



50

Combined Years
of Security Cooperation

MARYLAND • ESTONIA • BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



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Front Cover and inside front cover: Soldiers from Maryland, Estonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 2015 Admiral Pitka Challenge in Estonia. The first trilateral event in which soldiers from all three entities participated as a team, these images represent all soldiers and airmen of Maryland's State Partnership Program.



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AMDANGA-10ThunderboltIItakesoffonJägala-KäraveteHighway,Aug.10,2017,inJägala,Estonia.AsmallforceofeightSpecialTactics combatcontrollersassignedtotheUSAF321stSpecialTacticsSquadronsurveyedthetwo-lanehighway,deconflictedairspaceandexercised commandandcontrolonthegroundandintheairtolandA-10sonthehighway.(PhotobySeniorAirmanRyanConroy,U.S.AirForce)

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GREETINGS,
THIS BOOK CELEBRATES the anniversaries of long-standing relationships between the State of Maryland and two of our international partners: Estonia, followed 10 years later with Bosnia and Herzegovina. These special relationships grew out of the State Partnership Program, organized by the Maryland National Guard and our overseas domestic security counterparts. While these partnerships started decades ago to strengthen defense and security, they've grown with time and now positively influence spheres of government, education, and economic development.

Maryland's relationship with Estonia began three decades ago when our great state became one of the first in the nation to develop a State Partnership Program. The bond between Maryland and Estonia has informed the trajectory of other State Partnership Programs across America — and encouraged friendship around the world. Together, Maryland and Estonia have exercised leadership on the international stage and helped one another thrive. Decades ago, our partnership helped pave the way for Estonia's entrance into NATO. Today, this special relationship continues to improve military readiness of the U.S. and Estonia, and bolster the cybersecurity infrastructure of both of our countries.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was incorporated into our partnership program in 2003, making Maryland the first state in the nation with two different international partners. Over the course of our decades-long relationship, Bosnia and Herzegovina has proven itself to be a credible and reliable military partner that contributes to regional and global security. While challenges remain in the country, the BiH Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces support the nation's citizens during national emergencies with enhanced capabilities derived from our partnership.

The great State of Maryland appreciates all we have gained through our association with these two countries. As a veteran myself, I've seen first-hand the strong bonds that form between men and women who put on the flag of their country and step up to defend their homeland. These bonds help develop trust, faith, and friendship — not just among individuals but among entire communities.

It's in that spirit of partnership that I extend my best wishes.

Wes Moore
Governor of Maryland





I CANNOT THINK OF A BETTER WAY to start my term as the thirty-first Adjutant General of the Maryland National Guard than to celebrate two significant strategic relationships: the 30th anniversary of the Maryland State Partnership with Estonia, and 20th anniversary of partnering with Bosnia and Herzegovina. I've experienced firsthand the value of these partnerships throughout my career in the Maryland National Guard. More than a dozen military-to-military engagements with partner countries were valuable

opportunities: I learned of our partners' cultures while training side by side with my fellow Soldiers and Airmen. From my lieutenant days on, I was able to both teach and learn through close relationships with my peers in Estonia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is the true strength of the State Partnership Program. Together, over dozens of years, we strengthened our professionalism and military skills.

The State Partnership Program will be one of my top priorities as The Adjutant General of Maryland. This professional development program is vital and valuable within and beyond our borders. I look forward to applying my personal insights and those of our SPP directorate to guide our partnerships into the future.

Thank you to all those who make this program work, particularly all the Soldiers, Airmen, and military civilians in Maryland who have supported this program. I recognize that contributions by representatives of multiple agencies have helped make our partnership programs successful: the U.S. European Command and its Service Components; Offices of Defense Cooperation; the National Guard Bureau; the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the Estonia Defense Forces. Notably, diplomats and attaches in Washington, D.C., Sarajevo, and Tallinn, guide the mandate for our work.

Our decades-long commitment to our partners has no end date. As the clouds of war loom over Europe, the Maryland National Guard stands ready to support our allies and partners in deterring aggression. The Maryland National Guard will invigorate efforts, expand promising endeavors, and explore innovative new ways we can expand our partnerships. We will build on the exceptional work of our Maryland Guard members and partners. We can and will grow our State Partnership to be the standard bearers for the other 53 National Guards to follow and emulate.

Janeen L. Birckhead

Major General, MDARNG The Adjutant General





I AM HONORED to be given the opportunity to support the extremely important 20th anniversary of the partnership between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Maryland. The partnership between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Maryland was established in order to strengthen partnership ties and increase the interoperability of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the U.S. Armed Forces.

As a sign of the exceptional cooperation established at ministries of defense and armed forces levels, in 2011, Bosnia and Herzegovina appointed a liaison officer to the State of Maryland, becoming the first of then 65 partner countries to support the State Partnership Program in this way.

Trilateral activities between the State of Maryland, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Estonia such as the Admiral Pitka Reconnaissance Challenge and the Best Warrior Competition have provided opportunities to work with our partners and challenge our Soldiers. Over the past years, cooperation has expanded, activities have intensified and our friendship has grown and strengthened. Bosnia and Herzegovina and the State of Maryland crowned their long-term partnership with a joint military-police mission in 2013 in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Due to all previous joint experiences, as well as future plans, I believe that it is time that the cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the State of Maryland expand to civilian-civilian cooperation in the fields of health and our economies, especially activities that improve and strengthen the overall relations between our countries.

The implementation of our military-to-military program's activities contributes to the overall increase in the capabilities of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is something for which I am both personally and professionally grateful. In the coming years, our cooperation will be expanded to areas that will be identified as necessary for the further development of our operational capabilities in order to achieve interoperability with NATO. These are processes that we have started together; it is difficult to slow them down and impossible to stop them.

Strengthening our partnership continues to be imperative, especially in today's security environment. I would also like to acknowledge all our esteemed colleagues in the U.S. Armed Forces, especially the Maryland National Guard, the team of the Office for Defense Cooperation of the U.S. Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Governor, and the administration of the State of Maryland. Our relationships are far more than a partnership.

Senad Mašović
Lieutenant General
Chief of the Joint Staff, AF BiH





THIS BOOK TELLS THE STORIES of people who have dedicated their lives to service. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to serve, especially in service to the U.S. Government abroad, know that a key to enduring success are the relationships we build. Through the State Partnership Program, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina have built long-lasting, impactful relationships with their friends in Maryland.

In fact, the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina may not have a better friend than the Maryland National Guard. For the past 20 years, these organizations, and, the people within them, have built bonds that bridge the divides of distance, politics, time, and space. The Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina could always look to the Maryland National Guard for expertise, assistance, and advocacy. When I speak to the Adjutant General of Maryland, or to any of the Maryland National Guard's soldiers and airmen, I know I am speaking to people who understand the issues at hand and what needs to be done. For that I am grateful.

