

EUCOM Quality of Life Conference underway

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Garmisch, Germany — The European Command's Quality of Life Conference entered its first full day of activities Monday as delegates, subject matter experts and facilitators began 14 hours of brainstorming and developing issues during the next three days.

The meetings are held annually to allow service members and their families a chance to bring issues to senior leaders.

"This year's theme, 'Share and Advance' denotes the key role each of you will play in sharing your extensive experience to ultimately advance the quality of life for service members, civilians and their families within the European theater," said Navy Cmdr. Stacy Henderson, U.S. European Command and Quality of Life mistress of ceremonies, as she addressed the group during the welcome session.

"This conference has a strong tradition of making a difference. We look forward to advancing the quality of life as a result of your efforts this week," Henderson said.

Throughout the day, delegates listened to briefings from Bill Carr, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Military Personnel Policy), who briefed the audience on compensation and benefits affecting troops, and Tighe Murray, Congressional Budget Office senior analyst, who spoke about entitlements.

"Anybody you see in the force is there for a reason," Carr said. "To the best of our scientific ability, we're ensuring the person you see standing next to you is fully capable, and we will continue to do that in the future."

Directors from the Army and Air Force Exchange Services, Defense Commissary Agency and the Department of Defense Schools in Europe were also available to discuss issues affecting service members and their families.

One particular item of interest was the new AAFES fuel card, which is being driven by German regulations, after the original coupon system expired in 2006. The new system will eliminate the need to fill out multiple coupons and will allow drivers to monitor gas usage online.

Throughout the QoL conference, delegates are assigned to focus groups that are divided into five areas: deployment support, entitlements, healthcare and two community services areas focusing on family-related issues and education.

Each focus group contains a subject matter expert who serves as a quick-reference and

helps answer incidental questions from delegates that come up during discussions.

Melissa Jones, a spouse who is stationed at Patch Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany, is one delegate at the conference.

"I've really liked being here because people at a higher level can see that it's not just one place having problems, but several others, as well," Jones said. "I feel like I can make a difference."

As the military engages in more operations worldwide, the quality of life that service members and their families receive is viewed as primary factors in recruiting and retention.

After the meetings, EUCOM routinely forwards the top 10 collective concerns taken from each focus group to the Department of Defense.

Although EUCOM uses the conference as a way to bolster its ability to support operations in theater, the command reviews all concerns, whether positive or negative.

"Sometimes issues may be above our understanding, but that shouldn't stop you from submitting what you think are issues that need attention," said Judy Mayrand, Entitlements focus group facilitator.

The conference is scheduled to run through March 13.



GARMISCH, Germany — Retired U.S. Army Gen. George Joulwan, former U.S. European Command commander (left), U.S. Army Spc. Michele Lawson, AFN Europe reporter, and Dan Robinson, AFN Europe chief of information, prepare to film a public service announcement at the Quality of Life Conference here, March 10. Joulwan, who founded the conference in 1996, provided opening remarks to the delegates during the meeting's introduction. (Department of Defense photo by Air Force Capt. Darrick Lee)