

TENNESSEE GUARDSMAN

T E N N E S S E E & B U L G A R I A

**CELEBRATING
30 YEARS
OF PARTNERSHIP**

★ ★ UNITED STATES ★ ★
NATIONAL GUARD
STATE
PARTNERSHIP
PROGRAM

Mutually Beneficial – Enduring Relationships

BRIG. GEN. WARNER A. ROSS II



To my fellow Soldiers and Airmen of the Tennessee National Guard,

This year is a huge milestone for the Tennessee National Guard and our partner nation, Bulgaria. For thirty years we have been working together and building a mutually benefiting relationship that has enhanced peace and security throughout the world. As we celebrate the anniversary of being one of the first members in the National Guard's State Partnership Program, we need to reflect on how important this partnership is.

Since 1993, Tennessee and Bulgaria have set the example for what the partnership program should be. The SPP was just in its infancy when Tennessee and Bulgaria jumped in with both feet to be in the program, and we are grateful we did. Over the next three decades we have performed nearly 600 engagements with each other and built lasting friendships. Progress and accomplishments are built on relationships and the foundation of relationships are living things that are built on mutual trust.

Just this year we worked together on the joint exercise, Thracian Sentry, where more than 170 Soldiers and Airmen from Tennessee, Bulgaria, and Greece perfected their ability to perform in-flight refueling, firefighting, medical care, marksmanship, and a myriad of other skills. I had the privilege to visit Bulgaria for the exercise and I was able to witness you working together with your Bulgarian counterparts. It was impressive and inspiring.

As we all know, partnerships, coalitions, and alliances are crucial to our national defense. We occupy a "shared world" that is full of "shared challenges." Partnerships help steer us towards a shared future. It is how we have been defending our nation for more than a century. Mutually beneficial alliances, like what we have with Bulgaria, provide a strategic advantage no other competitor or rival can match. Our Bulgarian friends bring special perspectives to the current challenges going on in their region of the world. Those perspectives are unique and help us to better understand the way ahead for both partners.

It takes years to build trust, and that is immeasurable on the battlefield. We have built that with our Bulgarian partners, and we are stronger because of it. The old African proverb says, "if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together." This is true and can be applied to our partnership with Bulgaria.

I want to take this moment to thank every one of you. It is because of Soldiers and Airmen like you that our partnership is so successful. Because of your hard work, Tennessee and Bulgaria have become stronger and better prepared for the whatever threats the future may hold and we are ready to meet those threats together. It is your professionalism and service that helps make our partnership one of the most successful in the world.

Thanks for everything you do and keep up the excellent work.

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "War A Ross II". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Brig. Gen. Warner A. Ross II
Tennessee's Adjutant General

Coin commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the partnership between Tennessee and Bulgaria.
(Photo by Retired Sgt. 1st Class William Jones)



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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

RETIRED COL. JAMES REED

MANAGING EDITOR

LT. COL. DARRIN HAAS

SENIOR EDITORS

LT. COL. MARTY MALONE

CAPT. KEALY A. MORIARTY

ROB PENNINGTON

PUBLISHING COORDINATOR

SGT. 1ST CLASS TIMOTHY CORDEIRO

ART DIRECTION / LAYOUT

ROB PENNINGTON

PHOTOGRAPHY

LT. COL. MARTY MALONE

MASTER SGT. MAYA MCFARLAND

MASTER SGT. KENDRA M. OWENBY

TECH. SGT. CASSIE LOPEZ

RETIRED SGT. 1ST CLASS WILLIAM JONES

SGT. 1ST CLASS OSVALDO P. SANCHEZ

STAFF SGT. BRANDON KEYS

SPC. NORA DUNNIGAN

SENIOR AIRMAN YONETTE MARTIN

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS BEN CASH

BRANDON HULL

WRITERS

LT. COL. DARRIN HAAS

LT. COL. MARTY MALONE

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■ FROM THE EDITOR

LT. COL. DARRIN HAAS
MANAGING EDITOR

When I first enlisted in the Tennessee National Guard in 1999, I was completely ignorant of the state partnership program. I had never heard of it, nor would I have been able to find Bulgaria on a map. Even after my first few years in the Guard when I was commissioning, training, and deploying to Iraq, I would stay that way. But when I came home, that immediately changed. The 168th Military Police Battalion went to Bulgaria for Vigilant Sentry 2005, and I went to lead civil disturbance training to the Bulgarian Military Police.

It was my first time in Eastern Europe, and it was an experience I never forgot. For two weeks, we trained with some of the most talented Military Policemen in Bulgaria and Tennessee. I was leading riot control lanes and sharing techniques we used at Camp Bucca, the main theater internment facility in Iraq, when problems arose with the prisoners and Iraqi citizens. I thought I was there to teach, but, like usual, I was wrong. After my team taught its first class, the Bulgarian officer-in-charge led a demonstration of how they were trained in riot control. It was fast; they integrated vehicles into their formations, and used completely different, but wildly effective, tactics. It looked like something from a Hollywood movie involving the U.S. Army's Special Forces and the Los Angeles Police Department SWAT team. I am still in awe thinking about it today.

After picking my jaw off the floor, the Bulgarian MPs showed us the different techniques they were using and the benefits and risks of each. From that point on, we changed what we were doing. We started showing each other how we each chose to tackle a particular problem, then figured out the best way using the different approaches. Then we tested it out. Some worked, some didn't. We took turns playing the opposing force and did many of the scenarios integrated, so we could see what we were doing from all angles and find weaknesses to fix. When our training was done for the day, we were all beat. Some part of my body was sore the entire time I was there, and it lingered on well after I left. But we learned a lot, and they taught me more in those few weeks than any other school I've ever been.

But our graduate-level education did not stop there. We visited historic sites, toured their facilities, and learned to shoot each other's weapons and drive each other's vehicles. We even shared meals together, where dinner wasn't just to eat, it was an event. Multiple courses, celebrations in between, and it was the healthiest I have ever eaten in my 29 years in the military. I enjoyed things I had never heard of. One time before dinner I managed to get myself bit by a horse, but that is a story for a different time. During one of the meals, I am not sure how it started, but someone may have gotten a little to brave and challenged the Bulgarians to a game of soccer. That was a bad idea. I grew up playing soccer and have been on a few teams, but I knew soccer in Europe was held to a higher level than in Tennessee. After a few days of preparing, we faced-off at a local sports complex. I've never endured a beating as



1st Lt. Darrin Haas meets with the head of the Bulgarian Military Police Force while training in Bulgaria in 2005. (Photo by Spc. Nora Dunnigan)

bad as the one the Bulgarian MP team gave us. Imagine the Bad News Bears playing against the New York Yankees, and you can get a sense of how severely we were outmatched. I am not even sure we were playing the same sport. But when it was over, we made a lot of friends and just could not stop laughing about it.

While all these things were happening, I did not realize how important this experience would become later. We learned from each other and made relationships I still have today. My time in Bulgaria changed my outlook on what a partnership is and taught me how valuable they were.

As we returned home, we immediately got an opportunity to put some of these experiences to use. While flying back, Hurricane Katrina made landfall along the Gulf Coast. Our battalion, and my company, was mobilized and sent directly to Gulfport, Mississippi, where we spent the next month supporting local law enforcement along the decimated coastline. Many of the policing techniques I learned with the Bulgarians I applied to helping those in Mississippi and their overburdened police force. So did others. Our experience with the Bulgarian MPs made us better which directly affected those we were helping.

When you're in the middle of an exercise or real-world event, you don't realize the importance or effect that experience will have on you. It sometimes takes years of reflection, but my short time in Bulgaria shaped the rest of my career. I used what I learned responding to tornadoes, floods, Operation Jump Start along the U.S. Mexico border, when Kosovo declared independence, and many other situations I found myself in. I even took what I learned back to my civilian career in law enforcement. Those experiences from 2005 are still with me, and its value is priceless.