As a nation, Bosnia and Herzegovina faces many challenges in this 20th year of the partnership with Maryland. Precisely because of this, we look forward to a future in which Maryland continues to stand shoulder to shoulder with Bosnia and Herzegovina, endeavoring together to build a better future, as they have for the last two decades.

As we move into the next decade of this relationship, I look forward to enhancing partnerships with Maryland civilian officials in city, county and state government. We also seek cooperation with business, industry, universities, non-profit organizations, and passionate individuals with ties to Bosnia and Herzegovina from across the Old Line State. The expertise and energy that exists in Maryland can help Bosnia and Herzegovina move into a new era: one of peace, hope, cooperation, integration, and progress.

To paraphrase a quote, oft attributed to Darwin, though I am not certain of the origin: "a person's friendships are one of the best measures of their worth." Bosnia and Herzegovina and Maryland have both shown themselves to be friends of the highest order. The years of effort poured into this relationship reflect highly upon them both.

Congratulations to Maryland and its friends Bosnia and Herzegovina and Estonia on 50 years of combined partnership. Here's to 50 more.

Michael J. Murphy
U.S. Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina





VOLUNTEER DEFENSE ORGANIZATIONS in Estonia and Maryland are celebrating 30 years of mutually beneficial partnership in 2023. The relationship, which began in 1991 with U.S. European Command's early attempts to engage with the three Baltic countries, quickly evolved into a permanent program that paired individual State National Guards with partner organizations, which in the Estonian case is called the Defense League.

It is symbolic that Estonia's partner in this endeavor is Maryland. After all, from the early 13th century to the 16th century, modern-day Estonia was part of the political and cultural entity directly under the Holy See known as Terra Mariana, which means "Land of Mary" in Latin. Furthermore, Maryland has been home to one of the largest Estonian communities in the United States.

Estonia became an independent nation in February 1918, and the Defense League was established just a few months later. In July 1922, Estonia and the United States established official diplomatic relations. In 1940, however, the Soviet Union occupied and annexed Estonia, resulting in terrible repression and suffering. We restored our independence in 1991, after more than 50 years under the Soviet yoke. The modern state had to be built from scratch, and one of the first organizations to be rebuilt was the Defense League.

Since those early days, Estonia's strategic direction has been clear - to be part of the West again, to work closely with nations that share our values. Accordingly, Estonia has worked hard to safeguard our own security and that of our friends through cooperation and integration with key transatlantic organizations.

The partnership with the Maryland National Guard has played an invaluable role in this transition from a country with no military to a strong and reliable ally of the U.S. From basic soldier training, to the introduction of the principles of staff work, to joint exercises, Marylanders have helped their Estonian counterparts acquire the know-how that is fundamental to building a modern military force in the service of a democratic society.

Yet no partnership can last long without mutual benefit. I am glad to note that there is a growing number of areas - most notably, perhaps, cyber defense - where members of the Estonian Defense League can share their unique knowledge with their Old Line State counterparts. Moreover, I am very pleased that our 30-year partnership is not limited to military matters. Citizen soldiers in Estonia and Maryland have spread the word in their communities and brought their positive experiences back to their civilian jobs. This, in turn, has led to nine sister city/county relationships and a formal memorandum of cooperation between Maryland and Estonia that was signed in 2019.

Having personally witnessed the Maryland-Estonia partnership grow and flourish for more than 20 years, I am confident that this is just the beginning - the foundation is solid, the mutual respect and interest is there. So onwards for the next 30 years!!

Kristjan Prikk
Ambassador of Estonia to the United States





THE NATIONAL GUARD IS a lethal, cost-effective, dual-role operational force that provides strategic depth to the Army, Air Force, and Space Force, and responds to crises in our homeland. We are capable of operating in a complex global security environment and continue to invest in modernization and readiness to prepare for the threats of the future. Today's National Guard is an integral part in addressing the gravest challenges facing the Joint Force.

Building enduring partnerships at the international, federal, state, and local levels contributes to our nation's strength and readiness. Our approach makes the National Guard a force other nations and organizations are eager to partner with. At the international level, the National Guard's State Partnership Program (SPP) is a key pillar to the Department of Defense's focus on alliances and partnerships. Through the SPP, the National Guard maintains long-term relationships that strengthen alliances, enhance interoperability, reassure allies, and deters our adversaries. Improving the military, security, and emergency response capacities of partner nations improve their resiliency, thereby benefiting the entire international community.

It was not by accident that the National Guard Bureau selected the Maryland National Guard to be among the National Guards to spearhead SPP in 1993; Maryland was well prepared to partner with Estonia and has proven NGB made the right choice. Maryland did so well that NGB gave Maryland another opportunity to partner, this time with Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 2003. I have every confidence that Maj. Gen. Birkhead will continue to keep her State Partnership Program among the best.

I would like to congratulate Estonia and Maryland on their 30th Anniversary in the SPP together. Your relationship continues to set the standard. As one of the original thirteen partnerships, I have been continuously impressed by what you have accomplished together. I would also like to congratulate Bosnia and Herzegovina and Maryland on their 20th Anniversary in the SPP together. BiH and MD have also celebrated impressive milestones such as their co-deployment to Afghanistan of members of the 115th Military Police Battalion with a platoon from the Armed Forces of BiH 4th Brigade. MDNG has conducted numerous tri-lateral exercises and multi-state deployments alongside both partners, and I look forward to what you have planned for the next few decades. Through the SPP, National Guard and partner nation personnel learn together, work together, and prepare - if necessary - to fight together.

Daniel R. Hokanson
General, USA
Chief, National Guard Bureau



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to begin by thanking those who laid the foundation of this book, just as they laid the foundation of the program: Lt. Gen. (ret.) John Conaway, Chief, National Guard Bureau when the State Partnership began; Lt. Gen. (ret.) H Steven Blum, Chief, National Guard Bureau when Maryland first partnered with Bosnia and Herzegovina and longtime Maryland National Guardsman; Maj. Gen. (ret.) James Adkins, Maryland National Guard Adjutant General in the early days of partnership with Estonia; Dr. John Finney, National Guard Bureau Strategic Planner for Key Leader Engagements; and Mr. William Boehm, National Guard Bureau historian and author of *The National Guard State Partnership Program* (2014). All gave their time to talk about the concept behind the SPP and Maryland's initial involvement in the program. They answered my many questions and provided valuable feedback on the manuscript.

