rounds of a world championship.

NCC SIMULTANEOUS EVENTS	
1991	GM Jonathan Speelman
2000	GM Vlastimil Hort
2002	GM Amir Bagheri
2003	GM Lars Bo Hansen
2004	GM Harmen Jonkman
2010	GM Carsten Hoi
2011	GM Algimantas Butnorius
2018	GM Alexander Onischuk



CHAMPIONSHIPS IN ♖HE ♜IME PERSPECTIVE♞

by Publishing House of Polish Air Force University

* All photos from www.natochess.com.



Poster of the 1st NATO Chess Championship in Hammelburg (Germany)



Official picture of the 3rd NATO Chess Championship in Cranwell (United Kingdom)



Official picture of the 5th NATO Chess Championship in Breda (Netherlands)



Official picture of the 7th NATO Chess Championship in Viborg (Denmark)



Official picture of the 2nd NATO Chess Championship in Oslo (Norway)



Official picture of the 6th NATO Chess Championship in Gausdal (Norway)



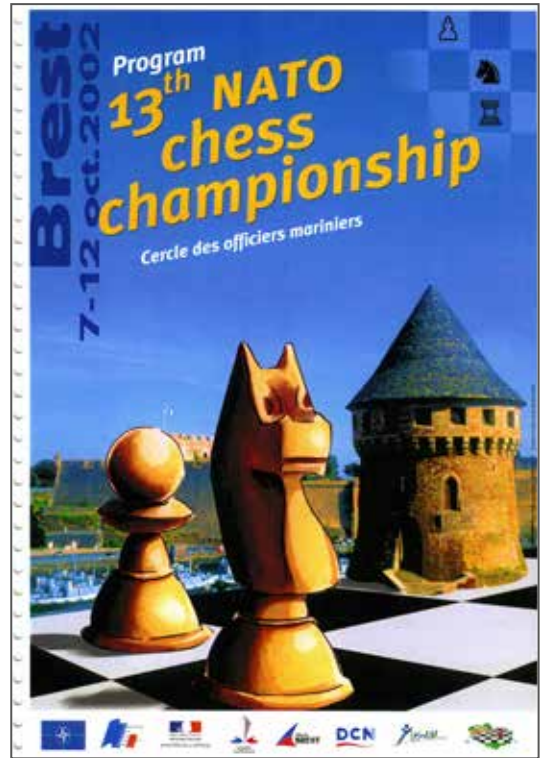
Official picture of the 4th NATO Chess Championship in Muenster (Germany)



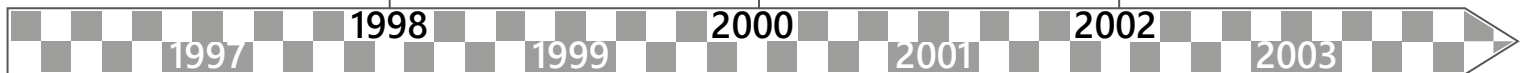
Official picture of the 11th NATO Chess Championship in Leopoldsburg (Belgium)



Official picture of the 9th NATO Chess Championship in Portsmouth (United Kingdom)



First page of program of the 13th NATO Chess Championship in Brest (France)



Official picture of the 8th NATO Chess Championship in Apt (France)



Official picture of the 12th NATO Chess Championship in San Remo (Italy)



Official picture of the 10th NATO Chess Championship in Stetten am kalten Markt (Germany)



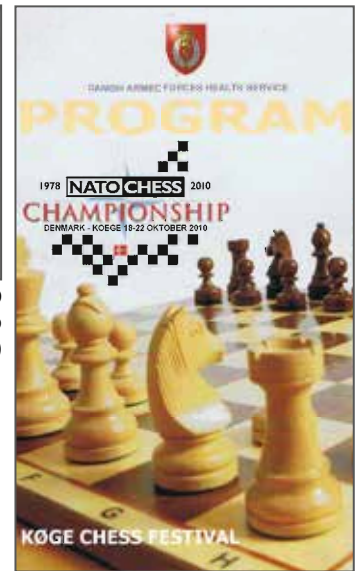
Logo of the 14th NATO Chess Championship in Høvelte (Denmark)



Logo of the 15th NATO Chess Championship in Hague (Netherlands)



Official picture of the 17th NATO Chess Championship in Crowthorne (United Kingdom)



First page of program of the 21st NATO Chess Championship in Køge (Denmark)