Vigilant Sentry was not the last time I worked with Bulgarians. A year later, I hosted the head of the Bulgarian Military Police force and his team as they visited Tennessee. I took them to the best places our state is known for as we continued learning from one another. As the years progressed, I met other Bulgarians during visits, engagements, and training, and every time it was a rich and fulfilling experience. Working with the Bulgarians have been invaluable and has made a lasting effect on my career. The experiences have been irreplaceable.

In this special issue of the Tennessee Guardsmen, we did our best to try and highlight the dynamic partnership Bulgaria and Tennessee has had over the last 30 years. Within these pages you will find a story about the first Bulgarian visit to Tennessee in 1994, and a retrospective on Vigilant Sentry 2005, which was my first experience with the SPP. We have also added a history of the SPP, which looks at the start of the program and its many successes. Lastly, we examined what our partnership is doing now. To do so, Lt. Col. Marty Malone traveled to Bulgaria for Thracian Sentry 2023, where he chronicled the joint, multi-national exercise between Bulgaria, Tennessee, and Greece, and all that occurred during our anniversary year. Malone and his team captured many of the key events during the exercise which can be read about in this issue.

I hope that this issue helps highlight the 30 years Bulgaria and Tennessee have been partnered and what we have accomplished together. We are more than just a partnership, we are a team. Much of what we have done together cannot be captured or measured, just like the impact my first experience had on me. I feel I speak for everyone when I say we are all looking forward to many more years together.



Military Police take a break during training at Novo Selo Training Area in 2005. (Photo courtesy Tennessee National Guard)



STATE OF TENNESSEE

PROCLAMATION

BY THE GOVERNOR

WHEREAS, the National Guard's 100-nation, 30-year-old State Partnership Program provides unique partnership capacity-building capabilities to the combatant commands and U.S. Ambassadors through partnerships between the U.S. states, territories, the District of Columbia and foreign countries; and

WHEREAS, the State Partnership Program supports global stability, economic integrity and security cooperation goals for all participating partner nations via military, socio-political, and economic conduits at the local, state, and national level; and

WHEREAS, the program evolved from a 1991 U.S. European Command decision to set up the Joint Contact Team Program in the Baltic Region with Reserve component Soldiers and Airmen and a subsequent National Guard Bureau proposal paired U.S. states with key partner nations when the State Partnership Program was born, becoming an essential security cooperation tool that has facilitated peaceful cooperation across all aspects of international civil-military affairs, and forged personal relationships and organizational ties at all levels; and

WHEREAS, in 1993, the State of Tennessee and the Republic of Bulgaria became one of the first thirteen partnerships to lead the ongoing global mission to foster strategic relationships and develop mutual knowledge and understanding between our nations; and

WHEREAS, our 30-year partnership has resulted in more than 590 military to military engagements, unmeasurable mutual benefit, development and growth between Tennessee's National Guard forces and the Republic of Bulgaria's Armed Forces; and

WHEREAS, this partnership will continue to foster ongoing exchanges between the soldiers, airmen, political leaders, and citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria and the State of Tennessee, increasing the safety and economic vibrancy of our two great nations;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Bill Lee, Governor of the State of Tennessee, do hereby proclaim July 14, 2023, as

*30th Anniversary of the State Partnership between the Republic of
Bulgaria Armed Forces and the Tennessee National Guard*

in Tennessee and encourage all citizens to join me in this worthy observance.



IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the official seal of the State of Tennessee to be affixed at Nashville on this seventh day of July 2023.

Bill Lee

Governor

John R. Wright

Secretary of State

30TH ANNIVERSARY SPP PROCLAMATION



Members of the Tennessee National Guard and Bulgarian Armed Forces pose for a photo with Governor Bill Lee, July 20, 2023. From left: Retired Col. James Reed, Maj. Lucas Rogers, Maj. Brad McMahan, Lt. Gen. Tsanko Stoykov, Gov. Bill Lee, Brig. Gen. Warner A. Ross II, Lt. Col. Ivan Bogdanov, Command Sgt. Maj. James Crockett, Capt. Gregg Murphy. (Photo by Brandon Hull)

As part of the 30th anniversary celebration of the National Guard's State Partnership Program and the Tennessee National Guard's partnership with the Bulgarian Armed Forces, Lt. Gen. Tsanko Stoykov, Deputy Chief of Defense for Bulgaria, and Lt. Col. Ivan Bogdanov, the Military Attaché with the Bulgarian Embassy, visited Nashville from July 19-21.

During their visit, Stoykov and Bogdanov met with Tennessee's key military leaders and governmental officials to continue building relationships and honoring the long-lasting friendship. They toured the 118th Wing at Nashville's Berry Field and then visited the Joint Forces Headquarters. They also met with the senior leadership from the Tennessee Military Department and the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency.

Following a briefing at JFHQ, Stoykov said, "The state partnership program in Bulgaria has given us a way to be proud. We started with all branches of the Bulgarian military forces with the commitment that we should cooperate with the Tennessee National Guard to achieve a better understanding of how to be better prepared, interoperable, and how to organize our future organization processes of the military forces."

While in Nashville, the Bulgarian delegation also traveled to Tennessee's State Capitol and met with Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee. They discussed the successes the program has had over the years, its benefits, and the future of the program. Once the meeting was complete, the Bulgarians presented the governor with a few gifts and the governor presented Stoykov with a resolution honoring and celebrating the 30-year partnership.

Upon receiving the resolution, Stoykov said, "I will receive it personally and take it back to the Bulgarian government, thank you!"

Following their short stay, Stoykov returned to Bulgaria and Bogdanov returned to the Bulgarian Embassy in Washington D.C.

"We all occupy a shared world, and it stretches beyond the border of Tennessee and that shared world is volatile, dynamic, and complex," said Brig. Gen. Warner Ross, Tennessee's Adjutant General. "Having these types of partnerships allows us as Tennesseans to understand the broader context out there."



TENNESSEE SNAPSHOT

REFUELING OUR FRIENDS FROM GREECE

June 20, 2023 - Airmen from the 134th Air Refueling Wing refuel F-16s from the 337th Fighter Squadron based on Larissa Air Base while supporting Thracian Sentry 23, a joint operation between the 134th, Hellenic, and Bulgaria Air Forces.

PHOTO BY: AIRMAN 1ST CLASS BEN CASH



TENNESSEE SNAPSHOT

WORKING TOGETHER FOR DEFENSE

Aug. 7, 2009 - Members of the Tennessee National Guard and Bulgarian forces participate in the opening ceremony of Joint Task Force-East, providing the U.S. and its partners opportunities to train and contribute to the defense of the region.

PHOTO BY: SGT 1ST CLASS OSVALDO P. SANCHEZ



TENNESSEE SNAPSHOT

SCHOOL RENOVATIONS

Aug. 24, 2016 - Brig. Gen. Donald Johnson dances with Bulgarian students at the "grand re-opening" of the Izvorche Kindergarten school in Kabile, Bulgaria. Members of the Tennessee National Guard assisted in the renovation of the school.

PHOTO BY: MASTER SGT. KENDRA M. OWENBY



TENNESSEE SNAPSHOT

COMBAT MEDICAL CARE

June 19, 2023 - Members of the Tennessee National Guard and their Bulgarian counterparts exchange knowledge during a combat medical care exercise as part of Thracian Sentry 23 in Sofia, Bulgaria.

PHOTO BY: SENIOR AIRMAN YONETTE MARTIN

INTERNATIONAL READINESS THRACIAN SENTRY 23

STORY BY LT. COL. MARTY MALONE

Tennessee and Bulgaria work to further strengthen ties and regional stability across Southeast Europe and the Black Sea during the 30th anniversary of their partnership.