To tell the complete story of a partnership, all partners need to be involved. I traveled to Estonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina with Maj. Ben Hughes (MDANG) and his fantastic public affairs team to interview current and former members of the Estonian Defence Forces, Estonian Defence League, and the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These interviews could not have been accomplished without the persistence of the members of the Offices of Defense Cooperation (ODC); in particular, Ms. Anu Kütt of Estonia and Ms. Zlata Veselinović of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These two ladies accomplished what I feared was impossible: coordinating my interviewing twenty senior members of their armed forces in a four-day span on short notice and then answering my incessant follow on emails for clarification and fact-checking. Backing up Anu and Zlata are the rest of the ODC members, many of whom have been with the partnership since the beginning and who gave me additional insight into the evolution of the program. I have included in the glossary the full list of ODC members, without whom this program would not have been successful. Thank you!

I also thank the team that made this book a reality. I put the words to paper, but this team helped to dot the *i*'s and cross the *t*'s. Col. Wayde Minami (MDANG), State Public Affairs Officer, edited the final manuscript and provided many additional details from his experiences in reporting on SPP events. Lt. Col. Adam Smith



(MDARNG), Deputy J-3 and my supervisor, supported me with anything I needed. Lt. Col. Admir Jusupović, Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina's liaison officer to the SPP office, provided valuable insight into the recent history of BiH and ensured the accuracy of the BiH content. The SPP office, led by Maj. Harrison Bittenbender (MDARNG) and staffed by Capt. Nicholas Boeh (MDARNG) and Capt. Phuoc Le (MDARNG), generated the idea of this book and supplied all the information and documentation they had, in addition to making initial contacts to former SPP Directors and Bilateral Affairs Officers, paving the way for them to find time to talk about their experiences. Thanks to them, we have the full list of SPP Directors and BAOs in the back of the book.

I especially thank the MDNG Public Affairs team of Maj. Ben Hughes (MDANG), 2nd Lt. Enjoli Saunders (MDANG), Airman 1st Class Rachel Underwood (MDANG), Spc. Tyrell Boyd (MDARNG) and Sgt. Kimberly Glazier (MDARNG). This team kept me supplied with articles about the SPP, organized the thousands of pictures, chose the ones that best represented the partnership, and drafted a design of the book around the content and ideas.

Lastly, I want to thank the book's contract designer, Ms. Eve DeGrie. Eve took the rough draft design we gave and turned it into what is in your hands. Her suggestions and expertise proved invaluable.

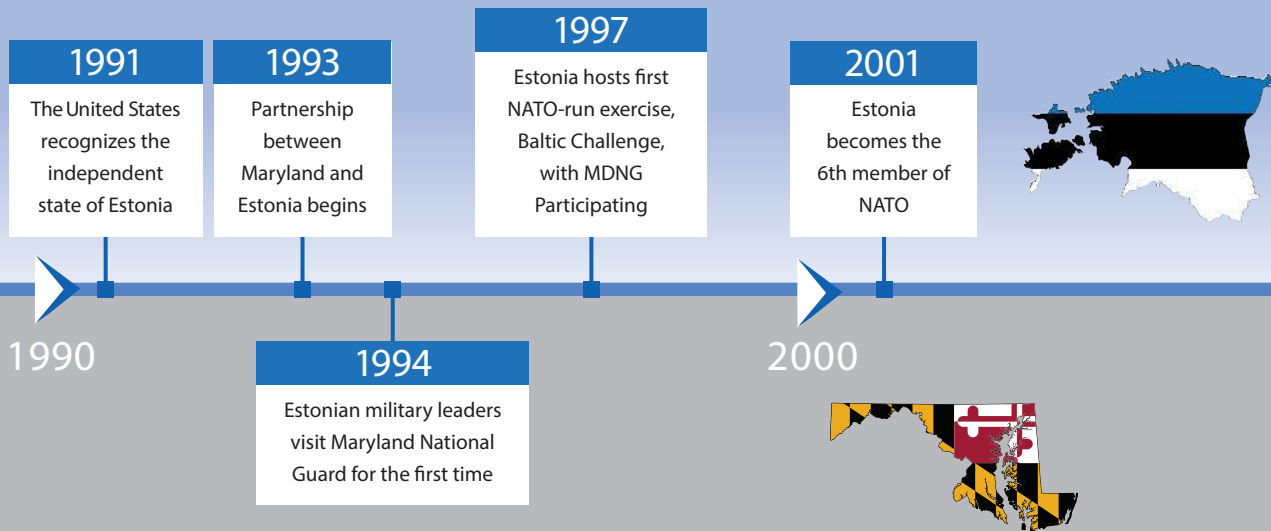
I am honored to be associated with the State Partnership Program by documenting its challenges and successes. The unprovoked invasion of and continued onslaught in Ukraine by the Russian government drives home the vital necessity of tightening our partnerships and letting everyone, especially our enemies, know that we stand together to ensure the freedom of our countries.

