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## NATO Chess Championship



If the ACA awarded Road Warrior points for tournaments in Denmark, Corporal Stephen Stone would be in first place! Pictured left is a miniature village located in Kjøge, Denmark. Between rounds, the Canadian team did some sight-seeing and came across this cozy-medieval town dating back to 1865. Scale = 1:10. Stephen give a full report in this issue.

## Joining the Canadian Team in Køge Denmark

*for the 21st NATO Chess Championship*

*By Stephen Stone*



*Opening Ceremony, complete with buglers and timpanist on horse. A very unique job, we all agreed, being the timpanist on the horse.*

We seemed a rag-tag band of men, decent players all, but hopelessly outgunned. If you looked at list of opponents we might be facing, you'd see numbers after their names. Big numbers. Numbers that were much bigger than ours. But, we grit our teeth and set ourselves to the task. We fought tooth and nail, and we rose to the challenge.

October 16-24 was one of the most dreamlike and surreal weeks of my life. For my entire year off teaching English in Korea, I'm granted but 5 days of holiday of my choosing. So I had to make the most of it. It

demanded something awesome. Something ridiculous. Something amazing to compensate for a year of toil, for my year of teaching kindergarteners that at times would rather throw books in the air (“Whoops! Did I do THAT teacher?” written tauntingly on a face) than read them. NATO Military Chess Tournament in Denmark. Oh yeah! Whhhhhhaaaaaatttt?

As I strolled through the airports in Seoul and Istanbul, I couldn’t help but walk briskly with a grin. Did I meet any other travelers with a more random purpose in the airports than myself? Nope! How to explain: “Well... I’m a Canadian teaching English in Korea. But before that I studied music at university, where I also made a chess club. And... well, I was a musician for the military as well. Part-time. And that’s actually why I’m going to Denmark right now... The military. Which I’m on leave from (but will be going back to). I’m playing chess for them.”



Canadian team + family.

*Left to Right (behind): MCpl Rodney Goodall (2 Svc Bn, Petawawa), Cpl Stephen Stone (L Edm R, Edmonton), Cpl Frédéric Langelier (3 R22R, Quebec), MCpl Brian Murray (Joint Signals Regiment, Kingston), Maj Régis Bellemare (1 Svc Bn, Edmonton), From Left to Right (in front): Abeda Ghiacy, Jelani Ghiacy (Atco Fronte Kandahar, Kingston) Humaira Ghiacy, Mariam Ghiacy April Murray*

And so, I join the Canadian team: the NATO country with by far the smallest military, the largest land area and the least formal qualification process for this tournament (well, until we become a chess SUPERPOWER next year, anyways!).

Q: What’s more random than a Canadian from Korea playing chess in Denmark?

A: A Canadian from Korea travelling from Denmark to Sweden with his Turkish friend.

And so I met the team. The Turkish team, that is. As it turns out, they were on the same flight as me from Istanbul to Copenhagen and we took the same van from the airport to the tournament site in the small homely town of Koge. We weren’t talking long before we became friends. Especially John (that’s written “Can”) and I.

Somehow it comes up that I like to run. “Let’s go running in the mornings at 6:30am before our games!” “Sure, why not!”.

I mention I would like to visit Malmo, Sweden, just across the bridge from Copenhagen. I have a percussionist friend there.



*Handshakes between team captains + mayor of Koge (lady behind) and high ranking military personnel at the opening ceremonies.*

“I too would like to see Malmo! I will go with you!

And so there was great company for the trip (a much too short but wonderful and packed visit).

I cannot find my team upon arrival at the tournament site.

“Join ours!”

And so I did. We walked around the town of Køge and had Shawarmas for lunch at a Turkish restaurant... it is interesting that for a town of 40,000 people, 1,500 are Turkish there (I thought perhaps Turkish was a more useful language than English). Between the Turkish team and the Turkish neurologist I was chatting with on the plane from Seoul to Istanbul (along with the layover in Istanbul), I felt like I got a small taste of Turkey from the whole adventure.

Being in Denmark and playing chess in a NATO tournament was an experience like no other I have had before. Certainly, it was great being able to see a bit of Denmark... But, more than it being a Danish experience, it was really a multicultural experience. Players from 15 NATO countries met up for this tournament and it is certainly not every day that you find such a mixture of people and languages in one place. I think I will always remember my games against the players from France and Belgium. Along with my Québécois roommate and team Captain, it was also a really great opportunity for practice of my French (the first time I've done post-game chess analysis “en français”).

And to meet up with everyone in Denmark, seeing most of the team for the first time, but unifying as Canadians, was very special. As the Arrogant Worms “2nd national anthem” written for our country simply states it: “Canada is Really Big!” It's not every day that one gets to meet up with our brethren that live off in some other part of the country.



*Tournament Hall,  
before the first game.  
Complete with NATO  
country flags.*

Whether chatting with the Germans, going on adventures with my Turkish friends or even hearing the stories of our own fellow Canadians (note, our one team-mate, Jelani, is Afghan-Canadian and I think it was good to hear of the world over there directly from him and his family), it was certainly an enriching experience filled with much camaraderie. Especially, that is, shared amongst the stories of battles fought at the board.