A 134th Air Refueling Wing KC-135 sits on the tarmac at Bezmer Air Base in Bulgaria on June 23, 2023. The aircraft is preparing to perform an in-flight refuel of an 337th Hellenic Air Force F-16 as part of Thracian Sentry 2023, a joint exercise between U.S. National Guard, Hellenic, and Bulgarian Airmen in Greek and Bulgarian airspaces. (Photo by Airman 1st Class Ben Cash)



U. S. AIR FORCE KC-135R
A. F. SERIAL NO. 57-1451
SERVICE THIS AIRCRAFT WITH
GRADE JET A FUEL FOR ALTERNATE
REFERENCE T.O. 42B11-14
IDENTIPLATE LOCATION

1451
134TH ARW

STATIC PORT



DO NOT PLUG OR DEFORM HOLE. AREA
WITHIN HOLE MUST BE SMOOTH AND
CLEAN.

THRACIAN SENTRY 23



Members of the Tennessee National Guard and their Bulgarian counterparts, participate in a combat medical care exercise as part of Thracian Sentry 2023, June 19. During the exercise, the two teams exchanged knowledge and best practices to help develop interoperability and improve readiness for full-spectrum operations in complex environments. (Photo by Senior Airman Yonette Martin)

As we celebrate the 30-year anniversary of the partnership between Bulgaria and Tennessee, numerous exercises and engagements were conducted highlighting their successful relationship. The largest was Operation Thracian Sentry, a joint, multi-national exercise held in Eastern Europe between the Bulgarian Armed Forces, the Hellenic Air Force, and the Tennessee National Guard.

From June 11-30, more than 170 military personnel from the three nations partnered to develop and improve their warfighting capabilities, which included aircraft fire rescue, joint operations, logistics and sustainment, combat medical care, aeromedical evacuation, and weapons training. Each of these areas developed new relationships, fostered a baseline of understanding for all participants, and collectively strengthened our fighting force.

“For the last three decades, Tennessee and Bulgaria have worked to grow and develop together across a wide variety of military capabilities,” said Col. Jason Glass, Tennessee’s Assistant Adjutant General-Air. “This year’s Thracian Sentry exercise displayed a level of advanced security cooperation and partnership that will further strengthen the regional stability across Southeast Europe and the Black Sea.”

The 20-daylong event started on June 11, when the first of three flights from Tennessee landed in Sofia, Bulgaria, to offload gear and personnel for the exercise. Arriving in a C-17 from Memphis’ 164th Airlift Wing, the first flight held Airmen and Soldiers from units across the state who specialize in firefighting and medical treatment as well as the leadership and staff to manage the exercise. Once they arrived, they were ready to begin the first phase of the Thracian Sentry exercise; Falcon Responder.

Airmen from the 134th Air Refueling Wing train with Bulgarian firefighters at Bezmer Air Base, Bulgaria, June 20. The training centered on emergency response tactics to various aircraft and the overall flight line. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Brandon Keys)



FALCON RESPONDER

The first event focused on accident prevention and emergency response on aircraft and airfields. Six firefighters from the 164th, along with their Bulgarian Air Force counterparts, trained at Graf Air Base just north of Plovdiv. The purpose: to enhance each nation's emergency response capabilities. Throughout the exercise, each nation shared experiences on how to preserve and protect equipment, aircraft, and personnel. They also shared best practices on equipment storage, regular maintenance, and emergency response to flight line incidents.

"I believe in our Air Force partnership," said Colonel Metodi Orlov, the Deputy Base Commander in the Bulgarian Air Force. "It has been great, and I appreciate the cooperation."

After performing preventative maintenance on the fire and rescue equipment, the teams tested water cannons on their machinery and the flight line to ensure proper and effective water delivery in case of an emergency.

"I've really enjoyed meeting the people and seeing the culture," said Staff Sgt. Shane Conaty, a firefighter with the 164th. "The Bulgarian Air Force has a lot of great folks. Everyone has been super nice and a pleasure to interact with. I'm really excited about this mission, and it has been an exciting opportunity."



Tennessee Air National Guard firefighters and the Bulgarian Air Force firefighters pose together as part of Falcon Defender and Thracian Sentry 23 on June 13 at Graf Air Base in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. (Photo by Master Sgt. Maya McFarland)

THRACIAN SENTRY 23



COMMAND AND CONTROL

As the firefighting training was going on, the Tennessee National Guard's Joint Adaptive Battle Staff partnered with the Bulgarian military's Joint Forces Command to establish a command-and-control center for the exercise. The purpose is to track and lead the hundreds of Soldiers, Airmen, their equipment, and aircraft from the three nations participating in the various exercises across Bulgaria.

In a remote facility in the Bulgarian hills, both militaries collaborated to form an operations center with staff who controlled various departments like personnel, logistics, communications, operations, weather, and intelligence. They provided real-time data to key leaders which included weather tracking, troop movement, plans, terrain analysis, and aircraft movement.

"Tennessee and Bulgaria are two professional organizations with differing organizational skills," said Col. Jay Jackson, director of staff for the Tennessee Air National Guard. "Everyone here is learning varying techniques that we will both be able to take back to our home units and make our militaries better."

Throughout the exercise, the staffs learned from one another while providing quality, timely, and effective data to military leaders. They also developed online collaboration tools to be used for future exercises and real time emergencies.

"It's called the state partnership program and we want to be a great partner," said Jackson. "We want to be a state National Guard that the Bulgarian military can rely on and vice-versa. We want to be a training partner and friend in time of peace that is just a phone call away in time of emergency."



TOP: Colonels Anton Gachev, Hristo Hristov, and Jay Jackson are briefed during a commander's update regarding Thracian Sentry 23 on June 14. (Photo by Lt. Col. Marty Malone)

BOTTOM: Lt. Col. Guy Alexander and Col. Hristo Hristov collaborate during the command and control portion of Thracian Sentry 23. (Photo courtesy Joint Forces Command Bulgaria)

MILITARY MEDICAL ACADEMY

While the Joint Adaptive Battle Staff was providing leadership for the exercise, medical personnel from Tennessee were in Sofia cross training with their counterparts from the Bulgarian Military Medical Academy. From June 11-19, the two medical teams performed a myriad of medical tasks and training that improved everyone's proficiency.

First, the team visited the Military Medical Academy, which is a prominent medical training and treatment facility for both military members and civilians. Next, the two teams organized for a simulated casualty exercise, prepared for a medical military airlift scenario, performed virtual reality training, and aided in the certification of Bulgaria's first ever combat paramedics.

In preparation for these events, the U.S. and Bulgarian teams practiced critical care scenarios where they were faced with simulated patients and developed courses of action for treatment. After the scenarios, they collaborated on different medical care options and recorded best practices.

Additionally, in a landmark event, Bulgarian medical staff received their first ever certification for combat paramedics. This new duty position in the Bulgarian military required changes in their medical laws.

"I was honored to be asked to serve on the certification board for their new combat paramedics," said Col. Keith Evans, a Tennessee National Guard medical officer. "It was a great experience, and I was proud to be able to be a part of this new certification."

Tennesseans also worked to integrate their services into Bulgarian first-line medical care, referred to as "Role One" facilities. The two teams practiced various scenarios so they could seamlessly provide medical care to patients.

"Whenever NATO countries are involved in a medical crisis, it's beneficial to have already worked together under a common standard," said Maj. Lyubomir Angelov, an International Health Specialist from the office of the Command Surgeon for United States Air Forces in Europe.

