



EUROPE'S NCOs

A EUROPEAN HELPED BUILD OUR NCO CORPS.
NOW, WE'RE RETURNING THE FAVOR.

BY MICHAEL L. LEWIS NCO Journal





In 1778, Gen. George Washington hired a drillmaster from Prussia to mold a professional corps of enlisted Soldiers from the shambolic band of colonials that made up the Continental Army. Steeped in the European ways of training soldiers and of instilling discipline among their ranks, Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben is widely credited with instituting the NCO Corps of the U.S. Army.

Some 230 years later, the U.S. Army is returning the favor, helping European armies train, develop and, in some cases, build from scratch corps of noncommissioned officers who fight alongside their American comrades in Afghanistan. It is all part of an enduring program of collaboration and partnership that benefits NCOs on both sides of the Atlantic.

“The cooperation across the European footprint is unbelievable,” said Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport, command sergeant major of U.S. Army Europe. “The high level of cooperation can be seen in Afghanistan, where the large majority of coalition forces comes from Europe.”

Indeed, of the non-U.S. soldiers currently in Afghanistan, more than 91 percent are from Europe — a ratio of about 2 European troops for every 7 from the United States. That alliance is more than just the start of a trend, Davenport said. It reflects a new reality that will affect every American NCO.

“I hope that NCOs in the U.S. Army understand that we will always be part of a coalition. It will no longer be one against one; it’s going to be a united effort,” he said. “I hope NCOs get from these partnerships the ability to learn from one another. Just because we are the U.S. Army, that doesn’t mean we have the best practices exclusively. When we send NCOs to different [NCO Education System] schools, we always talk about networking. Well, why not network and gain different insights from a different army? I think that’s going to be hugely important.”

Partners in training

Training together in Europe is a natural outcome of fighting together in Afghanistan, said Lt. Gen. Mark Hertling, the outgoing commanding general of U.S. Army Europe.

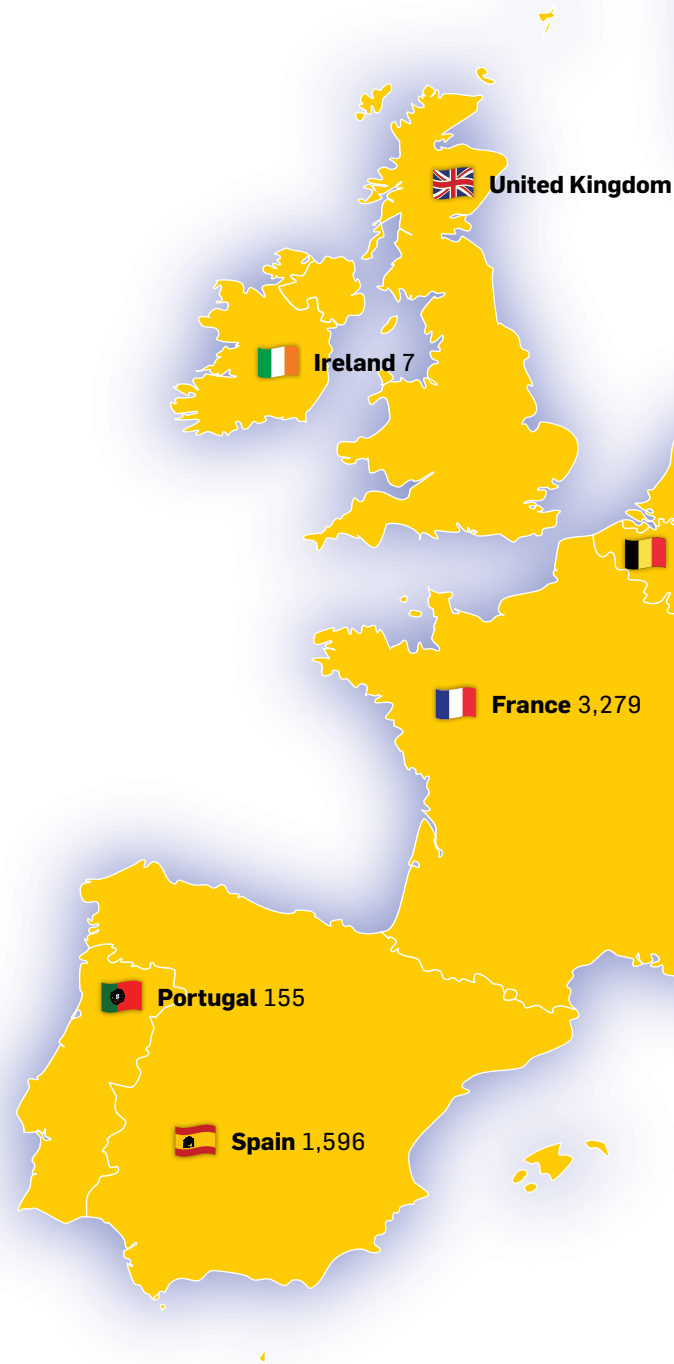
“The way they got there and the way we are able to conduct operations together there is because we all train together here,” he said.

