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230th MPs partner with Macedonian army, prep unit to deploy

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MANNHEIM, Germany – “First, we will drink coffee.”

Those were the words of Macedonian army Maj. Slavco Cvetanoski, the commander of Army Training Area Krivolak in Macedonia March 12 at a meeting with leadership from the 230th Military Police Company, 95th Military Police Battalion.

Before they could discuss training, the business of friendship and partnership needed to be established. After a tray of fresh Macedonian coffee was brought to the table and every soldier took a seat, only then could the work truly begin.

Like many successful interactions between foreign militaries, cultural protocol would be as important as military protocol for the joint training exercise the military police Soldiers were going to be running for the army of the Republic of Macedonia.

As the group sat around a table together – enjoying the traditional Macedonian coffee – details could now be worked out, schedules and logistics updated, and official business could begin. The meeting was a scene that would preview the duality of the 230th MP Co.’s mission.

The 230th MP Co. deployed 36 of its 1st Platoon Soldiers to Krivolak and Pepelishte March 11-22 to take the lead in a crew-served weapons training exercise for the Macedonian military police, ranger and special forces soldiers from the Macedonian army’s Special Operations Regiment in

preparation for the unit's upcoming deployment to Afghanistan with the Vermont National Guard's 86th Brigade Combat Team.

The exercise, which consisted of multiple days of classroom training and weapons ranges, familiarized more than 90 Macedonian soldiers with the Army's M2 .50-caliber machine gun, M249 Squad Automatic Weapon, MK19 automatic grenade launcher and M240B machine gun – all weapons the Macedonians will need to be very familiar with when they link up with their American counterparts in Afghanistan.

Being experienced marksmen already, the training for the Macedonian soldiers was an opportunity to familiarize themselves with U.S. weapons and to fuse the training provided by the Soldiers of the 230th MP Co. with the extensive knowledge of weapons they already possess.

After a few days in the classroom, the success of the Macedonian soldiers at the weapons ranges proved to be a testament to not only the hard work and dedication that went into their training but also to their readiness.

Macedonian army Lt. Col. Zoran Blazevski, the chief of operations for the Special Operations Regiment, said that in the future the Macedonian army may receive its own supply of crew-served weapons and that having 92 trained personnel would be a huge asset to its forces.

“With this experience, during those five days of training, we learned a lot, I would say. Our soldiers, who are going on their mission in Afghanistan in the future, are (well)-prepared to use these weapons,” Blazevski said.

The weapons range is something they hope to replicate in future training for other soldiers now that they have 92 soldiers who are trained and experienced on crew-served weapons, Blazevski added.

A visit to the weapons range at Krivolak March 19 by a delegation from Allied Joint Force Command Naples, headed by Adm. Mark Fitzgerald, the JFC Naples commander as well as the commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe and U.S. Naval Forces Africa, emphasized the military-wide importance of the training.

The U.S. military's mission in Afghanistan places reliance on its strong partnerships with other militaries. The 230th MP Co.'s mission in Macedonia was a testament to the United States' dedication to these partnerships.

As important as the weapons training was from a strictly military perspective, the exercise also provided American and Macedonian troops with an opportunity to expand their horizons and interact on more personal levels. Having the chance to create a bond between the two militaries on a cultural and military level left a strong impression on many of the Soldiers who participated in the event.

"They've introduced us to a little bit of their culture – the sports they like to play, the food they like to eat. We have had little conversations about our lives before the military, and it's pretty nice talking to them," said Pfc. Daniel Rojas, a military police Soldier with the 230th MP Co. "I hope when I go downrange, I get to see a couple of these guys down there and we can fight side by side."

Many of the Soldiers who participated in the exercise saw the value in the duality of their mission and their unique opportunity to visit Macedonia. Having a chance to visit historic Macedonian sites and letting Macedonian soldiers show American soldiers the things they were most proud of in their country was a chance not many Soldiers will have in their military careers.

For Pfc. Ryan Lackovic, a military police Soldier with 230th MP Co., who had an opportunity to teach one of the classes on crew-served weapons, one of the most important things he wanted to take back from his time in Macedonia was not a souvenir or a photograph – it was the value of the experience.

"Most people don't get to have the experience of coming to Macedonia and seeing the countryside or even to train soldiers," Lackovic said. "So the experience is pretty priceless, and I think taking that back is pretty big."

Despite the language barrier that many thought would exist, it proved to be relatively easy for the two armies to find similar interests and ways around the communication roadblocks.

Staff Sgt. Sylvester Hall, platoon sergeant for 1st Platoon, 230th MP Co., said that in spite of the language barrier, there was a common language among soldiers that helped to make the training run smoothly and the mission a success.

“I am very impressed with how my Soldiers have done over here,” Hall said, “and the Macedonian soldiers have done excellent as well. I think they’ll be successful when they go over to Afghanistan.”

As has been seen time and again, the camaraderie between soldiers – of any country – can transcend borders and language barriers. It is a bond that it quick to form and almost impossible to break.

As the 230th MP Co. prepared to depart Macedonia and its Soldiers said their final goodbyes, the friendships that had been established were obvious. Unit patches were traded, emails were exchanged and hopes of seeing one another again were voiced time and again.

And as these Macedonian soldiers make their way to Afghanistan, they leave behind a unit of U.S. military police Soldiers who are not only proud to have supported them in their mission, but are personally invested in their success.



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Pvt. Heather Davis, an Austel, Ga., native and a military police Soldier with the 230th Military Police Company, 95th Military Police Battalion, instructs Macedonian soldiers on the M2 .50-caliber machine gun during classroom training March 14 at Training Area Pepelishte in Krivolak, Macedonia. Soldiers

from 230th MP Co. travelled to the Republic of Macedonia from March 11-22 to train Macedonian soldiers on crew-served weapons. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Adrienne Killingsworth, 18th MP Brigade, PAO)



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Macedonian army Sgt. 1st Class Sasha Toshevski stands behind Sgt. Daniel DeMars, a Malta, Mont., native and a team leader with the 230th Military Police Company, 95th Military Police Battalion, while another Macedonian soldier takes aim during a crew-served weapons range at Army Training Area Krivolak March 19 in Macedonia. Soldiers from 230th MP Co. travelled to the Republic of Macedonia from March 11-22 to train Macedonian soldiers in preparation for their upcoming deployment to Afghanistan where they will be embedded with the Vermont National Guard's 86th Brigade Combat Team. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Adrienne Killingsworth, 18th MP Brigade, PAO)



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Soldiers from 1st Platoon, 230th Military Police Company, 95th Military Police Battalion stand in formation next to Macedonian Special Operations Regiment soldiers during a visit by dignitaries from Allied Joint Force Command Naples, headed by Adm. Mark Fitzgerald, the JFC Naples commander, March 17 at a weapons range at Army Training Area Krivolak in Macedonia. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Adrienne Killingsworth, 18th MP Brigade, PAO)



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2nd Lt. Todd Rossbach, a St. Paul, Minn., native and a platoon leader for 1st Platoon, 230th Military Police Company, 95th Military Police Battalion, addresses Macedonian and U.S. troops during a safety brief March 17 at Army Training Area Krivolak in Macedonia. 230th MP Co. Soldiers travelled to the Republic of Macedonia March 11-22 to train Macedonian soldiers on crew-served weapons in preparation for their upcoming deployment to Afghanistan. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Adrienne Killingsworth, 18th MP Brigade, PAO)