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NATO School
Public Affairs Office

NATO School History



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The NATO School Oberammergau (NSO) is located inside the Hötendorf Kaserne complex in the beautiful village of Oberammergau, Germany. The barracks were built in 1935 and occupied on 16 October 1937 by soldiers of the 54th Mountain Signal Battalion, part of the 1st German Mountain Division. Their mission was “to defend communication lines during times of war and to destroy or jam enemy communications”. The Battalion deployed to the Balkans theatre during World War II. In 1943 the Kaserne was used by the Messerschmitt Company that moved their Head Office and Planning Departments from Augsburg in an effort to avoid the Allied bombing campaign. Their main work concerned the development of rocket driven engines and the start of variable wing tip technology. Some of this work was conducted in a cave complex dug into the Laber mountain some 150 metres to the south of the present main school buildings. On 29 April 1945 the 409th US Infantry Regiment of the 103 Infantry Division occupied Oberammergau and assumed responsibility for the Kaserne.



One of the early post war users of the Kaserne was the US 6819th Army Information Education Staff School. Originally established in 1944, the role of this school was to develop a framework for adult education throughout the US Army in Europe and took the form of an early “Train the Trainer” programme. A European Theatre Intelligence School was established at Oberammergau in January 1946, with language training in German, Russian, Czechoslovakian, Serbo-Croatian, Polish and Hungarian all on the curriculum by April of that year. In 1948 a Military Police School (recently been established at Sonthofen) moved to Oberammergau and was consolidated with the Intelligence School.

The genesis of the NATO School came in 1953 when General Mathew B. Ridgeway, then Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), directed the Special Weapons Branch of the US Army Intelligence and Military Police School at Oberammergau to teach 2 courses on strategy and related developments of conventional and nuclear weapons to Allied officers and senior civilians. These courses were: First, an Orientation course of three or four days duration for Senior Allied Commanders and, second, a more detailed course of two weeks to qualify key staff officers for the necessary planning for the tactical use of and defence against nuclear weapons. In December 1955, the Special Weapons Branch moved into a new building and to further facilitate the NATO programme, Supreme Headquarters Allied Power Europe (SHAPE) installed simultaneous translation equipment in June 1956.

On 1 October 1960 the US Army School Command, Europe was consolidated at the Kaserne and consisted of 4 schools: Intelligence School, Military Police School, Special Weapons School, and Weapons Assembly School.

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In 1966, the US Army Special Weapons School became the NATO Weapons Systems Department and was placed under the operational control of SACEUR. The curriculum was expanded and additional courses were introduced. In 1972, the Department became the NATO Weapons Systems School. The School remained under the operational control of the SACEUR, but was designated as a separate, joint-service, multinational United States European Command activity. The School received its charter and the name "NATO School (SHAPE)" in 1975. Between 1970 and 1990 the school expanded its curriculum from 6 to 23 courses as NATO recognised the value of standardised education for members of the Alliance. The school experienced a further growth in the curriculum after the fall of the Warsaw Pact, and the advent of the Partnership for Peace and other partnering initiatives. In 2011 the school offered over 100 different residential courses.

The NSO welcomes Conferences and Seminars on defence related issues and it conducts Mobile Education and Training at dispersed locations as one of its core competencies. The school complements its education programme with currently 34 online courses and maintains a Web Portal to facilitate Advanced Distributed Learning and online collaboration.

In June 2003 during a Transfer of Authority Ceremony, the School received its present name: "NATO School Oberammergau". The school receives its education and training guidelines from Allied Command Transformation (ACT) located in Norfolk, Virginia, USA. An expanding curriculum has prompted the need for increased facilities, and NSO has undertaken 2 recent major improvement projects in 2005 and 2011.

As an MOU-based organisation, Germany and the United States European Command (USEUCOM) contribute facilities and logistics support. Germany and the US form the majority of our approximately 190 strong staff and faculty, with 24 other NATO and partner nations assigning staff in the form of Voluntary National Contributions. The School's operating budget is highly dependent on the tuition fees of our students, and in this regard the NSO is essentially self-supporting.

Since 1953, more than 200,000 Officers, Non-Commissioned officers and civilians from NATO and Partner Nations as well as from a large number of International Organisations have attended courses at the School. In 2011 more than 10 000 students from 73 different nations took part in NSO educational activities.

Today NATO School Oberammergau aspires to be a **Global Leader in Multinational Military Education and Individual Training**. It conducts education and training in support of current and developing NATO operations, strategy, policy, doctrine and procedures. Resident courses of instruction in five main disciplines: Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR), Joint Operations, Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), Policy and NCO Programmes (NCOP). Most courses are one week duration and there are many subjects from which to choose. Teaching is conducted by Subject Matter Experts drawn from the NSO staff, the NATO Command Structure, Civilian Academics, and Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations.



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