Davenport added, “It’s better to build that relationship now in a training environment than trying to do it on the battlefield.”

For an army the size of Croatia’s, partnering to train for missions abroad has been invaluable, said its top NCO, Sgt. Maj. of the Army Dominick Ban.

“The Croatian Army is relatively small, if you are comparing with other armies,” he said. “However, we are aware that we have successfully completed our duties outside our nation always with the cooperation and support of larger alliances and joint international training. This is crucial and very important. Why? Because there needs to be mutual understanding in order to successfully complete the tasks that stand before us.”

As part of the collaborative effort, thousands of soldiers from partner nations



EUROPE IN AFGHANISTAN

Much of the training the U.S. Army conducts with forces from European armies has its roots in the coalition fighting in Afghanistan. Of the nearly 40,000 non-U.S. troops currently deployed in support of the International Security and Assistance Force there, nearly 36,000, or 91%, are from Europe. The map shows those countries with forces currently in Afghanistan and the number of troops deployed there as of May 15.

SOURCE: ISAF
MAP BY MICHAEL L. LEWIS





Staff Sgt. Dustin French, a Warrior Leader Course instructor at the 7th Army NCO Academy at Grafenwöhr, Germany, explains the M16A2 zeroing target to Staff Sgt. Maciej Rzepka of the Polish Land Forces during a situational training exercise in April 2011. More than 260 Polish NCOs have enrolled in WLC at the academy since 2002. PHOTO BY SGT. 1ST CLASS TONYA GONZALES

have trained at U.S. Army facilities in Grafenwöhr and Hohenfels, Germany, to prepare for missions in Afghanistan, said Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis Zavodsky, command sergeant major of U.S. Army Europe's Joint Multinational Training Command.

"Combat training, home-station training, institutional training and simulation — all those things are possible at JMTC, which is unique in our Army, because that is not always the case stateside," Zavodsky said. "That's something specific to U.S. Army Europe that I think our customers find facilitates their training needs."

"USAREUR is uniquely set up to provide the resources to get at the wide range of operations — everything from our maneuver training areas to our live-fire ranges for individual and crew-served weapons," Davenport said. "They give [our Soldiers and those of other countries] the opportunity to interact. I think those combinations really help training."

"You hear about 'smart defense' initiatives," Hertling said. "But this is the kind of smart defense that I think is the smartest — just getting people together for a training opportunity, watching them on the ranges, combining efforts and building trust. That's the real smart defense,

and we've been doing it at USAREUR for quite some time."

Predeployment training is just one way U.S. Army Europe contributes to partner nations' NCO education, Zavodsky said. Incorporating international students into NCOES courses is another. More than 650 students from other countries have graduated the Warrior Leader Course at the 7th Army NCO Academy in Grafenwöhr during the last decade.

"We consider Poland the gold standard as far as training volume is concerned," he said. More than 260 Polish troops have attended the course. "Ultimately, what we're trying to get to with our Warrior Leader Course is we want it to become even more multinational. Our model doesn't fit everybody, but what I think it does provide is an

opportunity for partnership and to work together."