Official picture of the 19th NATO Chess Championship in Brussels (Belgium)



Poster of the 18th NATO Chess Championship in Ankara (Türkiye)



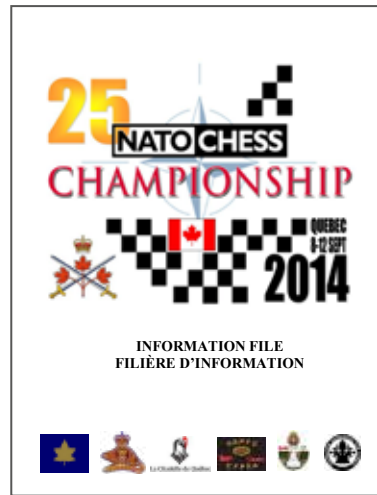
Logo of the 20th NATO Chess Championship in Hammelburg (Germany)



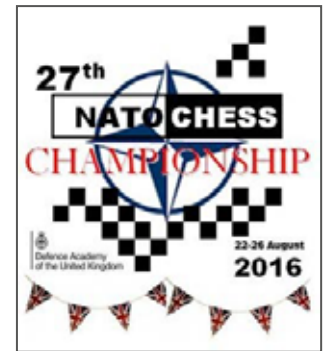
Official picture of the 16th NATO Chess Championship in Kołobrzeg (Poland)



Poster of the 23rd NATO Chess Championship in Brest (France)



Information file of the 25th NATO Chess Championship in Quebec (Canada)



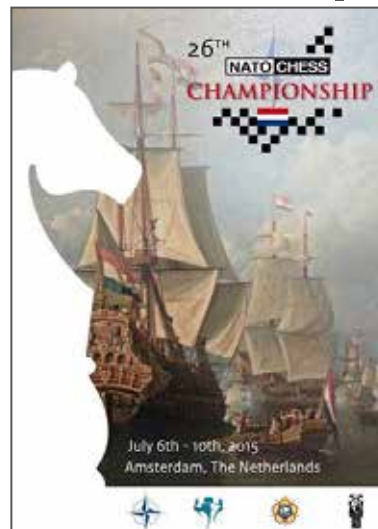
Logo of the 27th NATO Chess Championship in Shrivenham (United Kingdom)



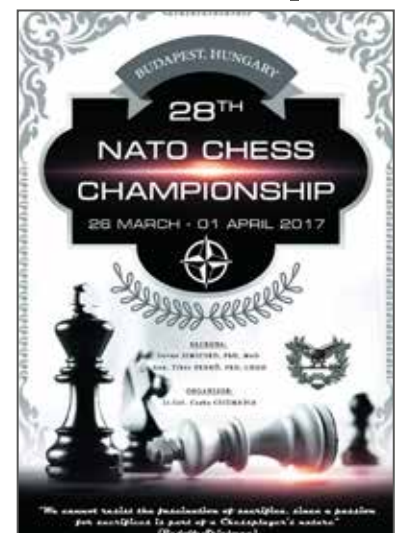
Part of poster of the 22nd NATO Chess Championship in Kaunas (Lithuania)



Invitation of the 24th NATO Chess Championship in Warsaw-Rynia (Poland)



Poster of the 26th NATO Chess Championship in Amsterdam (Netherlands)



Poster of the 28th NATO Chess Championship in Budapest (Hungary)



Logo of the 29th NATO Chess Championship in Lubbock (United States)



Poster of the 31st NATO Chess Championship in Blankenberge (Belgium)



Logo of the 35th NATO Chess Championship in Dęblin (Poland)



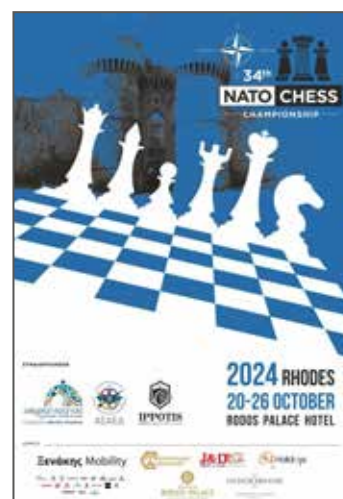
Invitation of the 33rd NATO Chess Championship in Portorož (Slovenia)



Logo of the 30th NATO Chess Championship in Berlin (Germany)



Poster of the 32nd NATO Chess Championship in Tartu (Estonia)



Poster of the 34th NATO Chess Championship in Rhodes (Greece)



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