The games of course, were the point of it all! Intense bloody battles as two countries round after round duke it out on the 8x8 board. A deceptively civil looking battlefield. For all of us, we shake hands and then exchange token gifts from our respective countries. But then it starts... For myself, my mind becomes set: FIGHT! KILL! RIP EM TO SHREDS. ARRRRGHGGG! FOCUS. CALCULATE. SQUEEZE. DON'T GIVE AN INCH. My opponent is my friend when I shake his hand, when we talk before the game or when we look at it afterwards. But during the match he is the foe I must obliterate!



*Jelani Ghiacy (left), from Kingston, Ontario and Team Captain Major Régis Bellemare (right), from Edmonton, Alberta.  
**Canadian Content Note:** Régis Bellemare founded the International Chess Club in Kandahar, Afghanistan, which Jelani Ghiacy continues to operate as the current president.*



*My good friend and roommate Frédérique Langelier (Cpl) of Québec (right), deep in concentration against a Belgium player*

The tournament itself was actually the strongest tournament I have (to this point) played in my life. The bulk of the players were rated over 2000, reaching up to 2519 (with the top player from Germany). If you looked at our

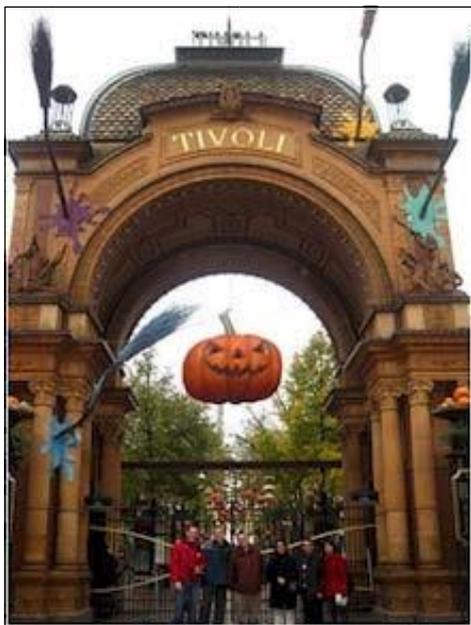
team on paper, we were by far the lowest rated. Considering the pool of people available though, ours is also the smallest and spread out over the largest area (especially if you consider, say, the odd person taken from Afghanistan or Korea). A break-down of a few of the countries' military numbers, courtesy of Wikipedia: (comparison of Active + Reserve Personnel, approximate): Canada 80,000 (maybe 100,000, if including "supplementary"). Lithuania 115,000. Belgium 147,000, Germany, 600,000 Turkey 1,000,000, USA 3,000,000.



*Prepping for one of the craziest games I've ever played, against my good friend Can (it's not often a person can sacrifice a queen and only one tempo (and no pieces) in return and then have a winning position...). Can's fierce determination saw him through in the end, but there were points at which I had winning opportunity as well. It was an excellent game.*

Despite being outgunned though, throughout the tournament we had focus and we had determination and as it turned out, the big intimidating numbers by people's names were not such a big deal (you start to get into the mindset of: oh, only rated 2000? No problem!). We were happy with our end-result: it is the first time (in Canada's three years since its return to the tournament ) that the team had a full roster and also that it has taken down another full complement team. We finished above Luxemburg (not-so-fully manned ) and Lithuania! Throughout the tournament, we cautiously followed the scores with hope, only half-jokingly making it our goal to take down our "archnemesis". We were rewarded in the end.

As per performance rating in the tournament, we all played hundreds of points above our supposed ratings. For myself, considering the calibre of players, I was actually very happy with my 2.5/7, in my first international tournament (I could have maybe won 2 more of my games, being a little more careful... but I could have lost the ones I got, as well!). Major Régis Bellemare, our other Western Canadian representative (currently also from Edmonton) took the top Canadian spot with his 3/7. And at this tournament, any win a person gets there counts for a lot, when you consider the strength of the opponents they are torn away from. We all got at least one! All in all, despite being the "little guys" at a strong competition, we held our own in and gave a respectable showing.



*Tivoli: amusement park/nature park in the middle of Copenhagen. A beautiful surreal little world.*

As a whole, it was an amazing experience and an interesting taste of the Scandinavian countries. The chess was great, but the people even better. A feeling of family amongst our Canadian team and friends with all the faces from other countries... that alas, may be difficult to see in the foreseeable future. But then, perhaps we may all be able to meet again at the next NATO Chess tournament: summer 2011 in Lithuania

## About the author

Stephen Stone (Cpl) has performed as a reservist military musician with the Loyal Edmonton Regiment (Edmonton) and the Band of the Ceremonial Guard (for the Changing of the Guard Ceremony on Parliament Hill, Ottawa). At the time of writing he is teaching English in South Korea. Stephen studied music at the University of Alberta where he also founded the current U of A Chess Club. He will be returning to Edmonton in time for this 2010 Christmas.



## Questions About Military Chess in Canada?

If you have any queries, comments or want to become involved, contact Major Régis Bellemare, Canada's ring-leading Military Chess organizer. If you're in the military or are a civilian working with the military, there are military chess tournaments throughout the year (both in and out of Canada) you could be involved with.

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