In the future, Zavodsky hopes to begin exchanging instructors with other countries' NCO schools to further share tactics, techniques and procedures. One such swap is already in the works with Germany's NCO school, he said.

"Their course is much longer than ours — about six months long," Zavodsky said. "But we're willing to make that investment to maintain that partnership."

It's a collaboration that is designed to be reciprocal, Davenport said.

"I think we can provide a standard, a way of doing business, and allow them to see that," he said. "They then put their own national identity on that as they develop their NCO corps. We just show one way of doing it."

"If we can learn something from, say, the Croatian Army and can apply it to our Army, we do, and we are," Hertling said. "During our last exercise at Hohenfels, we had a U.S. Airborne unit trying to dig in a defensive position and establish an engagement area. That is a skill required by all our Soldiers, but they haven't done it in 10 years. Meanwhile, the Slovenian army was off to the right, digging foxholes and putting out wire, putting up their aiming stakes, making sure their weapons were sighted. One of our Airborne battalion sergeants major pulled aside one of his first sergeants and said, 'Look at how they're doing it. That's how I want you to do it.'"

"This isn't a one-way street; this is an exchange," Hertling said. "This isn't a top-

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down, this-is-how-you-do-it thing. It's an exchange of best practices between armies. It's about good ideas."

Old but new

At the most recent gathering of the top NCOs from across Europe and beyond, held in June in Zagreb, Croatia (see page 32), conference participants discussed how best to train the next generation of non-commissioned officers within militaries that don't necessarily regard NCOs as the backbone of their organizations. Though the Bulgarian army can trace its origins to the 7th century, for example, its NCO corps is still nascent, said Sgt. Maj. of the Army Lyubomir Lambov, the Bulgarian Land Forces' first SMA.

"The very first thing was to change officers' minds, because some of the officers do not recognize the need to even have a sergeant major of the army," he said. "There is a Bulgarian NCO Corps. But NCOs in the Bulgarian army are more like 'senior soldiers,' not professional NCOs like in the United States. We have an enlisted rank structure now, but that had to be created from nothing."

Like many nations in Europe, Bulgaria had to develop its NCO corps as it shifted away from conscription to an all-volunteer force. Since the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, nearly two dozen European nations have abolished or suspended mandatory military service during peacetime. Yet as the militaries shrank, so did budgets for education and training. And noncommissioned officers, if there were any left, were not considered a priority by many countries' military leadership.

"The educational opportunities for NCOs are still not as large as those for officers," Lambov said. "Three years ago, we established a one-year NCO college. But I get the impression from some senior officers and generals that they don't want this college to exist. I don't know why, but it's probably related to old-style thinking left over from the Soviet system."

Croatian soldiers wait for dignitaries to arrive June 5 during the Immediate Response 2012 exercises in Slunj, Croatia. The tactical training involved more than 700 personnel from the U.S. Army's 2nd Cavalry Regiment and the armies of Croatia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Serbia.

PHOTO BY MASTER SGT. ANTONY M.C. JOSEPH

Greece, which still has conscription, has worked to develop NCOs from both its volunteer and conscript forces, said Sgt. Maj. George Papakirykos of the Hellenic Army.

"The difference, based on the other countries that I've seen, is that we're more like the Italian or German style," he said. "We have an NCO corps, but we don't have brigade sergeants major or battalion sergeants major like in the United States. We do have similar positions, but they change from one person in the unit to another regularly. The purpose is mostly to gain experience. In my battalion, for example, I was the battalion sergeant major, and that was for a week. That way, all the senior NCOs have the opportunity to see the du-

ties of the command team."

Papakirykos said experience and education work in tandem to provide NCOs professional development in Greece.

"We try to have an equilibrium between the military's tactical experience and training, and academic qualifications. We believe that this will generally increase our level," he said. "For example, I am a political scientist and am pursuing a master's degree. That gives another perspective to my job as an NCO. But that doesn't mean that a 20-year NCO — especially a sergeant major — can't teach me many things about how to train soldiers."