Dr. Julie Shively
Maryland National Guard
Command Historian

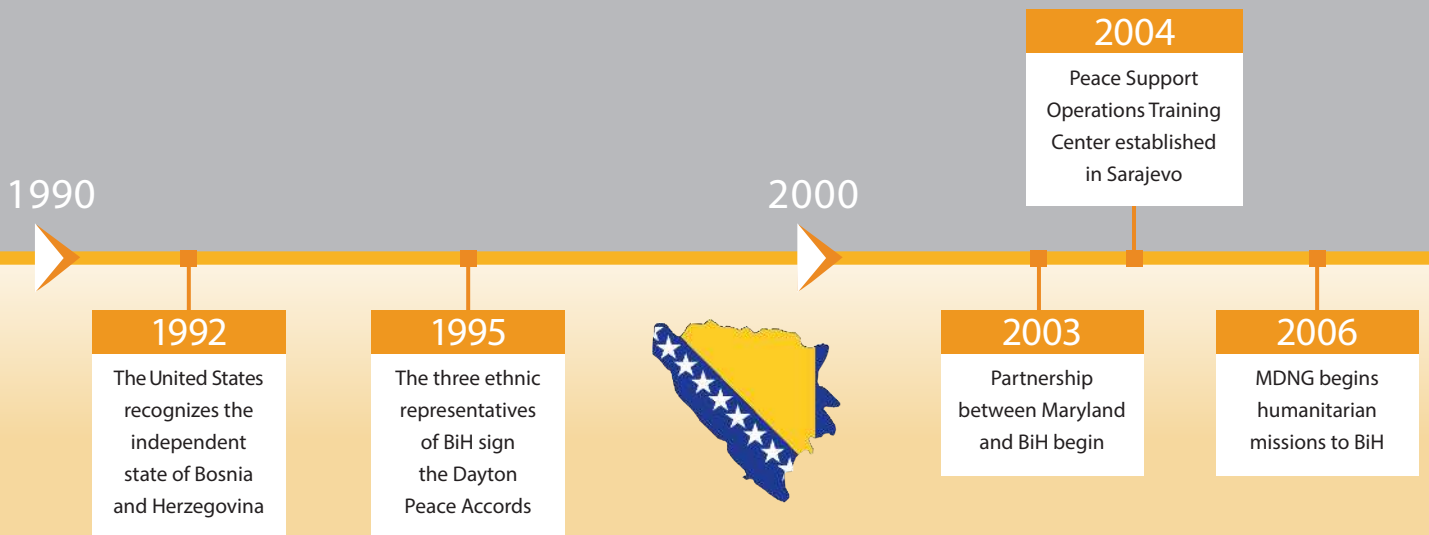


STATE PARTNERSHIP TIMELINE

ESTONIA

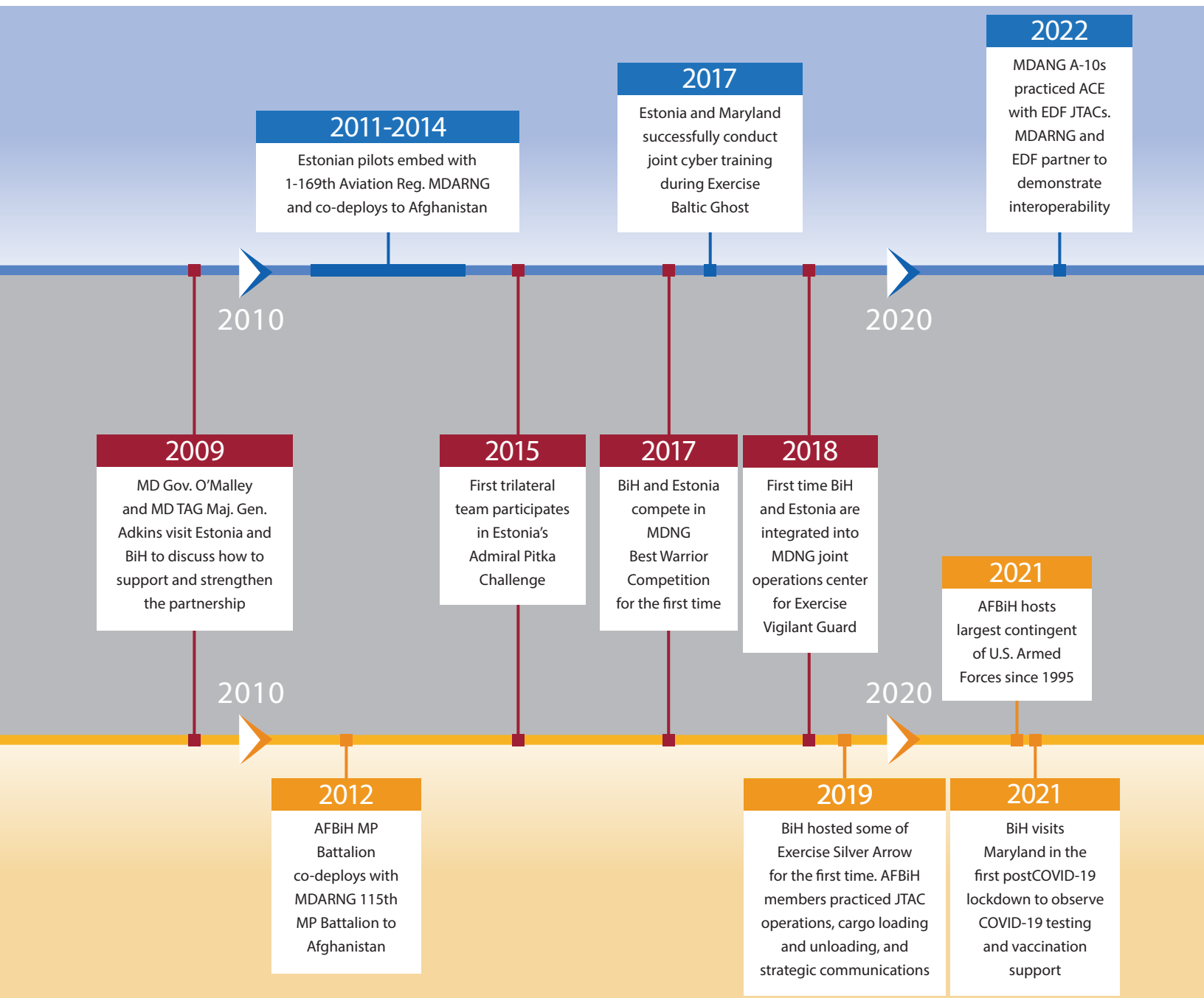


JOINT PARTNERSHIP EVENTS



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA (BiH)





FOUNDATIONS

“This partnership is turning into brother-ship more than partnership because we have so much in common...with Maryland.” –Lt.Col. Admir Jusupovi, Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina Liaison Officer to Maryland National Guard

Between December 1991 and May 1992, the Department of State and Joint Chiefs of Staff designed processes and policies for U.S. contact with the Eastern European countries in what was initially known as the Joint Contact Team Program (JCTP). Under this program, each participating country would support a Military Liaison Team (MLT) of four to six U.S. military personnel. These MLTs, in coordination with the U.S. ambassadors in the partner country and U.S. European Command (USEUCOM), would oversee all operations between the host nation and the United States. The engagements would be conducted by small teams called Traveling Contact Teams (TCT), consisting of military and civilian U.S. subject matter experts.

On December 25, 1991, the Soviet Union formally dissolved. Eight days later, Lt. Gen. John Conaway, then Chief of the National Guard Bureau, sent a letter to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Army

General Colin Powell, in which he offered to use the National Guard as the most appropriate assistance to the newly independent eastern and central European countries. Powell quickly accepted. The National Guard, being a state entity and comprised of part time militia, could relate to the Baltic countries whose size and military make up were similar. Additionally, Soviet troops continued to occupy the former republics so sending the Guard to these countries would not be as threatening as sending active duty military members.

During this same time, the National Guard Bureau (NGB) drafted the State Partnership Program concept. In November 1992, Conaway led a team of military leaders and members from civil affairs, state emergency management, and medical personnel to visit the three Baltic nations to discuss the Joint Contact Team Program, and the State Partnership Program as one piece of JCTP. All three countries expressed interest in

the partnership. The MLTs began deploying in January; and on April 27, 1993, the Baltic countries officially partnered with three states: Estonia with Maryland, Latvia with Michigan, and Lithuania with Pennsylvania.



