

U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

contact: paoci@eur.army.mil
phone: 49-6221-57-5815 / DSN 370-5815
fax: 49-6221-57-6376 / DSN 370-6376



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Retention experts from across Europe gather for training at Garmisch conference

By Dave Melancon

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

HEIDELBERG, Germany -- Reenlistment NCOs from all over Europe are learning about new Army re-up programs and honing their career counseling skills during a weeklong team-building conference in Garmisch, Germany that wraps up May 22.

“Since we are geographically dispersed, this is the best opportunity to get everybody together,” explained Sgt. Maj. David Best, U.S. Army Europe’s senior reenlistment NCO. “We have counselors from all over Europe, and since all counselors have the same training requirement, we open this training to all career counselors.”

The 90 active and reserve component counselors represent several Europe-based commands, including USAREUR, Installation Management Command-Europe, Europe Regional Medical Command, 7th Civil Support Command and the Network Enterprise Technology Command, he said.

Most career counselors work at the battalion level, Best said. The conference gives them the opportunity to learn more about Army- and command-wide issues.

Keynote trainers included representatives from the Department of the Army’s personnel directorate and the Army Human Resources Command’s reenlistment management team, the sergeant major said. Classes offered the counselors methods to better their administrative and technical skills and improve their ability to support Soldiers’ reenlistment desires and the Army’s personnel needs.

Information about the new “post 9-11” GI Bill and the Army’s retention goals headlined the training session, Best said. Other discussion included topics ranging from processing “exception to policy” reenlistments, quality control of retention documents, budgeting, marketing and advertising, he added.

“We are sitting here brainstorming on how we can improve the quality of the force and give the Army the mix of people it is looking for,” he said. “We’ve also had

philosophical exchange among the commands on how we can improve our services to Soldiers and leaders.”

While conference participants spent most of their training time in classrooms, other team-building training exercises took place on the physical fitness field, he added.

“By training together we can build our team and we get people better prepared to take care of our Soldiers and leaders,” Best said. “We’re going down as far as how each person can individually improve himself to be a better Soldier and a better career counselor.”

Retention goals were also discussed, he said. USAREUR has been traditionally successful in meeting its mandated reenlistment goals and “a well above the Army average” stabilized assignment rate, Best said. Soldiers are satisfied with their assignments, missions and life in Europe, he added, because USAREUR leaders at all levels “have created an environment that people want to be part of.”

The sergeant major stressed that, contrary to what many Soldiers may believe, meeting reenlistment quotas is not a career counselor’s most important task.

“It is not about the goal. It is about taking care of our Soldiers and their Families. They are Soldiers, they are faces. They mean something to us.”



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