



## **Press Release**

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### **U.S., Bulgarian Soldiers strengthen relationships through training**

NOVO SELO, Bulgaria -- In today's joint and combined military environment, it is critical for Soldiers to understand the tactics, techniques and procedures of those serving with them, regardless if they are from a fellow U.S. service or from another country.

U.S. and Bulgarian Soldiers with Joint Task Force-East had the opportunity to learn from one another and build enduring relationships during the first week of the "Lion Strike" exercise, which started Sept. 17 at Novo Selo, Bulgaria.

Side by side, the Soldiers conducted training on patrolling techniques, team and squad buddy movements, reacting to contact, breaking contact, evaluating a casualty, radio communications, and calling in a nine-line medical evacuation plan, said Capt. Joel Leflore, company commander of Battery A, 1st Battalion, 94th Field Artillery (MLRS).

To enhance the learning process, the U.S. and Bulgarian soldiers have been integrated into mixed platoons while conducting training. The Soldiers are broken up into three platoons, said Leflore. Each of those three platoons has approximately 10 Bulgarian Soldiers and at least one imbedded interpreter.

"1st Lt. Svetoslav Godinov, a Bulgarian soldier, is in charge of one of my platoons," said Leflore. "Also, their company commander, Capt. Enchev, is my deputy commander for the exercise."

Sgt. Stephen Yokley, a team leader from 1-94 FA, was enthusiastic about having the opportunity to learn from the Bulgarian soldiers.

“They are our allies, and we need to understand how they fight,” said Yokley. “If we are embedded with them in any other place, we will be able to work better as a team.”

“We are forging relationships with the Bulgarians and learning that they are using many of the same techniques that we use,” said Leflore. “Even though we may not understand each other, we are all trying to accomplish the same mission.”

The Soldiers started their week by conducting weapons familiarization classes.

The U.S. Soldiers fired Bulgarian AK-47 rifles, machine guns and the weapons on the Bulgarian armored personnel carrier; the Bulgarians trained on the U.S. M-16 rifles, 50-caliber machine guns, and M-249 semi automatic weapons, said Leflore. “But the highlight of the training was when we got to fire 33 rounds of their [rocket propelled grenades].”

“When we deploy with our allies, it helps to know their weapon systems,” said Leflore. “You never know when you may have to pick up someone’s weapon and start firing it.”

Everyone from leadership down to the newest private had the opportunity to train with and learn from the Bulgarians.

“The training we did the other day was the greatest,” said Sgt. Paul Maxwell, a team leader from 1-94 FA. “We got an opportunity to mirror the Bulgarians’ techniques, then shadow their movements. They’re very good and on point; I was impressed.”

The first-week’s training culminated in a team live-fire exercise on Sept. 21, which tested how the Soldiers react to significant events, like improvised explosive device attacks, while on patrol, said Leflore.

In the end, both sides were satisfied with the training.

“Training together gives us more experience for all our troops,” said Godinov. “We can meet together in other countries and know each other’s methods of fighting, and we will know how to perform those methods, making it easier for us to work together.”



**CUTLINES:**

0013: Bulgarian Cpl. Ivan Tanev, 38th Inf. Bn., helps U.S. Spec. Zachary Baker, 1-94 FA, lock and load a Bulgarian light machine gun. U.S. and Bulgarian soldiers conducted weapons familiarization along with team and squad-level tactical training during the first week of Joint Task Force-East “Lion Strike” exercise, which started Sept. 17 at Novo Selo Training Area, Bulgaria. (U.S. Army photo by Master Sgt. Kimberly Williams)

For more information regarding the JTF-E PoP exercise please contact the JTF-E Public Affairs Officer, Mr. Troy Darr, 0040 241-608-288, email: [troy.darr@us.army.mil](mailto:troy.darr@us.army.mil).