

U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

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



RELEASE #2009-04-09-1

2009: THE YEAR OF THE NCO

April 9, 2009

Hamburg institute continues more than 50-year tradition of enhancing U.S.-German partnership through education and discussion

By Dave Melancon

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

HAMBURG, Germany – When the Haus Rissen Hamburg International Institute for Politics and Economics began conducting seminars in 1954, Europe was still recovering from World War II, the Cold War divided east from west and NATO -- the trans-Atlantic bridge between continents -- was still in its infancy.

More than 50 years later, many of those discussions of military security, economic stability and partnership between continents continue.

Members of the U.S. forces community in Europe, including servicemembers, civilian employees and, occasionally, family members, have been involved in the seminar program since its founding. The institute, located in the Hamburg suburbs, is considered one of Germany's leading think tanks for discussion of military security, economics and social issues.



DAVE MELANCON

University of Hamburg historian Eckart Krause discusses German history and the country's political system at the Haus Rissen Hamburg International Institute for Politics and Economics, March 25. During five-day seminars offered by the institute, U.S. and German Soldiers and civilians study German history, European economics and U.S., German and NATO relationships through classroom and informal discussions.

Led by some of Germany's leading experts in their respective fields, seminar lecturers lead U.S. and German Bundeswehr participants in discussions that encompass politics

and foreign affairs, national security, history and economics. Participants are encouraged to speak freely.

Informal and after-hours meetings also add to the seminars' success and are two of its most productive tools, said Eckard Bolsinger, Haus Rissen research program director.

"Our grassroots-level discussions are at a very basic level where we try to improve the trans-Atlantic relationship," he said. "We try within one week to give a firsthand understanding of how the German mind-set works. We try to help people to know how Germans and Americans think about foreign, security and economic policies."

Sometimes the most thought-provoking discussions take place outside of the seminar rooms, he added.

"The most important things happen during the coffee breaks or in the evening at the bar," Bolsinger said.

To facilitate the discussions and to help participants concentrate on the seminars, Haus Rissen provides food and lodging during their stay. The self-contained campus includes several meeting and conference rooms, a buffet-style dining area, recreation areas and guest rooms.

In addition to the classroom and informal seminars, the week's program includes a tour of Hamburg.

Haus Rissen, one of the few remaining think tanks in Germany since the end of the Cold War, also conducts programs in trans-Atlantic and international relations in Hamburg-area schools and for German businesses and other organizations, Bolsinger said. Military-to-military programs are conducted only for U.S. and German servicemembers and their civilian counterparts.

There is very little difference between the institute's officer and noncommissioned officer seminars, he said. Groups attend separate sessions based on rank and equivalent civilian pay grade solely to encourage free expression during discussions.

"We do not get the average Soldier. It takes motivation to leave your compound and to be interested in the German environment," Bolsinger said. "We have highly motivated students here. They are very curious and very supportive of the German speakers."

The only problem for many of the participants, he noted, was that many attend the seminars toward the end of their tours of duty or employment in Germany.

As the United States sets some of its national priorities, Europeans are developing their own security and economic policies, he said. However, there is no reason for either to be concerned that the two are growing apart.

“Sometimes is hard for us in Germany to recognize that your focus of security policy has shifted in the last 12 to 15 years. You are focusing more on the Pacific Rim and trans-Atlantic relations, and the European Union (nations) are less important than they were during the Cold War.”

“But we will always stand with Number One,” he added, referring to the United States.

Maintaining the relationship between Germany and America is an unwritten part of the German constitution, Bolsinger said.

“The relationship between the U.S. and

Germany is one central pillar in our (national) policy,” he said. “Our mission (at Haus Rissen) is to improve that pillar; to make it stronger even in difficult times.”

The seminars are successful if the participants return to their units and offices with a better understanding of one another, he said.

“We try to give them an understanding that you can see the world from a different perspective. The European experience is different from the American experience.”

Recent seminar participants said they valued that “European experience” Bolsinger mentioned.

“The most useful part for me was gaining an understanding of how complicated Europeans really are,” said Master Sgt. James K. Eakes of the Joint Multinational Readiness Center Operations Group in Hohenfels, Germany. “The knowledge I gained will certainly be applied in my future interaction with Germans and Europeans and I’m quite confident will lead to improving all of my European -- especially German -- relationships.”

As a self-described medieval history enthusiast, Eakes said the seminar also filled in some major gaps in his understanding of German history.



DAVE MELANCON

U.S. and German participants talk over a problem in international policy during a small group discussion at the Haus Rissen Hamburg International Institute for Politics and Economics, March 24.

“The end of the post-medieval time frame we (studied) put a lot of things into better perspective for me,” Eakes said. “Of course, a historical understanding explains quite a bit about modern times.”

Sara C. Hurt of the Installation Management Command-Europe Security Office Heidelberg said she thought linking Germany’s history to discussions about the future was informative and pertinent.

“The most interesting subject to me was the future of the European Union,” the security specialist said. “I must admit I really had no background on it and did not realize how long it has been in the making and how much it has evolved over the years.”

Hurt said she found the comparisons between the origins of the European Union and the United States particularly interesting, and learning history from another nation’s point of view enlightening.

“Although I had lived in Germany for three years in the 1980s and then a little more than a year on this tour, I still learned quite a bit that I did not know about German history, politics, and the fine line they have to walk still to this day with the fallout from World War II,” Hurt said.

Hurt’s final analysis of the seminar was proof of Bolsinger’s view about the informal grassroots discussions that take place among the U.S. and German colleagues who attend.

“The most useful part overall to me, though, was the networking and the friendships made with the Germans and with our U.S. Air Force personnel,” she said.

For more information about Haus Rissen, visit www.hausrissen.org/index_eng.html.

For information about enrolling in a Haus Rissen seminar:

- U.S. Army Europe personnel: contact the USAREUR Public Affairs Office Community Relations section at: DSN 370-6647 or via email at ocpa.pi@eur.army.mil.
- IMCOM-E personnel: contact the IMCOM-Europe Public Affairs Office at DSN 379-6328 or via email at imcom-e-pao@eur.army.mil.
- U.S. European Command personnel: contact the EUCOM Public Affairs Office Community Relations division at 430-8574 or via e-mail at ecpaactionofficers@eucom.mil.
- U.S. Air Forces Europe personnel: contact the USAFE Public Affairs Office at 480-6565 or via e-mail at usafe.pai@ramstein.af.mil.



www.hqusareur.army.mil