Members of the Maryland National Guard and Estonian Ministry of Defence during an early Traveling Contact Team engagement in 1996. (Photo courtesy of MDARNG Col. (ret.) William Everett)



FOUNDATIONS

“[W]e live in uncertain times, and potentially dangerous times. . . This is the exact situation that we’ve worked for for all these years, to be prepared to partner to ensure stability and democracy in that area of the world.” –Maj. Gen. James Adkins, MDNG-TAG

From the beginning of the SPP, the National Guard’s unique qualities fitted it for the mission. According to Maryland National Guard Lt. Gen. (ret) H Steven Blum, former Chief of the National Guard Bureau, the State Partnership Program began as a way to assist the eastern and central European countries’ transition to democratic rule following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. “The National Guard Bureau SPP program was born out of necessity,” Blum said. “Eighteen countries were former Soviet satellites who had now just declared their independence. [These] countries [were] being bombarded by anybody and everybody who wanted to help influence their future course.”

In 2023, Maryland celebrated 50 combined years of partnership with Estonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina through the State Partnership Program (SPP). Maryland and Estonia began their partnership in 1993, while Maryland and Bosnia & Herzegovina have

partnered since 2003. Through the years, these two partnerships have evolved and matured as young soldiers and airmen who met during joint contact teams and exchange trips continued to interact as they rose to leadership positions in their organizations. “When I first met Jimmy, he was Lieutenant Colonel Adkins. The last time we met, we were both two-star generals,” said Maj. Gen. Neeme Väli, former Chief of the Headquarters, Estonian Defence Forces. This book celebrates that partnership, built by individuals, sustained through multiple engagements, deepened through the years, and called upon when crises arose.

First meeting of Senior Leaders: Maj. Gen. James Fretterd, Maryland National Guard Adjutant General (2nd from right) standing next to the First Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces, Maj. Gen. Aleksander Einsel (center). Mary Ann Saare, Estonian expatriate and assistant to Maryland Gov. Schaefer. Lt. Col. James Adkins (Adjutant General 2008–2015) is standing at the far left. (Photo courtesy of MDARNG Maj. Gen. (ret.) James Adkins)





ESTONIA

HISTORY AND PARTNERSHIP



“We always like to say that Estonia is also Maryland, because historically, the name Estonia is also Mary’s land.” – Brig. Gen. Riho Ühtegi, Estonian Defence League commander

Estonia’s rich and ancient culture is derived from the various northern European nations that occupied its land from the late twelfth century until it achieved independence from Russia in 1920. Their sovereignty lasted only twenty years before Russia invaded and again forcibly annexed Estonia. For the next fifty years, Estonia struggled in one form or another to regain its freedom. They refused to allow the Soviet Union to obliterate the Estonian spirit and culture. Likewise, the United States never recognized the Soviet annexation of the Baltic nations. Estonia’s stubborn struggle culminated with Estonia declaring itself an independent nation on November 16, 1989. Beginning in April 1991, the Soviet Union loosened its hold over the Soviet republics, formally transforming them into sovereign nations in August 1991. On September 2, U.S. President George H. W. Bush recognized the independent nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In the words of Lt. Gen. Conaway, “peace was breaking out all over the place.”

Gen. John Shalikashvili, then Commander in Chief, U.S. European Command, and Gen. Conaway both understood the significance of beginning the partnership with the Baltic nations. They were the first to declare independence from the Soviet Union, they were similar in size to many U.S. states, they were eager to work with the United States, and sizable Baltic ethnic groups lived in the United States. Both sides found the partnership attractive.

Although Estonia initially partnered with New York, the newly independent country soon allied with Maryland. According to Lt. Gen. Conaway, Maryland National Guard’s Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. James Fretterd, called him several times to lobby for partnership with Estonia. Not only is Maryland the home of

a large number of Estonian-Americans, but Maryland and Estonia share the same name. In the Middle Ages, Estonia was called “Terra Mariae,” or Mary’s Land. Brig. Gen. Riho Ühtegi, Chief of Estonian Defence League, observed, “We always like to say that Estonia is also Maryland, because historically, the name [for] Estonia is Mary’s land.”

In the past thirty years, the State Partnership Program has matured from assisting countries in their journey to become NATO members to working shoulder to shoulder in peace and in war. The partnership has also expanded beyond the military so that now Estonia and Maryland share civic, economic, medical, educational and cultural engagements through civilian organization and partner city agreements.

The Maryland–Estonia partnership thus fulfills the mission of the State Partnership Program “to link National Guard states and territories with partner countries for the purpose of fostering mutual interests and establishing long-term relationships across all levels of society.”



MDNG Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Bruce Tuxill (left) and MDARNG Chief of Staff, Col. Annette Deener (right) meet with Bosnian senior leaders in 2005. Photo courtesy of MDARNG Lt. Col. Tony Bassham)



EARLY PARTNERSHIP ENGAGEMENTS

“I came from Soviet time...we were just starting to learn democracy [but] life was not easy because we still had Russian troops in Estonia.” – Brig. Gen. Riho Ühtegi



Most early TCTs consisted of briefings with the old-fashioned overhead projector. Pictured is MDARNG then Lt. Col. Benjamin Lucas giving a legal briefing to the Estonians. (Photo courtesy of Benjamin Lucas MDARNG (ret.) Brig. Gen.)

Estonia’s small population and history of guerilla warfare lent to structuring its armed forces around small, mobile, and tactical units. “The only training at the time [1991] was Soviet training. So, basically, people rejected the conventional way [of fighting]. We’ve been always thinking we should be able to fight partisan war, small unit tactics,” said Mr. Mihkel Tikk, Deputy Commander, Estonian Cyber Command. Knowing what they wanted, the Estonian military and governmental leaders looked to countries that could help them achieve their goals. They sent their officers to military academies in Finland, Sweden, and Germany, among other countries. While this provided military training and experience, it also created a mixture of multiple military mindsets within the Estonian Defence Forces. “That was kind of a mixture of everything. Then you had to put all that on the table and make it out to become the Estonian military. That takes years,” said Maj. Gen. (res) Neeme Väli, former Chief of the Headquarters of the Estonian Defence Forces.

EDL Capt. Raul Tõnnov and MDARNG Maj. William Everett in Tallinn, 1996. (Photo courtesy of MDARNG Col. (ret.) William Everett)



The State Partnership Program’s TCTs became the interlocutors of the Estonian armed forces during this transition time, providing them with the consistency of people but the flexibility to evolve the program as the Estonian needs changed. In planning these initial TCTs, also called familiarization trips, Lt. Gen. Johannes Kert, the second Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces, worked with Col. Larry Guderjohn, Chief of the U.S. Military Liaison Team. Estonia’s four major goals in these TCTS were: 1) establishing civilian authority over the military, 2) developing an NCO corps, 3) establishing an Inspectors General office, and 4) incorporating chaplains in the military. In accordance with USEUCOM’s guidelines for TCTs, active duty and reserve members, as well as guardsmen, filled the U.S. teams. However, world situations often caused the active-duty representatives to back out, leaving Guderjohn to call the Maryland National Guard to fill the void at a moment’s notice—which it did. Maryland soon became the primary go-to organization for Estonia’s TCTs.



