



Servicemembers from Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Germany, Lithuania, Luxemburg, the United Kingdom and the United States display their country's flags at the commencement ceremony for Iron Sword 2014, an exercise incorporating all nine NATO countries, to enhance combined tactical competency and strategy. These activities are part of the U.S. Army Europe-led Operation Atlantic Resolve land force assurance training taking place across Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to enhance multinational interoperability, strengthen relationships among allied militaries, contribute to regional stability and demonstrate U.S. commitment to NATO. (Photo by Spc. Seth LaCount)

U.S. NCOs Partner, Build Relationships In Europe Through Training

By Clifford Kyle Jones — NCO Journal

“Without strong NCOs, there is no Strong Europe,” Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges told an international gathering of senior enlisted leaders from throughout Europe.

The U.S. Army Europe commander wasn't just talking about noncommissioned officers from the United States. The U.S. Army needs strong allies in the region, and strong allies have strong NCO corps.

USAREUR has worked to build relationships through a number of training exercises — at its own European instal-

lations, as well as throughout its partner countries — and through shared education at all enlisted levels, from the first exposure to the NCO ranks at WLC to the pinnacle of enlisted education at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy.

One of U.S. Army Europe's most important training hubs, the 7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command, has increased its work with multinational forces in recent years. And that only benefits U.S. Soldiers, said Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey Huggins, command sergeant major of the JMTC.



Lithuanian and U.S. soldiers prepare to enter and clear a building during an offensive operations exercise earlier this year at the Pabrade training center in Lithuania. Dragoons of Lightning Troop, 3rd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment and Lithuanian soldiers of 3rd Company, Algirdas Mechanized Infantry Battalion, conducted combined operations during a three-day field training exercise in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Megan Leuck)

The 170th Infantry Brigade left Germany in 2012, and the 172nd Infantry Brigade, which had been based in Grafenwoehr, was inactivated in 2013. To stay relevant, Huggins said, JMTC had to increase the work it did with U.S. allies. As the Army has shifted toward aligning units based in the United States with specific Geographic Combatant Commands, U.S. forces have returned en masse to the Grafenwoehr and Hohenfels training areas.

“We have Regionally Aligned Forces now that are really starting to retap old resource requirements that we got rid of,” Huggins said. Grafenwoehr houses a contingent of vehicles and equipment, known as the European Activity Set, which is enough to equip a battalion-sized RAF as it rotates in and out. The permanent stationing of equipment at Grafenwoehr is intended to allow easier rotations, as personnel can be moved without having to ship equipment and vehicles across the Atlantic. The EAS includes the latest iterations of the M1A2 Abrams tank (the System Enhancement Package version 2) and the M2A3 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles, as well as other vehicles.

The Pentagon has sought approval to expand that program into Eastern Europe to deter Russia from further aggression after its occupation of the Ukrainian

area of Crimea, and would like to place equipment in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and possibly Hungary.

State Partnership Program

Like the RAF, the State Partnership Program also helps augment the U.S. presence in Europe, and elsewhere around the globe, by partnering U.S. state National Guard units with another country’s forces. The program started in the early 1990s, when U.S. state National Guards were paired with three former Soviet bloc countries.

“I’ve been in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard for a long time, and Pennsylvania is partnered with Lithuania,” said Sgt. Maj. Scott Haymaker, senior enlisted advisor for European Command’s J5/8, which develops military and political policy for the command’s activities with international militaries and other U.S. commands. “We’ve done multiple, multiple missions and events with Lithuania, but it wasn’t until I got this assignment at EU-COM that I really started digging deeper into the State Partnership Program.”

During a presentation on the program at the Conference of European NCOs, Haymaker said the National

Guard can be particularly helpful in training armies in disaster relief and protecting a nation's borders, two of the primary responsibilities of Guard units in the states. But perhaps the greatest advantage — on both sides — is the relationship that develops between the allied nations.

Air Force National Guard Command Chief Master Sgt. Annadele Kenderes, state command chief master sergeant for the Colorado Air National Guard, also spoke to conference participants about the program. The Colorado Guard has had a long-standing relationship with Slovenia, but just recently added Jordan, as well.