But what does a country do after it gets rid of all its NCOs? That was the issue the Swedish Armed Forces faced in recent





Sgt. 1st Class Randy Angel, an observer-controller with the Joint Multinational Training Command, gives instructions to Montenegrin soldiers June 1 during Immediate Response 2012. PHOTO BY SPC. LORENZO WARE

decades after it eliminated all NCOs from its military. Today, it is in the middle of rebuilding its NCO corps from the ground up, said Maj. Joachim Blomgren, head of NCO education, training and development for the Swedish Armed Forces.

“Between 1983 and 2008, we only had officers and [junior] conscript soldiers,” he said. “This resulted in a lack of well-educated officers and a lack of deep knowledge in each branch profession. In 2006, it was a government decision that we should go back — we should have officers and noncommissioned officers again. Because of that, we have a huge challenge to change this system.”

Blomgren explained that part of the process will be to convert more than a thousand officers to NCO ranks, including him.

“Today, we have about 90 percent officers and 10 percent NCOs,” he said. “But in two years, we should have 60 percent NCOs and 40 percent officers. For example, my position is an NCO position. Probably, my commander will come to me and say he wants me to become an NCO, and that will be the same

for 400 majors, 300 lieutenant colonels and 500 captains who will have to change to an NCO rank.”

In contrast to the lack of respect felt by some countries’ NCO corps, Blomgren said Swedish society prizes equality.

“I don’t think respect will be a problem,” he said. “In Sweden, the CEO, for example, is not as powerful; he’s an ordinary guy. If I talk to my commander, a brigadier, it’s like talking with anyone else. It’s Swedish society; we’re not divided into different classes like that.”

But he said that equitability makes it harder to attract potential recruits to Sweden’s military, which has been an all-volunteer force since 2010.

“I think the hardest thing is to keep the soldiers in,” Blomgren said. “In Sweden, for example, everyone can go to college or university and won’t have to pay. We have free health care as well. So you don’t

have the same incentives [like in the U.S. Army]. And we’re not allowed to give free food or free housing, like in the U.S. If I’m out on an exercise, I have to pay for the food, because a civilian working in a factory cannot get free food. In Sweden, everybody is supposed to be equal.”

A helping hand

Strengthening the bonds between the United States and its allies begins with the troops on the ground, who all speak a common language, if not the same tongue, Davenport said.

“It’s about what we have in common rather than our differences,” he said. “There’s a universal concern that NCOs have for soldiers, a commitment to make sure that they are well-led, well-trained and well-equipped.”

There are also parallels between the process armies are going through to develop their NCO corps and the process by which American NCOs develop themselves, he said.

“I think that sometimes, countries are facing issues that newly promoted sergeants in the U.S. Army are faced with. As they make that transition from specialist to sergeant, they’re faced with a lot of new responsibility and expectations. That’s what a lot of these countries are dealing with: What is the role of the noncommissioned officer? What can we expect from them?”

Ultimately, the more conversations NCOs from different countries have, the better it will be for all future leaders, Davenport said.

“When you have this dialogue, you’re able to teach the next generation,” he said. “We owe it to them to give them all our experience and the life lessons we’ve learned the hard way. Pass it on to them to make our Army and NCO Corps even better.”

To contact Michael L. Lewis, email michael.lewis73@us.army.mil.

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AMERICA'S EUROPEAN PARTNERS AT A GLANCE