THE FIRST MLT— SEALING THE BORDER TO DRUG SMUGGLING

“It is a partnership of equals” —Lt. Gen. H Steven Blum

The first TCT that deployed to Estonia worked with the Estonian government, military, and border guard units to stop the flow of drugs moving from Russia through Estonia and then into the Scandinavian countries. Experienced Guardsmen staffed this first engagement: Lt. Col. James Adkins, Director of the Maryland National Guard’s Military Support to Civil Authorities (MSCA), led the team that also included Maj. Benjamin Lucas, Maryland Army National Guard state headquarters judge advocate; Master Sgt. Kenneth W. Griffith who served in the Maryland National Guard Counterdrug Program; Sgt. Maj. Thomas E. Hutchins, Command Sergeant Major for the Maryland Army National Guard’s 175th Infantry Regiment and a colonel in the Maryland State Police; and Tom Carr, civilian head of counterdrug operations for Maryland State Police. The importance of this line of effort was underscored when several individuals were apprehended while attempting to smuggle drugs through the Estonian checkpoint during a TCT inspection of the country’s border facilities.

Lucas was also “tasked to determine the legality of the Estonian government’s plans for staffing its interdiction organization with military personnel.” To join NATO, the military had to come under the authority of the civilian government, and the Estonians could appreciate the concept of “Posse Comitatus.” “The Estonian hierarchy were well aware of the evils of allowing the military to enforce domestic policy; they had only just shed a regime where that was the order of the day,” said Lucas.

Looking down on a border checkpoint at Narva, separating Estonia from Russia, 1994. (Photo courtesy of MDANG Brig. Gen. (ret) Benjamin Lucas)



MDARNG Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Hutchins shaking hands with a Russian officer at the Estonian checkpoint during the first MLT site visit to the Narva River Bridge (the border between Russia and Estonia). (Photo courtesy of MDANG Brig. Gen. (ret) Benjamin Lucas)



DEVELOPMENT OF ESTONIAN NCO CORPS

“I served in Soviet army as a conscript, and communication was just from one side, [however, in the United States] generals had no problem being familiar with those serving them on the battlefield.” – Brig. Gen. Riho Ühtegi

Early in the partnership, Guardsmen and EDF members engaged in reestablishing the Estonian NCO corps, originally founded in 1920. Maj. Gen. (res) Neeme Väli remembered, “We knew that we didn’t want to have the [Soviet] system reflected in Estonia. But what else is out there? How should we train our military? How should be our doctrine and training? So we needed to have some kind of help outside in terms of experience [and] methodology.” The way to train their military was to begin with the young soldiers, those without first-hand experience of soviet military training. One significant difference between the Soviet and the U.S. military doctrines is the concept of the Noncommissioned Officer. The Soviet military is centralized with all decisions made at the officer leadership level, while “The U.S. Army NCO is empowered to lead troops and make decisions that are decisive on the battlefield,” said Command Sgt. Maj. David Harry, Maryland Army National Guard Command Sergeant Major.



U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Perlisa Wilson, senior enlisted leader for the Maryland National Guard, and Estonian Command Sgt. Maj. Enn Adoson, Estonian Defence Force, listen to a brief Feb. 25, 2020, at the 1st Infantry Brigade, EDF, Tapa, Estonia. (Photo by MDANG Sr. Airman Sarah M. McClanahan)

The early engagements between EDF members and Guardsmen included discussions regarding the relationship between officer and NCO and the importance of the NCOs’ leadership in the unit’s overall discipline and mission accomplishment. These initial discussions transformed the EDF NCO corps by raising its academic education and imbedding the western concept of noncommissioned officer leadership, while increasing the depth of military training from a one-month basic-level course to four levels of military education that NCOs rotate through as they progress in rank.



Then MDARNG Master Sgt. Harry, First Sgt. Thomas, Sgt. First Class Choma, and Staff Sgt. Simpson during an SPP event in Maryland, Feb 4, 2016. (Photocourtesy of Command Sgt. Maj. David Harry)





EDFSgt. Maj. Siim Saliste, (res) Command Sergeant Major, receives a gift after speaking at the Joint E-9 Professional Development Dinner about the significant role of senior NCOs in armed forces development, October 14, 2016. (Photo by MDARNG Cpl. Elizabeth Scott)

“When I started, it took only one month and I was already platoon leader in the regiment because we didn’t have any NCO course. But, from 2012, they changed [with] squad leaders coming from conscript school... and senior NCOs coming from battle school.”
 – Command Sgt. Maj. Peeter Land, Command Sergeant Major of the Estonian Defence League

The discussions also showed that the same issues and concerns affect all militaries: pay and training, morale and retention, housing and equipment. Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Beyard participated in a number of early engagements and observed that these discussions were “like a validation where, as bad as you think things are, everybody else is dealing with the same kinds of problems.”

One pivotal NCO event occurred in 2015 when Sgt. Maj. Siim Saliste, Estonian Defence Forces sergeant major, visited soldiers and airmen and participated in roundtable discussions with senior NCOs from Estonia and Maryland National Guard. “Everywhere I went I noticed the NCOs were always prepared, always had an answer, they knew how to describe their challenges and most importantly they had suggestions on how to confront these challenges.



EDF Command Sgt. Maj. Peeter Land stands with MDDF Command Sgt. Maj. Guy Johnson, during Land’s visit to Maryland in April, 2022. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)





One of the engagements with the Estonian and Maryland National Guard chaplains in Estonia, Aug. 2015.
(Photo courtesy of MDARNG Chaplain Brig. Gen. (MD) William Lee)

INCORPORATING CHAPLAINS INTO THE ARMED FORCES

“In the midst of battle, we’re the folks who bring some peace.”
—Chaplain Brig. Gen. (ret) William Lee

On Sept. 30, 1995, Gen. John Shalikashvili, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, wrote the following to U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, Chairman, Senate Committee of Armed Services, “. . . As a direct result of our Military Liaison Team presence, several Central and Eastern European countries are moving to ensure the human rights of their military personnel by instituting a military legal code based on our Uniform Code of Military Justice, instituting or reviving chaplain corps, and developing NCO corps.”

In the U.S. armed forces, the chaplain corps ensures that every military member of any denomination may freely practice their particular religion. The chaplain corps is also an integral part of the units’ and headquarters’ staffs. In direct contrast, the Soviet Union was not only an atheistic government, but it was hostile to religions. Once the partnership had been established, however, the Estonians expressed an interest in learning how to incorporate chaplains into the military.



In 1996, Maryland Army National Guardsmen Chaplain Col. Paul Grant and Chaplain Col. William Lee conducted their first engagement with Estonian religious leaders to discuss how the chaplaincy is integrated into the military. For the next twenty years, Lee and other MDNG chaplains and assistants traveled regularly to Estonia to talk about the integral role that the chaplain corps serves in the military and the concept of the chaplain as a staff officer.