"Each state partnership program looks a little different; each friendship that we have with whatever country looks a little different," she said. "I know each relationship is different; you have a different need. With our Jordan relationship, we're just fostering and feeding that, but when you saw the Jordanian pilot who was burned and killed on TV, it was like we lost a family member. We truly understand these friendships and these relationships."

USAREUR works hard to develop and maintain its relationships, but in Europe, the state-nation partnerships go back 10, 15 or even 20 years and give USAREUR something to build on.

"We have a partnership with Maryland, and it's already 12 years old," said Sgt. Maj. of the Armed Forces of Bos-

nia-Herzegovina Mario Bagaric. "At the beginning, it was just visiting National Guard and us going to the States. Now it's a two-way road. We developed ULF — unit-level familiarization. Every year, we send 10 to 15 people to training events in the National Guard. In the future, we're looking to have one unit from the National Guard visiting our training event in Bosnia-Herzegovina."

Building interoperability

Development and deepening of those relationships is exactly what the SPP is intended to do, and it's hoped that relationship will make training and any future actions smoother.

"The purposes are to promote mutual understanding and — this is key — interoperability," Haymaker said. "How do we work together during all these missions that we are now doing together? This has been a topic of discussion at EUCOM for the last two or three months now. With the deployments to [Iraq and Afghanistan] drawing down, how do we maintain the interoperability that we've built up? How do we keep it? How do we sustain it?"

Maintaining and sustaining skills are a primary concern to the agencies that oversee the partnership program, as well. The SPP falls under EUCOM and is overseen in each country by Offices of Defense Cooperation, or ODCs.



United States Army Sergeants Major Academy commandant Dennis E. Defreese speaks at the Conference of European Army NCOs in Bled, Slovenia. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones / NCO Journal)

Lt. Col. Stephanie Bagley, who leads the ODC in the Czech Republic, told CEANCO attendees about the challenges and successes of her ODC. The United States maintained ODCs in 40 countries until recently, when the Moscow office was shut down.

She noted that the Czechs had recently purchased a Scan Eagle Unmanned Aircraft System from the United States, but that the United States' responsibility doesn't end with the sale.

"If we just deliver that capability, it's never going to go anywhere," Bagley said. "We have to figure out how to sustain it. So what resources do I leverage to help the Czech Republic sustain that capability? That's where the State Partnership Program comes in. That's where I work with my bilateral affairs officer, the Texas National Guard officer in my office."

Texas is the Czech Republic's partner, and Bagley noted that because of the state's size, there's almost no capability it's not able to deliver or train on. And in fact, she was able to schedule several weeklong trainings from Texas' UAS experts, she said.

Training exercises are a key element to maintaining U.S. and allied experience with interoperability and equipment. Even this month, Soldiers and airmen from several state National Guard units are participating in the USAREUR-led Sabre Strike 15 across Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Such exercises help with another goal of the State Partnership Program.

"Building enduring relationships is also key," Haymaker said. "Some of these relationships have been built for more than 20 years. And I'm not talking about just the senior-level relationships. We're talking about the

bottom-level relationships, the two E-5s or the two OR-5s ("other rank 5" — the NATO designation for enlisted personnel at the rank equivalent to U.S. sergeant) meet and they start a relationship together that spans throughout their career. So when they move up in responsibilities and positions and authorities, they can still communicate and foster that relationship."

Training exercises are a powerful tool for building relationships, but the United States shares its formal NCO Education System with other countries, as well. As the CEANCO was underway in Bled, Slovenia, a mobile training team from the 7th Army's NCO Academy, in Grafenwoehr, Germany, was visiting the Czech Republic for that nation's first Warrior Leader Course.

And the commandant of the U.S. Sergeants Major Academy, Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis E. Defreese, led the first session at the conference. As he described the latest developments at the academy and encouraged attendees to participate in the programs, he also explained why the shared education is so important to the United States.

"For the Sergeants Major Academy and for me, it's not about bringing NCOs from around the world to the U.S. Sergeants Major Academy and teaching them how to be a U.S. Army sergeant major," he said. "It's about all of learning from each other. It's a fairly important thing for me, because we (the NCOs) are the people who do the things that need to get done in our armies. There is a responsibility and requirement for us to be better educated as we move into this more complex world that's continuing to get more and more complex." ■



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