As the medical training was concluding, the second C-17 arrived from Memphis on June 17. A second rotation of troops and equipment arrived to continue other aspects of the exercise. The aircraft landed at Bezmer Air Base, which is roughly 20 miles from the city of Sliven. The Soldiers and Airmen then traveled to Sofia for the next exercise, Copper Arrow. The C-17 then took the first rotation of troops back to Tennessee and returned with the staff for the Women, Peace, and Security delegation.



Members of the Tennessee National Guard and their Bulgarian counterparts, participate in a combat medical care exercise as part of Thracian Sentry 2023, June 19. (Photo by Senior Airman Yonette Martin)

THRACIAN SENTRY 23

The 134th Air Refueling Wing refuels F-16's from the 337th Fighter Squadron based at Larissa Air Base on June 20. The 134th was supporting Thracian Sentry 2023, a joint operation between the 134th, Hellenic, and Bulgaria Air Forces. (Photo by Airman 1st Class Ben Cash)



COPPER ARROW

From June 17-30, Tennessee, Greek, and Bulgarian Air Forces conducted a joint air-to-air refueling exercise with KC-135 Stratotankers from Knoxville's 134th Air Refueling Wing. The Tennesseans refueled F-16s over Greek air space to demonstrate their ability to rapidly deploy combat forces throughout a troubled area.

"Copper Arrow demonstrated the Tennessee Air National Guard's ability to successfully work with partner nations to keep aircraft flying," said Glass. "No one is better at refueling operations than the 134th Air Refueling Wing."

Right: Lt. Gen. Tsanko Stoykov, Bulgarian Deputy Chief of Defense, witnesses air refueling from the boom operation area of a Tennessee Air National Guard KC-135 during Thracian Sentry 23. (Photo by Airman 1st Class Ben Cash)





Tennessee's Women, Peace, and Security delegation, European Command's delegation, and the Bulgarian delegation work and plan at the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense in Sofia on June 22. (Photos by Lt. Col. Marty Malone)

WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

From June 19-23, Tennessee collaborated with the Bulgarian military for one of the first Women, Peace, and Security meetings together.

WPS is global initiative that began in 2000 when the United Nations recognized the disproportionate effect of wartime violence on women. To address this, countries around the world started implementing national action plans to establish programs to limit the effect war has on women.

In 2017, the United States Congress passed into law the Women, Peace, and Security Act, which mandated WPS programs and identified the Department of Defense as the federal department responsible for implementation. This legislation acknowledged the multifaceted roles of women throughout the conflict spectrum and pulled into focus the critical roles women play in international peace and security efforts.

"WPS provides an opportunity for the United States to engage with global partners and work to ensure that women are an equal partner in national defense," said Francisco Magallon, European Command's WPS program manager. "Tennessee's work with Bulgaria is another step forward in this important work."

Magallon, the Tennessee National Guard's delegation, and Bulgarian military representatives initiated a pilot program that utilizes the fundamentals of WPS to increase women recruitment and retention within the Bulgarian military. This collaboration,

piloted by Bulgaria, intends to set the example for other SPP members to follow.

From the week-long collaboration, the Tennessee National Guard and the Bulgarian military identified barriers to women in the Bulgarian military and ways in which these barriers could be removed. They also planned future engagements and workshops to develop opportunities to train together utilizing principles from the WPS strategic plans.

"Tennessee and Bulgaria are ready to implement this new doctrine through teamwork that has developed over many years of friendship and cooperation," stated Lt. Col Linda Kieser, Tennessee's WPS lead. "There is nothing we can't accomplish together."



THRACIAN SENTRY 23



ADVANCED MARKSMANSHIP

Toward the end of Thracian Sentry, the focus switched to infantry tactics and skills collaboration. From June 22-28, members of the Tennessee National Guard's Combat Marksmanship Program, as well as member of the 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment's Sniper Section, traveled to Kazanluk, to facilitate an advanced marksmanship curriculum.

Five senior members of the Tennessee Combat Marksmanship Program and eight members of the 278th led marksmanship training with twenty-four select members from Bulgaria's 61st Mechanized Infantry Brigade.

The purpose was to facilitate an open exchange of techniques, tactics, and procedures for close quarters fighting, mid to long-range target engagement, and reconnaissance principles using optics and various weapons. Participants from the 61st Mechanized Infantry Brigade fired U.S. weapons and trained on U.S. doctrine.

"From the first moment we arrived, there was excellent camaraderie and esprit de corps," said Senior Master Sgt. Michael Brumer, Tennessee's Combat Marksmanship Program manager. "Everyone showed high morale and professional attitudes throughout the long days. Members walked away with renewed energy, vigor, and a thirst for learning in their respective fields."

Once Thracian Sentry concluded, it was clear that the Bulgarian, Greek, and U.S. forces gained valuable training and the 30-year partnership between Bulgarian and Tennessee was strengthened even more.

"The Tennessee Air National Guard is one of the most dynamic organizations in the country and we are able to flex no matter where we are in the world," said Chief Master Sgt. Ben William, Command Chief of the Tennessee Air National Guard. "We are ready to face any challenge and exercises like Thracian Sentry ensures our preparedness."

The events also built more resilient and supportive partnerships between the military forces and their leadership as all participants came away with new experiences and future opportunities for continued joint operations. We are both a stronger force because of it.



Bulgarian Soldiers with the 61st Mechanized Infantry Brigade and Tennessee National Guardsmen familiarize themselves with each nation's weapon systems during Thracian Sentry 23. The Tennessee Combat Marksmanship Program conducted advanced training with both groups to exchange tactics, techniques, and procedures as part of the multi-national training held in late June. (Photos by Tech. Sgt. Cassie Lopez)



WHO WERE THE THRACIANS?

The name Thracian Sentry comes from the term Thrace which was used by the Ancient Greeks to describe the tribes and inhabitants of Southeast Europe that has now evolved into what is modern day Bulgaria and some of the surrounding nations. Today the name of "Thrace" is barely known outside of Europe. Little remains for written history about the Thracians and as a result much remains a mystery. What we do know is that the Thracians began to emerge as its own ethnic group around 4000 years ago. Whether the Thracians formed gradually from the ancient Neolithic inhabitants of southeastern Europe or if they descended from movement of people into the region is still unknown. The ancient Greeks produced what written histories we do have about their neighbors to the north, the Thracians. They called the territories to their North the Thraike or Thrake and therefore the people who lived there were respectively called Thracians. The Thracians inhabited the areas from the Carpathian Mountains, the Black Sea, and the Aegean Sea and included the lands near the Struma and Morava rivers. Today these lands are divided between mostly Bulgaria but include northern Greece, European Turkey, southern Romania and parts of Serbia and North Macedonia. Although several "Thracian" exercises take place in Bulgaria each year, the Tennessee National Guard is honored to initiate the newest exercise in the series, Thracian Sentry.



One of the most famous of all Thracians was Spartacus the gladiator, who headed the largest slave revolt against Rome. He was a Thracian from the tribe Medi, which inhabited the middle valley of the river Strymon (Struma). Spartacus statue from Louvre collections in France by Foyatier, Denis (1793 - 1863). (Photo courtesy Louvre)

THE START OF A 30-YEAR PARTNERSHIP

STORY BY: LT. COL. DARRIN HAAS

In today's world, global cooperation and collaboration are more important than ever. One of the best examples of such a partnership is between the Tennessee National Guard and the Bulgarian Armed Forces. For the last 30 years, they have been a part of the National Guard's State Partnership Program where their alliance has been a prime example of how two organizations, from different parts of the world, can come together to achieve common goals while benefiting from each other's strengths.

The program was designed to strengthen defense relationships with allied nations to promote peace and security. It fosters interoperability between U.S. and partner country forces, promotes the exchange of best practices and lessons learned, and develops long-term, enduring relationships between National Guardsmen and their counterparts. From the beginning, the SPP has been a low-cost, small footprint program, yet one of high impact delivering enduring results.

