

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



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U.S. ARMY EUROPE COMMANDING GENERAL SALUTES TEAM FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE FOLLOWING ALBANIA EXPLOSION

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

HEIDELBERG, Germany -- Lt. Gen. Gary D. Speer, U.S. Army, Europe acting commanding general, hosted a ceremony in his office May 20 to recognize USAREUR members of a U.S. European Command Humanitarian Assistance Survey Team that provided assistance to Albania in March and April.



SGT 1ST CLASS STEPHEN CHENAULT

Members of a U.S. European Command Humanitarian Assistance Survey Team examine damage caused by a March 15 series of explosions at a weapons demilitarization facility, in Gerdec, Albania, April 8. The HAST, including specialists in environmental science, engineering, explosive ordnance disposal, civil affairs and mortuary affairs, assisted Albanian citizens and military and government officials in the aftermath of a disaster that killed 22 people and destroyed more than 400 homes.

The HAST, including specialists in environmental science, engineering, explosive ordnance disposal, civil affairs and mortuary affairs, responded to what U.S. ambassador to Albania John L. Withers II termed a disaster – a series of explosions March 15 at a weapons demilitarization facility in Gerdec, Albania, where the stockpiled weapons were awaiting demolition by a commercial company.

undetermined, but according to published reports the blast was heard up to 100 miles away. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported as of March 26 a total of 22 people killed and 300 injured, while 4,200 homes were damaged, among them 408 destroyed by the blasts.

The precise cause of the explosions remains

In a letter to Gen. Bantz J. Craddock, EUCOM commanding general, Withers wrote, “Your team, under the inspiring leadership of Colonel Chad Sparks, made a real difference here ... my deepest thanks to you and each member of the HAST for your care and concern for this small Balkan country, which soon may become a NATO ally. You know of Albania’s stalwart support for the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thank you for returning that support through the professionalism of your team.”

The HAST consisted of six U.S. military officers, six enlisted U.S. service members and two Department of the Army civilian employees. Speaking to 10 of the team members present for the May 20 ceremony, Speer thanked the entire team for their performance in what he termed “an incredibly important mission.”



SPC JOSEPH McATEE

U.S. Army Europe Acting Commanding General Lt. Gen. Gary D. Speer thanks Christopher Childs of the 21st Theater Sustainment Command for his part in a humanitarian assistance mission to Albania, during a ceremony in the general's office on Campbell Barracks in Heidelberg, Germany, May 20. Kyle Cherrington, Army Manpower Analysis Agency Europe (second from left) and the 21st TSC's Staff Sgt. Derek Marble (center) and Sgt. 1st Class Hiruy Gemechu were also part of the team of 14 experts who assisted in the aftermath of a series of explosions March 15 at a weapons demilitarization facility in Gerdec, Albania.

While they gave critical assistance to the military officials and government of Albania, Speer said, the team also clearly demonstrated the caring and professionalism of the USAREUR team to the entire nation.

“You showed the Albanian people what our Army can do,” he said.

While he praised Sparks’ leadership of the team, Speer also singled out the enlisted members for recognition, saying the HAST’s noncommissioned “showed the level of competency of NCOs in our Army.”

Sgt. 1st Class Steve Chenault, team noncommissioned officer in charge, said the team’s relations with Albanians at the site were good.

“They were very grateful and hospitable to us the whole time we were there,” Chenault said. “I think the most important thing we were able to do is help get the people back into their homes or shelters as quickly as possible.”

HAST members included:

Col. Chad E. Sparks, USAREUR Deputy Chief of Staff, Engineer

Lt. Col. Jeffrey M. Stolz, 18th Engineer Brigade

Lt. Col. Jeanne Wessel, Joint Task Force Headquarters, Fort Dix, N.J.

Lt. Col. Glen Masset, EUCOM J4, Engineer

Capt. Ray A. Sackmann, New Jersey Army National Guard

Capt. Davin E. Bridges, U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive
Medicine - Europe

Sgt. Maj. Lauren Larson, USAREUR Current Operations

Chief Master Sgt. Richard Bouffard Jr., Joint Task Force Headquarters, Fort Dix, N.J.

Sgt. 1st Class Stephen D. Chenault, USAREUR Deputy Chief of Staff, Engineer

Sgt. 1st Class Hiruy Gemechu, 21st Theater Support Command

Staff Sgt. Michael Lenander, 18th Engineer Brigade

Staff Sgt. Derek Michael Marble, 21st Theater Support Command

Christopher M. Childs, U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine
- Europe

Kyle R. Cherrington, Army Manpower Analysis Agency Europe



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