	POPULATION ¹	ACTIVE MILITARY ¹	 EU MEMBERSHIP ²	 NATO MEMBERSHIP	CONSCRIPTION	 USAREUR TRAINING ³
 Albania	2,994,667	14,245	potential candidate	since 2009	abolished 2010	24 WLC, 168 JMTC
 Armenia	2,967,975	46,834	no	no, CIS member	yes, 2 year obligation	—
 Austria	8,217,280	25,758	since 1995	no, neutral	yes, 6–12 month obligation	—
 Belgium	10,431,477	34,336	since 1957	since 1949	suspended 1992	1 WLC, 48 JMTC
 Bosnia & Herzegovina	4,622,163	10,577	potential candidate	planned	abolished 2007	14 WLC
 Bulgaria	7,093,635	31,315	since 2007	since 2004	abolished 2007	52 WLC, 415 JMTC
 Croatia	4,483,804	18,600	acceding 2013	since 2009	abolished 2008	100 JMTC
 Czech Republic	10,190,213	25,421	since 2004	since 1999	abolished 2004	14 WLC, 270 JMTC
 Denmark	5,529,888	18,628	since 1973	since 1949	yes, 4–12 month obligation	6 JMTC
 Estonia	1,282,963	5,750	since 2004	since 2004	yes, 8–11 month obligation	8 WLC, 106 JMTC
 Finland	5,259,250	22,100	since 1995	no, neutral	yes, 6–12 month obligation	—
 France	65,102,719	238,591	since 1957	since 1949	suspended 2001	—
 Georgia	4,585,874	20,655	no	planned	yes, 18 month obligation	2 WLC, 196 JMTC
 Germany	81,471,834	251,465	since 1957	since 1955	suspended 2011	1 WLC, 795 JMTC
 Greece	10,760,136	145,647	since 1981	since 1952	yes, 9–12 month obligation	—
 Hungary	9,976,062	22,587	since 2004	since 1999	abolished 2004	211 JMTC
 Iceland	311,058	0	candidate	since 1949	no	—
 Ireland	4,670,976	9,650	since 1973	no, neutral	no	—
 Italy	61,016,804	184,532	since 1957	since 1949	abolished 2005	113 JMTC
 Kosovo	1,836,529	2,800	potential candidate	no	no	116 WLC, 23 JMTC
 Latvia	2,204,708	4,600	since 2004	since 2004	abolished 2007	162 JMTC
 Lithuania	3,535,547	10,640	since 2004	since 2004	suspended 2008	64 JMTC
 Luxembourg	503,302	900	since 1957	since 1949	no	—
 Republic of Macedonia	2,077,328	8,000	candidate	planned	abolished 2006	2 WLC
 Moldova	3,694,121	5,354	no	no, CIS member	yes, 12 month obligation	8 WLC
 Montenegro	661,807	2,984	candidate	planned	abolished 2006	13 WLC
 Netherlands	16,653,734	37,368	since 1957	since 1949	suspended 1997	96 JMTC
 Norway	4,691,849	24,450	no	since 1949	yes, 6–12 months	34 JMTC
 Poland	38,441,588	100,000	since 2004	since 1999	abolished 2009	262 WLC, 885 JMTC
 Portugal	10,760,305	42,634	since 1986	since 1949	abolished 2004	—
 Romania	21,904,551	73,900	since 2007	since 2004	abolished 2006	9 WLC, 531 JMTC
 Russia	143,056,383	1,027,000	no	no, CIS member	yes, 12 month obligation	12 WLC
 Serbia	7,310,555	28,184	candidate	no	abolished 2011	44 WLC, 6 JMTC
 Slovakia	5,477,038	15,799	since 2004	since 2004	abolished 2006	12 WLC, 249 JMTC
 Slovenia	2,000,092	7,600	since 2004	since 2004	abolished 2003	58 WLC, 396 JMTC
 Spain	46,754,784	143,006	since 1986	since 1982	abolished 2001	2 JMTC
 Sweden	9,088,728	20,263	since 1995	no, neutral	abolished 2010	—
 Switzerland	7,639,961	25,287	no	no, neutral	yes, 5 month obligation	—
 Turkey	78,785,548	666,576	candidate	since 1952	yes, 6–12 month obligation	9 WLC
 Ukraine	45,134,707	129,925	no	no, neutral	yes, to be abolished 2015	16 WLC
 United Kingdom	62,698,362	174,030	since 1973	since 1949	abolished 1960	2 JMTC

¹ 2012 figures according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies. ² Status according to the European Commission; includes membership in the European Economic Community, the predecessor of the European Union.

³ Warrior Leader Course students at the 7th Army NCO Academy in Grafenwöhr, Germany, Oct. 2002–June 2012 and troops trained by the Joint Multinational Training Command's Combined Arms Training Center Oct. 2006–May 2012.