Tennessee and Bulgaria are one of the original partnered members of the SPP and have participated in hundreds of exercises, performed humanitarian missions, and hosted countless engagements together over the last three decades that have made both organizations a more flexible, efficient, and lethal force. They have built a partnership and friendship that rivals other members of the SPP and is a leading example of the program's success.

The Origin of the State Partnership Program

Following the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States' Department of Defense realized they needed a new security cooperation strategy in Eastern Europe, primarily to help new countries emerging from the former Soviet bloc nations. Swift changes were happening in Europe in the early 1990s, and it provided the U.S. an opportunity to build relationships and offer aid to those nations as they modernized and transformed their defense and militaries.

In early 1992, U.S. European Command developed and organized the Joint Contact Team Program to establish contact with these nations various militaries. Its purpose was to serve as the main point of foreign engagement with the new militaries being created in Eastern Europe. The program created 3-5 person teams who worked with the defense ministries and their staffs to establish familiarization visits for those nation's military personnel to visit the United States or Western Europe. During those visits both nations would exchange information and ideas about defense, host staff and noncommissioned officer exchanges, develop and conduct conferences and workshops, and visit naval vessels.

National Guard Bureau felt that the Guard was well suited to assist and build relationships with the Soviet bloc nations as part of this initiative. It could use its skills and the versatility of its Soldiers and Airmen, at the grassroots level, to work toward a lasting peace with the United States' former adversaries. They also felt that this was an opportunity to showcase its unique structure and be a model for how those nations could defend their citizens at a lower cost. Lastly, it was an opportunity for the Guard to



Logo of the early SPP. This was from the publication, "National Guard State Partnership Program: Real People, Real Success," released in September 1994. (Courtesy National Guard Bureau, Office of International Initiatives)

be utilized as a tool for foreign policy and expand its utility.

In early 1992, as the Joint Contact Teams were starting up, the DoD identified areas where cooperation in military-to-military exchanges in areas such as military education, personnel management, budget/finance, force structure, military justice, and civil and National Guard/Reserve affairs, could be greatly beneficial to those Soviet bloc nations. It determined that the National Guard could provide these exchanges as well as expertise on how to establish a deployable reserve force, provide humanitarian or civic assistance projects, and they had personnel with civilian sector skills that could enhance the exchanges.

The DoD, also faced with the possibility of their active-duty force in Europe shrinking by nearly two-thirds due to the post-Cold War force reductions, saw that using the National Guard could help relieve pressure on the decreasing force. And using Guardsmen in former Soviet bloc nations would appear less confrontational to Russia.

On April 1, 1992, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney publicly announced, during a speech in Brussels, that the U.S. intended to support the former Soviet bloc countries by helping improve their economic conditions, help with humanitarian assistance, and strengthen their crisis management programs as well as in other areas. The National Guard seemed to be tailor made for those missions.

A few weeks after Cheney's speech, the Republic of Latvia reached

out to the United States and asked for help reorganizing their military, primarily with the creation of a Latvian Home Guard. The purpose of their Guard would be to protect public facilities, infrastructure, and assist local governments during natural or other emergencies. They also wanted assistance creating a reserve component like the National Guard in the U.S., and NGB was ready to help.

In the fall of 1992, the Chief of the NGB, Lt. Gen. John Conaway, traveled with a delegation of medical doctors, civil defense experts, and disaster assistance professionals to Latvia and began laying the groundwork for what would be the SPP's first partnership. The visit demonstrated what partnerships were capable of and paved the way for future projects and visits into the region.

After the successful trip, the DoD approved for the National Guard to continue supporting new democracies in Europe and to showcase the missions of the National Guard and how they are used to support civil authorities on a permanent basis. NGB proposed that they establish "partnership state" relationships between the Baltic nations and U.S. states which would be known as the "sustaining partnerships" model.

On January 27, 1993, NGB's sustaining partnership model was approved to continue by DoD. However, the DOD had to confirm that the National Guard had the authority to participate in military-to-military engagements with foreign countries, which was traditionally an active-duty mission. By March 1993, it was decided that it was legal for the Guard to participate in this program and on April 27, 1993, the first three partnerships were approved. The first states and their partnering nations to participate in the program were: Maryland-Estonia, Michigan-Latvia, and Pennsylvania-Lithuania. The Chief of NGB selects state partners based upon relevant political, military, and socio-economic criteria that benefit the nation and the state. Three months later, Tennessee and Bulgaria followed, becoming partners on July 14, along with eight other states and nations.

Tennessee and Bulgaria – The First Year

Once Tennessee became partnered with Bulgaria in the summer of 1993, planning on how to integrate the forces and begin their partnership began in earnest. Throughout the fall, leaders from both nations began communicating and established the first official engagements.

In February 1994, the first official engagement between the two militaries occurred when two Tennessee National Guardsmen traveled to Bulgaria for the first visit of Tennesseans to Bulgaria. Col. Matt McKnight, the Chief Fixed Nuclear Facilities Manager, and

Maj. John Sheumaker, a state operations officer, visited the Eastern European nation from February 5-12. During those eight days they met their counterparts, toured facilities, and established a plan for the first Bulgarian visit to Nashville. Their meetings opened the first real dialogue on how both militaries can learn from one another and establish an effective and productive partnership. This was the first real opportunity for both militaries to meet, learn from, and work with one another.

Just four weeks later, through the work of McKnight and Sheumaker's visit, the first delegation from Bulgaria visited Nashville and the program began in earnest. From March 19-26, the 12-person delegation visited many of the key military sites in Tennessee and some nuclear facilities where they were interested in seeing how the military assists with nuclear emergencies. The delegation also invited Tennessee Gov. Ned McWherter to visit Bulgaria. (For more on the Bulgarian visit to Tennessee, see the story on page 22 in this issue.) These engagements would lead to two more delegations from Bulgaria visiting Tennessee again in September and October.

In mid-September, a six-person delegation from Bulgaria, which included Guirgui Dimitrov, the Assistant Minister of Defense – Foreign Police, and Krassimira Boneva, Chief for the Directorate of Public Relations with the Ministry of Defense, visited Nashville. For a week, the delegation participated in working group meetings designed to explore and continue development in areas like emergency response, civilian control of the military, and the citizen-soldier concept.

One of the main focuses of their visit was on public affairs and media relations. During the stay, the delegation toured the newsroom of Murfreesboro's Daily News Journal and learned how the military Public Affairs works with the newspaper and the relationship they have. They also met with Journalism Professors from the Middle Tennessee State University's College of Mass Communications and they were briefed on the United States concepts of a free press and the military-media relationship. Col. Hooper Penuel, the Public Affairs Officer for the Tennessee National Guard, also gave detailed briefings on the role the Guard's public affairs office plays.

The third Bulgarian visit was in October when Bulgarian Deputy Defense Minister Dimitur Pavlov arrived in Nashville on October 28 to meet with National Guard officials. Prior to arriving in Tennessee, his delegation visited Washington D.C. and met with the National Security Council and visited the



Daily News Journal president Ron Fryar, second from right, explains various American free press publications printed at the newspaper plant in Murfreesboro to Bulgarian military leaders, from left, Guirgui Dimitrov, Lt. Col. Dentchov Kamenov, Maj. Gen. Pandev and Krassimira Boneva. The Bulgarians are studying American free press and its relation to a citizen-controlled military being formed in the former communist-bloc Eastern European country. (Photo by J. Intintoli, Daily News Journal / Murfreesboro)

United States Naval Academy in Annapolis. Only staying in Nashville for two days, he was briefed on the ongoing efforts of the partnership and plans for training exchanges by Tennessee's Adjutant General. He also met with the Tennessee Governor at his residence for lunch where they discuss defense issues and the role the Governor plays as the Commander-in-Chief of the Tennessee National Guard.

