

STRENGTHENING THE COALITION

SENIOR NCOS FROM 38 COUNTRIES GATHER FOR 6TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

BY MASTER SGT. ANTONY M.C. JOSEPH NCO Journal

It has been said that war is the result of a failure of diplomacy; others have said that even if mediation and negotiations were factors in today's global conflict, terrorists cannot be swayed by diplomacy. Whatever the outcome of that discussion is, it is beneficial when soldiers from different, allied countries get together to discuss a joint, combined and cohesive way to combat terrorism and other threats to their nations.

To achieve this, U.S. Army Europe has been conducting a Conference of European Armies for Noncommissioned Officers for the past six years. The gatherings' aim has been to work through the different aspects of forming a unified and productive allied force. This year, at the conference hosted by USAREUR and the Croatian Army in Zagreb, Croatia, the theme was strengthening the coalition that has fought together in Afghanistan by training together in Europe. In attendance were the sergeants major of the army and other senior NCOs from 38 countries, mostly from Europe.

"In the first year of the conference, only 16 countries

participated. But the reputation and success of the conference has grown and encouraged the turnout seen now," said Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport, USAREUR's command sergeant major.

Davenport said the annual conferences help maintain the momentum that has been built over the years in "leader development and

establishing personal relationships to strengthen the NCO Corps" of the partner nations.

The commanding general of USAREUR, Lt. Gen. Mark Hertling, is also a great proponent of building bonds with our allies.

"In Europe, we have a good relationship with the rest of our coalition partners and work well together," Hertling said. "Because we train together and know each other personally and have built trust, not only at events such as this but also during training events, we have a better rapport when we get downrange."

One such training event was being conducted at the Croatian Army's training area outside Slunj while the conference was under way in the capital. Troops from Croatia, Albania, Slovenia, Montenegro and USAREUR's 2nd Cavalry Regiment joined together to attack a fortified position of mock insurgents. The advantages of training together and knowing one another's tactics and procedures was evident as the coalition of forces seemed to work as one, executing the mission flawlessly.

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Dominick Ban of the Croatian Army said the exercise was a very visual way to show conference attendees "how important the training together is."

"Though we have modeled our training on the U.S. curriculum, we have our own intricacies, and so do the other countries," he said. "But by knowing each other's differences, we were able to flow together very nicely."

Hertling said that during the past 10 years, American forces have focused on skills needed for counterinsurgency warfare. "We have been focused on that type of skill set, but as we get toward the post-ISAF scenario, we are going to be asked to do other things," he said. "Different skills will be required; skills we haven't practiced for a while now — things such as fortifying our positions, digging in defensive positions. Some of our coalition partners have maintained those skills; I noticed that during the training event. The

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Dominick Ban of the Croatian Army presents a coin to U.S. Army Sgt. Zachary Malphurs of 1st Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, June 5 during a visit to a multinational training exercise near Slunj, Croatia. PHOTO BY MICHAEL L. LEWIS





Above: Ban and Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport, command sergeant major of U.S. Army Europe, lead a discussion June 4 during the 6th Annual Conference of European Armies for Noncommissioned Officers at Zagreb, Croatia.

Right: Sgt. Maj. of the Army Lyobomir Lambov of the Bulgarian army (left) talks with Sgt. Maj. of the Army Roshan Safi of the Afghanistan army on June 6 in front of the Ban-ski Dvori, home of Croatia's executive branch, in Zagreb.

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL L. LEWIS

relationships we have made here are going to help when we have to refine our skills based on what everyone else in the coalition is doing.”

Though funding for such events is always a concern, Davenport said that because of the close relationships, countries “are able to partner up and use each other’s resources and facilities,” thus defraying the cost.

“The generals have been doing these types of Conference of European Armies for about 18 years or so, but the NCOs’ version has only been in existence for the past six years,” Hertling said. “What we’ve seen is that NCOs don’t just talk about things, they make an action plan and execute it like NCOs do.”

He added that the NCO Corps will force the training in the future. The resources and budget issues will be thrashed out at the officers’ conference; NCOs should concentrate on how best to use those resources.

Many participants said they have learned that no matter where they come from, they have many things in common with their international counterparts.

“The most common sentiment expressed was the genuine concern that NCOs have for their soldiers,” Davenport said. “All of them want to ensure that their soldiers are well led, trained and equipped.”

That more countries are accepting their NCO corps as an integral part of the success of their army has been one of



the significant gains of the CEANCO. The NCOs of most of the countries represented at the conference are gaining more respect and are becoming part of the decision-making process, which was not always the case in years past.

“A good NCO corps is the backbone of the army,” said Maj. Gen. Dragutin Repinc, commander of the Croatian Army. “We have established the Croatian NCO Corps on the U.S. model. We are becoming better and better. At this stage, we are very satisfied in all that the NCOs are doing in the command and support channels. There needs to be more of these types of get-togethers for NCOs.” ♡

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