







## Unity through Training

Multinational troops prepare for Afghan deployment at training centers in central Germany

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By *per Concordiam* Staff

Romanian soldiers participate in Operational Mentor and Liaison Team training at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, a 2012 exercise to prepare troops for Afghan deployment.

SPC. KIRK EVANOFF/U.S. ARMY



A Georgian infantryman trains for a mission to Afghanistan at the U.S. Army's Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Germany. Georgian soldiers partnered with U.S. Marines to prepare for joint deployment.



GUNNERY SGT. ALEXIS MULERO/U.S. MARINES



**S**gt. Maj. Vladimir Smilianov was patrolling a dusty Afghan lane when his unit was confronted by an unarmed but irate villager complaining about the presence of coalition troops. “You are in my village,” the Afghan raged. “You don’t tell me where I can go.” Then Smilianov, a 20-year Bulgarian army veteran with a shaved head and the barrel chest of a wrestler, observed something he didn’t want to observe: A soldier in his unit started apologizing profusely to the Afghan civilian.

Wrong. All Wrong.

Fortunately for all parties concerned, Smilianov and his counterparts were engaged in a multinational simulation in the rolling hills of central Germany meant to mimic the atmosphere of a real Afghan deployment. The village was a reproduction, the Afghan an impersonator. The way Smilianov saw it, his American training partner provoked the Afghan by entering the village with his rifle leveled menacingly but forfeited his authority by apologizing too much after the fact.

“Some of the soldiers are so young,” said the Bulgarian infantryman, a veteran of countless multinational training exercises since the 1990s. “They should learn how to respect the locals from the beginning. If they don’t, there will be trouble.”

Such skill sharing – between old hands and new recruits, Europeans and Americans, NATO members and partner nations – is the main reason that the 7th U.S. Army’s Joint Multinational Training Command (JMTC) exists. Based in Grafenwoehr, Germany, on hundreds of square kilometers of converted swampland once used by the Kaiser’s imperial army, the JMTC uses a combination of live-fire training, readiness exercises, computerized battle simulations and classroom cramming to familiarize troops with upcoming missions.

The multinational forces flocking by the thousands to JMTC’s northern Bavarian training grounds have been heavily focused on Afghanistan in preparation for deployment to the International Security Assistance Force’s counterinsurgency effort in that country. “We always say we replicate, not duplicate,” said Lt. Col. Drew Brown, deputy director of computer simulations at Grafenwoehr, which trained 16,000 soldiers from 39 nations in 2011. “You give them a flavor of the tribal environment in Afghanistan, make it as real as possible.”

A rainbow of patches and uniforms representing more than 8,000 multinational troops thronged barracks, fields and classrooms in March 2012 for simultaneous exercises at Grafenwoehr Training Area and at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, the maneuver center, near the town of Hohenfels. About 2,000 of the soldiers participated in battle command training called Unified Endeavor meant to prepare headquarters staff, mostly mid-ranking officers, for impending deployment to ISAF and ISAF Joint Command headquarters in Afghanistan. The JMTC, in cooperation with NATO’s Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) in Stavanger, Norway, sponsored Unified Endeavor. Soldiers from Croatia, Germany, Latvia, Poland, Spain, the United States and two dozen other nations converged on JMTC’s simulation center wired with thousands of phone and computer lines linking Grafenwoehr with locations in Norway, Poland and the United States.



Polish soldiers paired with the U.S. Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team scan for targets during a simulated engagement hosted by the Joint Multinational Training Command in Grafenwoehr, Germany.

STAFF SGT. JOEL SALGADO/U.S. ARMY

Hundreds of training and simulation experts used “dynamic scripting” to ratchet up crises levels to test the skills and mettle of the soon-to-deploy headquarters staff. For realism’s sake, the JMTC and the JWC gathered input from seasoned personnel from Afghanistan. Their scenarios plugged in not only military movements on the ground but simulated political unrest that played off current events. “What we use is real world data,” said Lt. Col. Markus Beck, a Bundeswehr officer attached to the NATO training center in Stavanger. “We send our guys into Kabul to collect data we can work with.”

Maj. Eric Vercammen of Belgium, tasked in Afghanistan with procuring fuel for the ISAF mission, was happy for the opportunity to bond with his soon-to-be headquarters colleagues before shipping out. The 24-year veteran, attached to Eurocorps in Strasbourg, France, had already served in Lebanon and the Balkans. “The first objective is simply doing my job effectively as a staff officer,” Vercammen said a day before Unified Endeavor was scheduled to “go live” after months of planning. “The second main objective is team building. We train together and we deploy together.”

A few kilometers down a tree lined highway from Vercammen, the pop of sniper rifles echoed

through the glades of Grafenwoehr. Rows of Dutch Royal Marines were taking target practice, watched over by a noncommissioned officer in a spotting tower. “You have to train. You have to feel it. You have to smell it,” said Sgt. Maj. Peter Laurier, peering through the tower window towards the firing range as marines squeezed off shots at targets as far away as 1.7 kilometers.

In Afghanistan, the Dutch marines have helped train Afghan police officers, part of the transition and stabilization plan designed to make Afghans responsible for their own security. Preparation for that mission wasn’t lost upon Laurier. He and his colleagues planned to practice shooting and simulations at Grafenwoehr for three weeks. “The young marines, they want to be part of a mission,” he said. “If you want to be part of a multinational force, you have to be ready. That’s why we’re here.”

Readiness is what brought Sgt. Przemysław Jakubczak to Grafenwoehr. The Polish air force sergeant was stationed at Pápa Air Base in Hungary, home to the multinational Heavy Airlift Wing that has hauled thousands of tons of cargo and ferried more than 23,000 passengers to six continents. Jakubczak’s story encapsulates the essence of the JMTC: He’s a Pole training in Germany for service in Hungary in support of Afghanistan.