While these Bulgarian engagements were happening, Tennessee Guardsmen were also making visits to Bulgaria. One of the major trips was at the beginning of October when Gov. McWherter flew to Bulgaria as part of a 10-day trip to Europe. Accompanied by Tennessee's Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. William Jones, state Veterans Affairs Commissioner Bill Manning, and other Guard officials, this was the first time a U.S. governor had visited the Bulgarian nation. During the trip, he met with Bulgarian President Zhelyu Zhelev, U.S. Ambassador William Montgomery, and he presided over the U.S. Business Incubator at the World Trade Center in Sofia. Following his visit, the governor traveled to Germany and Spain where he met with Tennessee National Guardsmen currently training overseas.

By the end of 1994, Tennessee and Bulgaria had made great progress developing a partnership that has been growing stronger every year for the last three decades. Since then, the two militaries have completed nearly 600 engagements, training exercises, and events that continue to strengthen both organizations and increase the safety and vibrancy of both countries. They have been an example of the best the State Partnership Program can be and continue to be an example for other partnerships to follow.



In the Spring of 1994, a 12-member delegation from Bulgaria visited Tennessee for the first time, setting the groundwork for a 30-year partnership that endures today.

A little after 9 p.m. on Saturday, March 19, 1994, the first Bulgarian delegation with the recently created State Partnership Program landed at Nashville International Airport for the first of many visits to Music City. The 12-member team, comprised of members of the Bulgarian Defense Department and regimental commanders from the Bulgarian Armed Forces, were visiting Tennessee for eight days to learn about the Tennessee National Guard, their new partner state, and to set the groundwork for future engagements between the two organizations.

Tennessee and Bulgaria partnered as members of the Department of Defense's State Partnership Program in the fall of 1993, and this was the first real opportunity for both militaries to meet, learn from, and work with one another. Earlier in February, Tennessee had sent two officers to Bulgaria for the first time, Col. Matt McKnight, the Chief Fixed Nuclear Facilities Manager, and Maj. John Sheumaker, a state operations officer, to learn about their new partner nation. From February 5-12, they met their counterparts, visited, and toured facilities throughout Bulgaria, and established the first communications link which led to the current visit to Tennessee.

When the Bulgarians arrived in Nashville after their 20-hour flight, they were greeted by Col. Gary Ellis, the Director of Plans, Operations, and Training, and Capt. Joe Geren, an operations and training staff officer, from the Tennessee National Guard. Both officers were assigned as the Tennessee State Partnership Program's representatives and were part of the initial National Guard Bureau initiative for the military-to-military program. After landing, the delegation was taken to their hotel for rest after their 20-hour flight and considerable jet lag.

Due to the long flight, Sunday, March 20, was meant to be an easy day, allowing the weary travelers an opportunity to rest and get acclimated to the time-change. After breakfast, they were taken on a short sight-seeing tour of Nashville and visited the Hickory Hollow Mall to purchase anything they needed for the next week. That evening, Tennessee's Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. William Jones, and his staff, hosted a reception at their hotel to welcome them to Tennessee. They talked about the itinerary for the next week and what everyone could expect. Jones and his team spent the evening with the Bulgarians, cultivating a relationship that would continue for decades.

One purpose of the visit was to show the Bulgarians how the National Guard operates. The Bulgarians were very interested in the U.S.'s civil-military relationship and how the Tennessee National Guard is utilized for state emergencies and their role when there is no immediate need for a warfighting force. They were also interested in seeing how the military protects the civilian population from nuclear power plant related emergencies.

According to Maj. Gen. Orlin Marintchev, the Chief of Finance for the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense and the head of the delegation, the National Guard concept is "uniquely American." He also said, "We will be using this unique military style in developing our military now that we are no longer a Warsaw Pact nation. Plus, Tennessee has similar terrain to that of large Southern agricultural Bulgaria."

Tennessee and Bulgaria were matched within the State Partnership Program due to similarities in terrain, military forces, and nuclear power plants.

The delegation was also very interested in Tennes-



The first Bulgarian delegation to visit Tennessee meets with Governor Ned McWherter at his office in the State Capital in Nashville on March 21, 1994. (Photo courtesy Tennessee National Guard)

see's response to nuclear disasters. Marintchev said, "We will be looking at how the Tennessee Guard is equipped and trained to deal, for example, with a nuclear accident. We have an interest in the work Tennessee has done concerning its nuclear program and the organization, structure, and state missions of the Guard."

The first thing Monday morning, March 21, the official tour began at a furious pace. It started with an official meeting at the Tennessee National Guard headquarters with Maj. Gen. Jones followed by briefings in the command conference room about the role and structure of the Military Department. Given by various department heads, to include the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency director Lacy Suiter and a member of the U.S. Army Reserves, Col. Doug Warne, they explained the structure and relationships the different components had and how they functioned within the government. The focus was how they each fit into the "Total Force" concept of the U.S. military.

After the briefings, the delegation took a quick flight on UH-1 Iroquois helicopters to Smyrna's Tennessee Military Academy where they had lunch, toured the school, and were given a Tennessee National Guard history presentation by the Recruiting Battalion. Maj. Gen. Jones and Col. Gus Hargett, Assistant Adjutant General, Army, introduced the Bulgarians to Murfreesboro Mayor Joe Jackson and officials with the Airport Authority who talked about the civil-military relationship. After the meetings, the Bulgarians then visited the Hermitage, home of President Andrew Jackson, where they did a two-hour tour focused on the United States's

tradition of civilian leadership over the military. They studied how Jackson was a citizen-soldier and served in the militia, the precursor to the National Guard, before becoming president.

In the afternoon, around 3:30 p.m., the delegation arrived at Legislative Plaza in Nashville where they met with the speaker of the House of Representatives, James Naifeh, Senator Thelma Harp-

er during future engagement opportunities. After the meeting with the governor, the Bulgarians were escorted to the floor of the House of Representatives by Thelma Harper which was in session. Hargett then escorted Marintchev to the podium where he thanked the legislature for the invitation to visit. He was proud to be the first Bulgarian General to speak on the Tennessee House floor.

Even after a long day visiting the state capital, the Hermitage, the Military Department headquarters, and the Tennessee Military Academy, the delegation began Tuesday morning at another furious pace. They started by touring Nashville's Berry Field and were given a briefing by Lt. Col. James Perkins, the commander of the 118th Airlift Wing, on the unit's mission and role in the total force. After a base tour, they boarded a C-130 Hercules to fly to Knoxville.

Once they landed in Knoxville, the delegation boarded UH-1 helicopters and flew to Watts Bar Nuclear Power Plant where they had a tour, meeting, and lunch. The Tennessee Valley Authority officials briefed them on their various safety procedures, emergency protocols, and plant operations. They were given detailed insight on the role the military would take in the event of an emergency. The delegation was especially interested in the reactor drill plans, since Bulgaria's capital city, Sofia, is near a nuclear reactor like the one in Chernobyl, Russia.

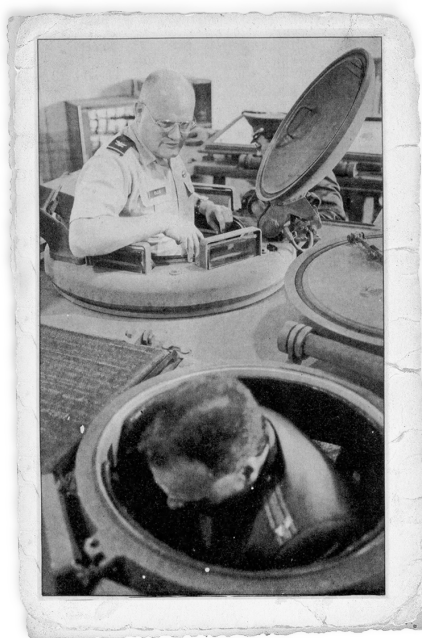
After the tour the delegation flew to the Knoxville armory where they were given a tour of the 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment's head-

quarters by Lt. Col. Jim Whitehead. They learned about the regiment's structure had the opportunity to utilize some of the regiment's equipment displayed in the drill hall. The Bulgarian regimental commanders found great interest in the weapon's systems and military vehicles used by the Tennesseans. Following the visit, they spent the night in Knoxville.

