

## U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

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### U.S. ARMY EUROPE CIVILIAN PERSONNEL DIRECTOR EARNS PRESTIGIOUS ARMY AWARD

By **Bill Roche**

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**HEIDELBERG, Germany** -- Tony Whitehouse has proof that he's at the top of his field. He was handed that proof in the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes May 15 by Nelson M. Ford, acting under secretary of the Army and assistant secretary of the Army for financial management and comptroller.



STAFF SGT ANGEL D. THOMPSON

Nelson M. Ford, acting under secretary of the Army and assistant secretary of the Army for financial management and comptroller (right) chats with Tony Whitehouse, U.S. Army Europe director of civilian personnel, in his office in the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., May 15. Just after the meeting, Ford presented Whitehouse with the William H. Kushnick Award for achievement in civilian personnel administration in a ceremony in the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes.

What Ford presented to Whitehouse, U.S. Army Europe's director of civilian personnel, was the William H. Kushnick Award, officially placing Whitehouse in the ranks of the civilian human resources elite.

The award, established in 1968 and sponsored by the Department of the Army and the Army Civilian Personnel Alumni Association, is presented each year to recognize an outstanding singular achievement by an Army employee in civilian personnel administration.

The award's namesake was the War Department's director of civilian personnel from 1941 to 1946, and is credited with helping to define the Army's civilian personnel

program, decentralizing authority for the program and helping establish levels of responsibility for civilian personnel management still in use today.

Whitehouse earned the honor for his support of USAREUR transformation, his efforts with works councils and the German government on issues affecting local national employees, the merger of USAREUR and V Corps, and the transition and implementation of the Department of Defense's National Security Personnel System throughout the command.

"Mr. Whitehouse's expertise, influence, and passion for his profession and our workforce have resulted in this command having programs, policies and plans that are serving us well during a time of unparalleled complexity," wrote USAREUR Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Rusty Frutiger in nominating Whitehouse for the award. "Whether the mission (was) National Security Personnel System conversion, transformation, or workforce development, Mr. Whitehouse has been the mastermind in setting the right conditions for our most senior Army and civilian leaders to make informed decisions that affect the living and working conditions of our civilian workforce."

"Tony has proven time and again that he is the human resources professional capable of getting the job done, and done right," added Ric Beresford, USAREUR's deputy chief of staff for personnel, in his endorsement of Whitehouse's nomination.

Vera Garcia, chief of the U.S. personnel programs division of the USAREUR civilian personnel directorate, echoed those endorsements of Whitehouse's abilities, but said it's his leadership skills that truly make him remarkable.

"I think what makes his accomplishments stand out," Garcia said, "are his open and honest manner, his tolerance for diverse points of view, and his overall concern for the greater good of the command. If I look at the work he's done in the short time he's been here, the accomplishments would not have been possible without the great trust we all have in him; trust that he has earned through those traits."

For his part, Whitehouse said he "never ever" thought he would be honored with the Kushnick Award.

"There's probably not a bigger honor that anyone in my business could receive from their peers," he said.

"I remember hearing first of the award in the early '80s. One person I really respected named Bill Dittmar won in 1983. He had taught my first human resources classes out of the San Francisco office, and I remember how impressed I was that he received it, because he made such a big impact on me and wanting to be part of this program."

"Of course," he adds, "the Army has provided me a lot of wonderful opportunities and surprises. I didn't expect to be the civilian personnel director in Europe, or a GS-15, back when (I was) making \$1.60 an hour."

That \$1.60 an hour wage no doubt recalls the days 31 years ago when Whitehouse says fate brought him into the personnel field.

“I actually started in March of 1973 as a 16-year-old kid, as a low-income student hire,” he said. “The only employer I’ve ever worked for. I found my calling early.”

Whitehouse, the son of an Army enlisted Soldier and one of a family of 11, was born at Fort Ord, Calif., and said he “went from Army base to Army base” while he was growing up. A high school counselor sent him to find work at Fort Sill, Okla., where he says he was offered a choice of jobs as a laborer in the base’s paint shop or warehouse.

“When I went in to in-process, one of the personnel staffing specialists called me aside and said, ‘Do you want to work with us? We were looking for a girl, but you can type fast and you have a 4.0 (grade point average), and why don’t you work in the personnel office?’ and I said, ‘Sure,’ and I mean it wasn’t very long until I realized that I loved this kind of business, and I loved the kind of people that worked in it, and so that was a fateful day. I often wonder what would have happened had I ended up in the warehouse then.”

Whitehouse said he has traveled the world in his three decades with the Army, but his seven-month deployment to Iraq as an civilian employee made perhaps the deepest impression on him, because it opened his eyes to how crucial it is for Army civilians to support Soldiers, and because three of the civilians he hired were killed there.

“My deployment to Iraq in 2004 at the early part of the war was a very sobering time, and then you realize the importance of what we do as civilian human resources (professionals) in getting civilians to take care of the Soldiers,” he said. “The missions we support (are) so critical, and ... it hit home that I’m in a noble profession, that what I do is important, and I wouldn’t want to do anything else.”

Whitehouse says this is his next goal -- “to expand the cadre of available federal employees for combat operations” -- not just in the Army, but across the government. He wrote a research paper on the subject while at the Army War College before coming to Europe two years ago.

“I was so impressed when I was in Iraq at the number of civilians that were volunteering and eager to go to Iraq to help out, regardless of their political persuasions, because it’s what they do. They’re professionals and their support was needed, and ... we needed more of the civilians there in Iraq when we first got there, so I’ve been working since then to try to increase the cadre of civilians and making it easier to get them to the battle front.”

But he says civilian deployment is a personal thing, too. While his brother attended his Kushnick ceremony in Washington, D.C., his sister couldn’t be there, because she

deployed to Iraq as a civilian employee of the Army Corps of Engineers three weeks earlier.

My brother and I talked to her -- the three of us are very close -- so making sure she has the logistical support and security support and what she needs to come back, it's a personal thing with me," he said.

"She saw me live through deployment, and her two sons -- one of whom got a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star for various injuries in an (improvised explosive device incident) -- so she (knew) what she was getting into, and she wanted to go. Now she's there and I'm real proud of her."

While Whitehouse's peers might rave about his skills, he credits the accomplishments that earned him his Kushnick to his staff.

"We ask a lot of them, and I push them hard, and they rise to the challenge. What's so moving to me is that my staff are the ones who really believed that I deserved this award. I read the nomination and said, 'Who is this guy you're talking about?' It was an honor. I just do my job, and I love doing what I do."

Garcia sees it the other way around.

"In Tony's decades of service to Army, he has successfully taken on huge department-wide challenges. Now USAREUR has the good fortune of his focus," she said. "Personally, I couldn't be happier that he has been recognized for the work he has done for USAREUR. I feel fortunate to have been able to work with and for Tony Whitehouse."



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