From the outset, the Estonian religious leaders embraced the concept. In fact, according to Col. Larry Guderjohn, MLT Chief, “the chaplains really had a good time; built up their chaplain corps to five from one overnight – you couldn’t stop the chaplains.” The EDF chaplain corps now boasts thirteen chaplains representing eight different denominations and faith traditions, with a robust chaplaincy training integrated in the EDF. They have expanded their services to assist in the recovery of wounded warriors, counsel soldiers on suicide prevention, conduct marriage and family retreats, and meet other spiritual needs of the soldiers.

MarylandNationalGuardChaplainsmeetingwithEstonianEDFChaplainsinFebruary,2023.
(Photo courtesy of MDNG Chaplain Lt. Col. Lonny Wortham)



“You couldn’t stop the chaplains.” —MDARNG Col. (ret.) Larry Guderjohn



FREEDOM OF THE PRESS—PUBLIC AFFAIRS

“It was just a lot of the personal one-on-one engagement, which is really what the partnership program is...an exchange of ideas and best practices.” —Col. (ret.) Robert Gould, MDANG



Left to right: Col. Howard Freedlander, Capt. Hunt Kerrigan, and Tom Olson, the first western civilian reporter who entered Estonia, near the Estonian–Russian border, 1995. (Photo courtesy of MDARNG Col. Hunt Kerrigan)

Media relations was a foreign concept to the newly independent Republic of Estonia, but they were eager to learn. The Maryland National Guard Public Affairs team regularly met with the EDF, EDL, border patrol, and civilian reporters to learn how to communicate information in a democratic society. An effective means of communication, especially when translators were still needed, was to role-play scenarios. These scenarios were based on real-world events, ranging from how to conduct press briefings and the different interview techniques, to what soldiers say to reporters in a deployed environment. Because the same Maryland Guardsmen and Estonian public affairs members interacted regularly, participants learned from each other and developed long-term bonds, often contacting each other throughout the years to ask about situations and exchange best practices.

Only four years after Estonia gained its independence, Public Affairs Officer Col. Hunt Kerrigan received permission to invite Baltimore WJHU radio reporter, Tom Olson, to Estonia. Olson assisted Kerrigan in discussing and then demonstrating in mock interviews the concept of free press. “It was so revolutionary that Estonia was opened up, that a Western reporter was there, and that the Maryland National Guard was involved in sharing with the Estonian Defence Forces the idea of media and free press,” said Kerrigan. He emphasized that the professional and personal relationships built between the two countries’ members also contributed to U.S. national security. He recalled

that, as chief of media operations at Camp Victory in Baghdad in 2004, one of the foreign media officers assigned to him was an Estonian. “If we had not established that relationship in 1995, we would never have had Estonians serving with us in Iraq.”



Staff Sgts Michael Davis Jr. and Margaret Taylor, members of the 29th Mobile Public Affairs detachment, prepare the lab scene for the Estonian public service announcements. (Photo by MDARNG Col. Charles Kohler)



COMBINED DEMINING OPERATIONS

The land of Estonia still contains hundreds of thousands of unexploded ordnances, remnants from World War I, World War II, and the Soviet occupations. The Maryland National Guard's 32nd Civil Support Team and 253rd Engineer Company regularly partnered with the Estonian Rescue Board to conduct demining operations and collaborated to stay abreast of new technology and best practices in demining operations.

From 2012 through 2015, Maryland National Guard's engineer, medical and public affairs units joined with the Estonian Rescue Board to support the demining operations in a unique way. In conjunction with the Department of Defense Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA) Program, Maryland public affairs and the Estonian Rescue Board determined to educate the

The MDNG public affairs team used moulage kits with medical training limbs to add realism to the final scene for public service announcements. The purpose of this project is to raise awareness of and educate the public about the unexploded ordnance issue in Estonia. (Photo by MDARNG Sgt. 1st Class Thaddeus Harrington)

public about the dangers of handling bombs, mortars, missiles, and landmines.

As the joint Maryland National Guard 253rd Engineers–Estonian EOD partners simulated finding unexploded ordnance, a joint Maryland public affairs–Estonian Rescue Board crew filmed their actions. Additionally, the Maryland medical team provided moulage kits to portray the wounds encountered from exploded ordnances. The film crew created four public service announcements during three of Maryland's annual training periods. The result was almost immediate as the number of Estonian civilians injured or killed as a result of contact with explosives—a common occurrence at the time—dropped to zero in 2015.



A soldier from the 253rd Engineer Company probes an area looking for a simulated mine hidden during a domestic emergency response exercise at Ocean City, Maryland. (Photo by Cpl. Elizabeth Scott, U.S. Army)





Disaster Response exercise conducted between Estonian Rescue Board and Maryland National Guard, 1996. (Photo courtesy of MDARNG Col. (ret.) William Everett)

NATIONAL GUARD SUPPORT TO CIVIL AUTHORITIES

Maryland National Guardsman, then Maj. William Everett, discusses flooding response options with Estonian Rescue Board representatives during a 1996 table-top exercise in Ocean City, Maryland. Everett, 70th Regional Training Institute (RTI) Commander, acted as the Estonian escort and point of contact for the Estonians' visits to Maryland from 1994–1998. As a Training and Doctrine certified school, the 70th RTI was typically called upon to assist with the early partnership events. (Photo courtesy of MDARNG Col. (ret.) William Everett)

In February 1994, Estonian military leadership visited the Maryland National Guard for the first time. During this visit, they experienced firsthand how the National Guard and civilian state government work together in a crisis. The weather in the mid-Atlantic states hit record low temperatures, accompanied by a heavy snowstorm in western Maryland; meanwhile Baltimore, Annapolis, and the eastern shore received a nasty wintery mix. The Maryland governor declared a state of emergency, which amused the Estonians. The Estonian Defence League Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen. (res) Neeme Väli, and Chief of the Estonian Defence League, Brig. Gen. Riho Ühtegi, considered the temperature, down to minus 10°C (14°F), a mild winter. However the emergency gave the Estonians the opportunity to witness the role of the Maryland National Guard in supporting civilian agencies during times of crises, and watch as the crisis control center quickly dealt with this emergency. “To see in the USA how politicians are also asking advice from the National Guard and this discussion between people, it was very interesting,” said Ühtegi.