The next morning, the delegation finished their visit at the 278th armory and then split into two groups. The first group flew to the Bradley County Emergency Operations Center, where they were briefed on safety protocols and procedures at the facility. They then watched volunteers from the EOC conduct a dress rehearsal for a practice evacuation drill in coordination with the Tennessee Valley Authority's Sequoyah Nuclear Power Plant in Chattanooga.

The second group, which was comprised of the Bulgarian regimental commanders, flew to Jamestown's Company M, 3rd Squadron of the 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment where they received "hands on" training with the Mobile Conduct-of-Fire Training system which simulates tank gunnery for the M1 Abrams and the Bradley Fighting Vehicle. They also trained on the Guard's Full Crew Interactive Simulation Trainer where a gunnery and marksmanship trainer are linked and the full Bradley crew can practice selected squad level tasks.

After the training and tours, both groups returned to McGhee-Tyson Air Base in Knoxville where the 134th Air Refueling Group commander, Lt. Col. Glen Knable, hosted a tour and briefed



Col. Gary Ellis, Tennessee's Director of Plans, Operations, and Training shows members of the Bulgarian Defense Ministry vehicles used by the 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment on March 22, 1994, in Knoxville.

er, and Lieutenant Governor, Jon Wilder. After visiting with the key state leaders, the group traveled underground to the state capitol where they met Governor Ned McWhorter in his office. During the 20-minute meeting, the delegation invited the governor to visit Bulgaria and they talked about how the two governments could support one another

about the role of the 134th and the facility. After lunch they flew back to Nashville and traveled to the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency where the delegation spent the evening receiving briefs on TEMA's capabilities at their Emergency Operations Center. They also participated in another dress rehearsal, at the state level, for the Sequoyah Nuclear Power Plant disaster exercise. Before the day ended, the Bulgarian delegation met with Max Allston, Acting Director for Emergency Planning, with the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense. They discussed responses to disasters at the state and national level and how the military would play into those disasters.

On Thursday morning, the Bulgarians started the day by flying to Huntsville on a C-130 and met with Space and Strategic Defense Command and visited the U.S. Space and Rocket Center. They received briefings from the SSDC and took a facilities tour. Afterwards, the Bulgarians flew to Chattanooga's Lovell Field and visited the Catoosa Training Site in Tunnel Hill, Georgia. They toured the site with Lt. Col. Ron Moore, the former site commander, and Lt. Col. Darrell Key, the newly appointed commander. After visiting the barracks, mess hall, and other facilities, they had lunch and went to the training ranges. From there, the Bulgarians were able to fire M16A2 rifles and M9 Beretta handguns. Once they each familiarized with the weapons systems, they climbed into M113 Armored Personnel Carriers and traveled to another range featuring the M1 Abrams Main Battle Tank. After being briefed on the vehicle, they were able to fire the main gun using dummy rounds.

The Bulgarians spent the afternoon at the 196th Field Artillery Brigade headquarters in Chattanooga following their Catoosa tour. They met with the 196th Commander, Col. James Darling, who gave a briefing on the unit's capabilities and gave a tour of the historic armory. He then showed them the M110A2 Howitzer and explained that the 1-181st Field Artillery was transitioning to the new Multiple Launch Rocket System. Once the tour was over, the delegation returned to Lovell Field and flew back to Nashville aboard a C-130.

On Friday, the Bulgarian returned to Berry Field for their last trip on a C-130. They flew to Memphis where they met with the Airmen of the 164th Airlift Group. Col. Jim Bassham, the base commander, gave the delegation a tour of the facility and then they had lunch at the base dining facility. Afterwards, they visited the

Members of the First Bulgarian Delegation to Tennessee

Maj. Gen. Orlin Marintchev – Chief of Finance, Ministry of Defense
 Mr. Nikolay Slatinski – Chairman, Parliamentarian Defense Committee
 Mr. Dimitar Yontchev – Member, Foreign Committee on National Security
 Mr. Georgi Mihov – Deputy Minister of Defense for Military and Political Affairs
 Lt. Col. Jordan Puntchev – Liaison Officer, Desk Officer for the U.S. and Canada
 Lt. Col. Ognian Vladimirov – Liaison Officer and Regimental Commander
 Lt. Col. Atanas Samandov – Regimental Commander
 Lt. Col. Pentcho Pentchev – Regimental Commander
 Lt. Col. Stefan Vasilev – Regimental Commander
 Maj. Galimir Pehlivanov – Regimental Commander
 Ms. Cornelia Bojanova – Reporter and Editor, Signal Paper
 Ms. Galina Bojkova – Reporter, Signal Paper

Central United States Earthquake Consortium where Tom Durham, the CUSEC Director, briefed them on the role of the organization and the plan following an earthquake along the New Madrid fault line. Then, they visited the 3-115th Field Artillery Regimental armory where Maj. Mike Armor gave a briefing on the unit, facility, and equipment.

Once all the briefings and tours were complete, the Bulgarians took a much-requested visit to Graceland, the home of Elvis Presley. They were fans of the famous musician, and this was the only site in Tennessee they specifically asked to see. After a visit to the house and gift shop, the delegation flew back to Nashville where they enjoyed a farewell dinner hosted by Jones and Hargett. The two groups and staffs exchanged gifts and made plans for the future of the partnership.

On the last day of the visit, Saturday, March 26, the Bulgarian delegation took a quick tour of downtown Nashville and then began their long flight back to Bulgaria, departing the Nashville International Airport around 2 p.m.

The eight-day tour was incredibly successful, and the Bulgarian delegation was able to learn much from the Tennesseans, and vice-versa. Marintchev said that throughout the visit he saw many things he'd like to put into practice in Bulgaria. "Our hosts have shown us good examples of how to organize relations within the civil government and how those good relations can improve contact with all of the community."

This would be the first of many visits on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. It began an exchange and friendship that would continue for decades.

OPERATION VIGILANT SENTRY

Nearly 20 Years Later

Story by: Lt. Col. Darrin Haas

In 2005, Bulgarian and Tennessee Military Police conducted one of the largest small-unit exchanges in the history of the State Partnership Program.

One of the main purposes of the State Partnership Program is to facilitate cooperation between those states and nations who are partnered together by having their militaries train with each other. These engagements are two-fold; they help support our nation's defense and security goals and build relationships between those partnered together. In the late summer of 2005, Tennessee and Bulgarian Military Police forces held an exercise and trained together in one of the largest exchanges in the program's history.

In August 2005, more than 80 Soldiers from the Tennessee National Guard's 168th Military Police Battalion, and its subordinate companies, traveled to Novo Selo Training Range near Sliven, Bulgaria, for Operation Vigilant Sentry. The training event between Tennessee and Bulgarian Military Police was designed to share tactics and techniques, especially lessons learned by Tennessee Military Policemen who recently returned from Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"All of the military police units from Tennessee just returned from deployments supporting Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, or Noble Eagle," said Lt. Col. Patricia Jones, the 168th Military Police Battalion commander. "These Soldiers were some of the first from Tennessee to see combat since Desert Storm, and they had wide ranging experiences to share with the Bulgarian MPs



Soldiers from the 168th Military Police Battalion visit a local orphanage for special needs children in the town of Medvan. (Photo by Spc. Nora Dunnigan)

who were preparing to go to Iraq soon. This was also the first time we were able to work with the Bulgarians on this scale and train side-by-side with each other."

