

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., European medical Soldiers train, test and build bonds during Expert Field Medical Badge

By Staff Sgt. Aimee Millham

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany -- There are few things livelier than a pumped-up group of U.S. Soldiers. Just ask any of the international candidates who participated in Expert Field Medical Badge training and testing here this month.

"The yelling when falling in and the singing while marching was great - it was a great way of motivation," said Sgt. 1st Class Bram Smitz, an infantry medic with the Royal Netherlands Army and one of 16 international candidates who trained and tested alongside 229 U.S.



Army Europe medical Soldiers for the badge.

While 16 European uniforms stood out in the crowd of U.S. Army Combat

Uniforms during the event, the Soldiers wearing those uniforms added their voices to

STAFF SGT AIMEE MILLHAM
Cpl. Jonathan Sohlaite, an infantry medic with the Royal Netherlands Army, drags Spc. Losivale Tally of the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine-Europe, who is role-playing as a "non-ambulatory victim," to safety during the 2009 U.S. Army Europe Expert Field Medical Badge competition. Smitz was one of 16 partner nation participants who trained and tested alongside USAREUR medical personnel during the competition at the Grafenwoehr (Germany) Training Area.

thunderous early-morning "Hoo-ahs!," helped make and carry a pair of makeshift guidons, and even called cadence in their respective languages.

"Everyone treated us like we were at home, not like foreigners," said Polish Land Forces Cpl. Monika Ner, the only woman among the international candidates.

Those candidates hailed from five partner nations -- Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Slovakia -- and their presence was vital to the event, said Brig. Gen. Keith W. Gallagher, commander of Europe Regional Medical Command.



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Lance Cpl. Krzysztof Kopiec of the Polish Land Forces (right) gets some tips from fellow competitor Spc. Saidkhodja Kasimov of the Vicenza (Italy) Dental Activity while preparing to tackle the land navigation test as part of the 2009 U.S. Army Europe Expert Field Medical Badge competition at the Grafenwoehr (Germany) Training Area, March 26.

"Support them; they are who we fight with side-by-side in Iraq and Afghanistan," Gallagher told the U.S. candidates during remarks to a combined formation of all the participants the day before testing.

Most of the partner nation Soldiers will be deploying to Afghanistan and Iraq in the coming weeks and months, where they will be operating alongside American forces, said Capt. Justin Trisler, officer-in-charge of the EFMB testing.

"It's ideal for them to work together and train together before wartime," he added.

The camaraderie that formed between the international and U.S. troops extended beyond working relationships, though.

For Spc. John Baeza and Polish Land Forces Cpl. Pawel Danielak, the event was the start of a friendship.

"He's my friend. If he's out, I'm gonna kick myself ... for not helping him enough," Baeza said.

He and Danielak created one of the makeshift guidons made of sticks from the woods on the training area combined with patches and flags donated by several Soldiers. While

neither Baeza or Danielak eventually earned the EFMB, both said they'd try again next time.

"Now I know what to expect," Danielak said, adding that he can now take apart and put together an M-16 blindfolded thanks to Baeza.

To qualify for the badge, candidates must undergo qualification testing on a combination of communication, warrior and medical tasks. They must also successfully complete day and night land navigation courses, a written exam, and a 12-mile foot march in less than three hours.



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Sgt. 1st Class Sasha Stiegeler of the German Army Medical Forces Command (right) demonstrates giving aid to a simulated spinal injury victim in a burning Humvee with the help of two U.S. Army Europe Soldiers, during Expert Field Medical Badge testing at the Grafenwoehr (Germany) Training Area, March 28.

The qualification testing consisted of mock scenarios within which candidates had several tasks to complete, including triage, casualty evacuation, and performing emergency medical treatment in a simulated wartime environment. They also had to perform Soldier tasks such as reacting to indirect fire; operating in a nuclear, biological or chemical environment; and performing a

functions check on their individual weapons.

After nine days of training and 120 hours of continuous testing, three of the international candidates earned the EFMB. They are Cpl. 1st Class Samuel Dee and Cpl. Jonathan Sohilaït from the Netherlands and Sgt. Marian Pacnar from Slovakia. Dee also earned an EFMB coin of excellence for being the only international candidate to pass the written exam on his first attempt.

Despite having lost their chances to earn the badge, 10 of the international Soldiers remained to complete the week's testing. For their efforts, each received a certificate of participation.

One of those 10 was German army Sgt. 1st Class Sascha Stiegler, a former drill sergeant now serving in the German Army Medical Forces Command. His "battle buddy" during

the training and testing, Staff Sgt. William Wade from the Illesheim Health Clinic, said the pair helped each other quite a bit during the event.

Wade said he drew strength from Stiegler's discipline when studying and practicing.

"I wanna be in his unit," Wade said.

"You're more than welcome, buddy," Stiegler responded.



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