

1AD units take top awards for

German-American partnership training

Story by
Master Sgt. Lisa Hunter
1st Armored Division PAO
Photo courtesy of
127th Aviation Support Battalion

WURZBURG, Germany - Several 1st Armored Division units earned recognition for training that has taken their soldiers way beyond what they learned in German Headstart classes.

Five 1AD units took awards in the U.S. Army Europe German-American Partnership Awards, including the two top awards.

"The two highest awards are the General Blanchard Award, which is the U.S. Army award, and the German Armed Forces Command Award (GARFCOM), which is the German Army award," explained Maj. Shane Hansen, 1AD's Civil Affairs officer. This year, USAREUR awarded the General Blanchard Award to the Division Engineer Brigade and the GARFCOM to the 127th Aviation Support Battalion.

"The German-American partnership is ultimately designed as platoon-level interoperability training," Hansen explained. "It's designed for them to train at the lowest level." For the soldiers involved in the partnership units, the exchanges between the two armies offer them a wealth of experiences that will last them a lifetime.

Through the program, American Army units team up with their German Army counterparts, according to Hansen. In Hanau, the 127th ASB has established and maintained an active partnership with the Nachschubbattalion 51, a German Army support unit based in Erfurt, Germany. The 127th ASB has been

recognized for its ongoing partnership over the past three years. In addition to winning the GARFCOM for the second consecutive year, the battalion earned the General Blanchard Award in 1999.

In the 1AD Engineer Brigade, the unit has established a three-way partnership between DIVENG, the 130th Engineer Brigade, and the German Army 40th Pioneer Brigade. The units focus on training together, learning each other's tactics and techniques. "This is a tremendous opportunity for interoperability and sharing experiences," said Maj. Dennis Bacon, 40th Engineer Battalion Operations officer. "This is an opportunity to build camaraderie with our host nation, one of our NATO partners."

Right now, DIVENG's German partner is preparing for deployment to Kosovo, so some of their plans for earning the German Sports Badge and

the German Army version of the Combat Lifesaver certification have been put on hold. Even so, their German partners are benefiting from the 40th Engineer Battalion's experience in Kosovo.

"They are going to be working with American engineers down there," Bacon explained. "We gave them a bunch of briefings and we're giving them all of our [after-action reviews], so they'll know what to expect."

Platoon sergeant, Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Stettler, 1st Platoon, Co. C, 40th Engineer Battalion, views the partnership training as a means of making the events more realistic. Stettler and his platoon recently participated in Operation Phoenix at the German training area in Speyer, Germany. During the week, the American engineers observed the German techniques for breaching obstacles, learned about the German anti-tank mines and observed river

crossings.

"I told the German commander that this training represents a real-world possibility," Stettler said. "The German engineers are a little more specialized, but they do some good stuff. The Germans used 'I' beams embedded in berms of dirt as an obstacle. Those are things we don't usually encounter."

The soldiers lived in the German field environment for the week, sleeping – when they could – on the vehicles. While the living conditions may not have been up to the American standard, the German food made up for it.

"We ate better than we usually do in the field," said Stettler. "They had hot chocolate and a potato soup [my soldiers] fell in love with."

In the 127th ASB, the unit has established an exchange program, of sorts. For a week at a time, German soldiers are attached to the unit. During their stay, they work and live with their American counterparts, according to Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Marler, the 127th ASB command sergeant major.

"When the [German] soldiers come here, I get them rooms in the barracks; each soldier has a sponsor," explained Spc. Robert Monroe, the armorer for Co. B, 127th ASB. Monroe, who speaks German, also serves as one of the unit's partnership liaisons.

"While they're here, they work with us, we take them to the dining facility and the International Club (the community club)."

In return, their German partnership unit hosts the 127th ASB soldiers, sometimes for up to two weeks.

"I learned how they do things

differently," said Spc. Nathaniel Smith, a Blackhawk helicopter repairman assigned to Co. A, 127th ASB. Smith spent a week on a German field training exercise. "For one, their guard shifts are really weird, and they sleep on straw mats on the ground or in the back of a truck.

"But, they also do some stuff better. I learned how they slingload equipment off of the back of trucks under hostile fire, to get supplies to the front lines. It's the best training I've ever had," Smith said.

Smith hopes to spend another week with his German counterparts. "They go through the same stuff we do. They get tired of the same things we do, but they keep morale high when they are in the field," Smith said. "The head cook brings out candy and sodas for the soldiers in the field. They are a tighter, more cohesive group. The hospitality they showed us was outstanding."

Sgt. Jonathan Rosemeyer, who is also a Blackhawk helicopter repairman with Co. A, 127th ASB, echoed some of Smith's comments.

"I made a couple of friends there," said Rosemeyer, who spent two weeks in the field with the Nachschubbattalion 51. During his two-week stay, Rosemeyer homed in on some of the differences between the two armies.

"They always come home from the field on weekends," Rosemeyer noted. "And, their food is a lot better in the field. They have a lot of fresh foods like bread and cheeses for breakfast and lunch. Being in the field with them is one of the best times I've had in my career."

Marler's goal for his partnership

activities is for the soldiers, both German and American, to have fun and to learn how their partners train, live and communicate.

"People think of partnership as an additional task, but it's quite the contrary," Marler explained. "It really doesn't take a lot of resources. These soldiers have learned how to slingload from the back of a truck. They have participated in live-fire exercises, and they have a lot of fun at it."

While the goal of the partnerships is for the soldiers to become familiar with their partners' equipment and capabilities, the cultural exchanges are a pleasant byproduct of the program, according to Hansen.

"These soldiers get a better understanding of their host nation," Hansen explained. "You have some 'barracks rats' that would never see a German if it weren't for the partnerships. You make friends. You never know when you're going to run into them again – and you do."

Award Winners

General Blanchard Award
Division Engineer Brigade

German Armed Forces Command Award
127th Aviation Support Battalion

Brigade Award
Division Engineer Brigade

Single Outstanding Event
1st Battalion, 94th Field Artillery
(MLRS) Regiment

2nd Place Battalion Award
501st Military Intelligence Battalion



American and German soldiers apply camouflage paint to each other during a partnership exercise.