The two governments had participated in numerous exchange programs in the past, incorporating the Army and Air National Guard with units of the Bulgar-



Bulgarian Military Police prepare to enter a building during military operations on urban terrain training at the Novo Selo Training Site, Bulgaria. (Photo by Spc. Nora Dunnigan)

ian military. Tennesseans also joined in major military exercises in Bulgaria, such as Operation Cornerstone and Operation Bulwark. But this was the first time that company level military policemen were involved.

“We were notified of this exercise in 2004 and looked forward to it,” said Jones. “Many of us just returned from deployments while some were still coming home. Once everyone was settled, we began training and preparing for this mission.”

On August 14th, 80 soldiers arrived in Nashville and loaded various weapon systems, equipment, and ten humvees on a C5 Galaxy from Memphis’ 164th Airlift Wing with the Tennessee Air National Guard. It did not take long, and with all their equipment on board, the MPs flew to Bulgaria with an overnight stop at Mildenhall, England. The next day, they arrived at the airport in Plovdiv, secured and transported their equipment to Novo Selo, and prepared for the exercise.

There was no rest for the MPs as the exercise began the next day. It started with an opening ceremony attended by both Military Police forces and hosted by Tennessee’s Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Gus Hargett, and Bul-

garian Maj. Gen. Orlin Ivanov, director of the Bulgarian Military Police and Counterintelligence Service.

“This exercise will permit the relationship between our two armies to continue to grow and enable the bonds that bind our two great nations together to become even stronger,” said Hargett during the ceremony. He also asked for a moment of silence for the fallen Soldiers of both countries during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Ivanov echoed those statements.

Following the speeches and playing of both nations’ national anthems, the Bulgarian forces demonstrated a close quarter combat scenario and a building raid. They also gave additional tours of the facilities and then training began.

For the next two weeks, the MPs participated in a series of exercise and training events. They shared experiences from several peacekeeping and wartime missions as well as daily operations. They primarily worked on cordon-and-search procedures, vehicle convoys, crowd control, and operating a checkpoint.

“We trained for the last six months to prepare for these engagements,” said Sgt. David Owen, 269th Mili-

tary Police Company. “But we had just returned from Baghdad, Iraq, where we did all these things in combat. We had a lot of lessons learned to pass on. And the Bulgarians showed us some new and interesting ways to perform them from a law-and-order perspective when dealing with your own citizens. Little did we know, but it would come in handy in just a few weeks.”

One of the major events the U.S. and Bulgarian Soldiers conducted was to plan and execute a raid in a Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain environment. More than 80 civilian actors were hired to simulate and act as a rioting crowd of civilians on modern-day battlefield.

“This was intense,” said Owen. “There were a lot of moving parts and different languages and interpreters being used. It was also interesting to see the different styles and approaches used by each nation to react to the same problem.”

The Soldiers had to deploy and contain the rioters using civil disturbance tactics. The civilian crowd blocked the movement of military convoys, disturbed checkpoints, and were overall destructive. Both the U.S. and Bulgarian troops responded to the situation together, but they also did multiple iterations where each force attempted different tactics to see the varying results. After each evolution, the MPs analyzed each event to see which was more effective and how to improve the next time. They also demonstrated different unarmed self-defense techniques to each other.

“The Bulgarian MPs are excellent at civil disturbance,” said Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Isbell, 267th Military Police Company. “They executed quickly, at full speed, and with little preparation and no problems. I learned a lot from them, and I believe they took away a lot from us. It was one of the best experiences I have had, and it really broadened my vision on what we are each capable of.”

Not only did the Soldiers conduct exercises together, but they also taught reciprocal courses. U.S. Soldiers taught various classes on current tactics, how the U.S. Army is organized and functions, and even professional development courses on the role of the noncommissioned officer. The Bulgarian MPs conducted similar courses and gave insightful presentations on the organizational structure of their MP Corps and the overall Bulgarian military.

The Soldiers also became familiar with each other’s weapons systems. Soldiers fired MK19 grenade launchers, AK47s, M16s, and numerous other weapons including additional rifles, and handguns.

“I have seen them all my life on television and in Iraq, but I never fired an AK47 until this exercise,” said Owen. “It is a powerful weapon, and now I feel confident if there was ever a reason I needed to use



Bulgarian and Tennessee National Guard Military Police pose for a quick photograph during training at Novo Selo Training Area in Bulgaria. (Photo courtesy Tennessee National Guard)

“The Bulgarian MPs were excellent at civil disturbance. They executed quickly, at full speed, and with little preparation and no problems.”

- Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Isbell

one, I would be effective.”

In one of the final training events, the Bulgarians learned how to maintain and drive a U.S. humvee while the Americans drove the Bulgarian Lada Niva, a small, two-door sedan used as a patrol vehicle. The Soldiers took turns traversing a rigorous driving course and learned how to move tactically and fight from each of the platforms. The MPs enjoyed the opportunity to operate another nation’s military vehicles and learn their capabilities.

Another purpose of the exercise was to encourage better relationships, both professional and inter-personal, among the partnering militaries. As another part of relationship building, the Tennesseans decided to challenge the Bulgarian MPs to a game of soccer. The two teams squared off at the city’s main sports complex with local officials and the city mayor as spectators. It did not go well for the Tennesseans. The Bulgarian team scored three goals in the first ten minutes of gameplay. After that, they took pity on the Americans and backed off, turning it into a less competitive event. The Tennesseans lost the game by a score of 5-2, which was kept low due to Bulgarian kindness.

Toward the end of the two-week exercise, a group of Tennesseans visited a local orphanage for special needs children in the town of Medven. Before coming to Bulgaria, the Guardsmen collected donations among themselves and purchased items the children needed. Soldiers helped unload food, bedding, cleaning supplies, and toys into a storeroom at the orphanage while others taught classes and played with the kids.

“It felt great to get to meet and spend the day with these children,” said Owen.

Once the exercises, training, and team building were completed, the two forces held a brief closing ceremony where awards were presented. The Tennesseans presented each of the Bulgarian MPs with U.S. Army Military Police brassards; the black, cloth panels worn on the shoulder by American MPs when they are on duty. In return, the Tennesseans were presented with pins and shirts by the Bulgarians that represented their country. During and after the ceremony, many of the Soldiers exchanged patches, hats, and other souvenir items. Many also exchanged information to sustain their new friendships.



The 168th Military Police Battalion soccer team after being defeated by the Bulgarian Military Police team. (Photo by Spc. Nora Dunnigan)

“During this trip, I developed a newfound appreciation for Bulgarian culture and respect for the Bulgarian Military Police Corps,” said Owen. “It was an awesome experience to get to know these guys personally and professionally. They are all warriors, and I would be proud to fight alongside them anytime.”

After their eventful two weeks, the Tennesseans reloaded the Air Force C5 Galaxy and started their journey home. They stopped again at Mildenhall, England, where they learned that Hurricane Katrina, a Category 5 hurricane, had ravaged the Louisiana and Mississippi coast and most of New Orleans flooded. Lt. Col. Jones, the 168th commander, was also notified that all of Tennessee’s MP units had been mobilized to go help the Mississippi National Guard in Gulfport, immediately.

From England, Jones began recalling all the state’s MP units and started to send them to the Gulf coast. When the MPs, who were in Bulgaria, arrived in Nashville the next day, they joined their units, with many of them already convoying south. Within just 24-hours of arriving home, many of the same Soldiers who were training in Bulgaria, were now in Gulfport helping with search and rescues, enforcing curfew, setting up traffic points, and supporting local law enforcement agencies while using many of the same skills on which they were just training.



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