“This [first visit to Maryland] was like water dropping on a stone. So we generated the momentum in the [armed] forces to change.” –Maj. Gen. (res) Neeme Väli



“Maryland gave us the example when you have an emergency, and not just a military emergency, but also a civil emergency, how different sides have to cooperate, that you use all the resources you have, and that the military side is useful, not only in wartime, but also normal times when you have that kind of catastrophe.” –Maj. Gen. (res) Neeme Väli

Similar to Maryland’s Department of Emergency Management, the Estonian Rescue Board is the department that manages fire fighting, civil protection and rescue operations during emergencies or times of crises. The Estonian Rescue Board, the EDL, and the MDNG have worked together to establish processes so that Estonian military resources can be used for national emergencies under civilian authority. For example, in 2005, Estonia experienced ten different flooding events, with the area south of Tallinn flooding almost two meters (six feet). Lt. Col. (res) Ragnar Koemets, former Estonian Chief of Protocol, remembered the flooding and that, because of the partnership, Maryland and Estonia together created processes to determine how military assets could be used under the authority of the Estonian Rescue Board. MDNG and EDL continued to partner to refine the collaboration between the EDL and Estonian Rescue Board. In 2009, EDL and MDNG began a five-year military-to-military plan to provide the Estonian Defence League with a deeper understanding of how the civilian agencies leverage the human and material resources of the Maryland National Guard.

A joint disaster exercise conducted in Estonia with TCTs and Estonian Rescue Board in 1996. (Photo courtesy of MDARNG Col (ret.) William Everett)



MEDICAL EXCHANGES



Estonian Rescue Board representative Andres Talvaron his visit to the Baltimore County Fire Department in 2001. (photo courtesy of Estonian Kaitseliit)



Maryland Rescue Board representatives Rivo Salong (with sunglasses) and Marti Magnus and interpreter Inna Kümnik on a familiarization trip to the USA in 2001.)



The Magdaleena Hospital's Amputee Care Center, the first center of its kind in Estonia to treat injured and wounded Estonian troops, opened in 2014, thanks to the support of the Partnership and partnering with multiple hospitals and medical centers in the United States. (Photo courtesy of MDARNG Col. (ret.) Christopher Mackin)

The Estonian Defence Forces, the Maryland National Guard and the Maryland Defence Force medical teams partner to share best practices that often focus on providing medical support during combat, civil emergencies and mass casualty events. This exchange of ideas and people began in 1994 when Maryland Gov. Donald Schaefer allowed the Guard to use people from other state agencies, such as Maryland state police, Maryland Shock Trauma Center, and Maryland Emergency Management Agency in partnership events. Members of the Estonian Rescue Board collaborated with various Maryland counties' emergency management and civil defense agencies to learn how they funded and staffed emergency operations, what and how leaders report to the agency in an emergency, and who gives the order to bring them together. One result was the enhancement of the Estonian firefighters' medical capabilities, as well as their skills in command and control during mass casualty events. Because mass casualties can be caused by aircraft accidents, the Maryland Air National Guard partnered with the Estonian Rescue Board to develop processes and procedures that incorporate all aspects of an aircraft accident and subsequent investigation. These partnership events also refreshed combat medics in their care for trauma patients and treatment of patients from the time of injury on the battlefield through medical evacuation.



Amputatsioonijärgse Taastusravi Keskuse renoveerimistööd teostati Ameerika Ühendriikide ja Eesti Vabariigi koostöös, Ameerika Ühendriikide Euroopa Väekoondise, Ameerika Ühendriikide Tallinna Suursaatkonna kaitsekoostöö osakonna ja Eesti Vabariigi Valitsuse kaasabil.

Renovation of this Amputee Care Center was accomplished as a partnership between the United States of America and the Republic of Estonia, through the combined efforts of the United States European Command, the Office of Defense Cooperation of the U.S. Embassy in Tallinn and the Government of Estonia.

June 2014





MDANG Col. Marvin Nielsen, 175th Medical Group, speaks with Marju Rink-Abel, president of the Estonian American National Council at the Air National Guard base at Martin State Airport on February 8, 2015. (Photo by MDANG 2nd Lt. Benjamin Hughes)

Another set of medical events assisted Estonia in developing programs to provide help and support to Estonian's wounded warriors through their wounded warrior and amputee care center. In 2007, EDF Sgt. Maj. Jaune Engle had been deployed to Afghanistan as a nurse when her base came under rocket attack. Two Estonian soldiers were killed, and four were wounded, including Engle, who lost her right leg. This was the first incident since independence, in which Estonians were killed and wounded to this extent. Engle was flown to England and then to Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, D.C. This attack and resultant casualties spurred Estonia to develop a medical facility to take care of their wounded warriors.

The State Partnership Program and the Office of Defense Cooperation helped Estonia link up with Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, D.C., Brooke Army Medical Center in Texas, and other organizations around the world to develop their Amputee Care Center in Estonia.

Opened in 2014, Estonia's care center reached NATO Role (or tier) 2 of a military medical facility for providing wounded warrior care and rehabilitation. The impact of the medical partnership is far-reaching. Estonia has assisted the countries of Georgia and Ukraine in establishing amputee care centers for their wounded veterans.



An Estonian veteran who received his prosthetic at the Amputee Care Center. (photo courtesy of MDARNG Col. (ret.) Christopher Mackin)



NATO MEMBERSHIP: ESTONIA'S GOAL

Estonia's overarching and focused goal of partnering with Maryland was to join NATO as quickly as possible. In 1994, NATO established the Partnership for Peace Program (PFP) in response to the rapid emergence of independent countries on NATO's eastern flank. As the gateway to NATO membership, the PFP provides nationwide and governmental activities based on individual countries' needs in their journey toward NATO membership. The three Baltic states joined the PFP the same year it was established.

The PFP is a separate program from the SPP; however, many PFP events with Estonia also included Maryland National Guardsmen. In fact, as the PFP events increased, so did the Maryland National Guard's engagements with Estonia through PFP events in addition to SPP events. Although a separate program, according to Lt. Col. (res) Ragnar Koemets, the PFP engagements involved the regular military, but sometimes the team chief could not find appropriate instructors for the event. "It was a lot easier to get the

right people [from Maryland] because some people came [here] already two to three times. They already knew it [the program]," remembered Koemets.

In addition to reformulating the EDF to resemble NATO armed forces structure and ensuring civilian control over the military, becoming bilingual was also deemed to be an important, albeit an often overlooked, advantage. All NATO communications at the battalion level and above are conducted in English. Therefore, "we must be bilingual people if we want to join NATO because we can't take translators to war," said Lt. Col. Ragnar Koemets. Because Estonian is one of the most difficult languages to learn, translators were a necessity before learning English became more common among the Estonian armed forces. Ms. Annika Veimer, one of the first Estonian translators assigned to the MLT program, remembered that sometimes the translators had to create Estonian terms from English words. "The military was just in the beginning years. We didn't even have all the ranks in place, such as war-

rant officer and the different levels of generals."

Estonia stayed its course toward NATO membership. On March 29, 2004, Estonia and six other countries made history by becoming the first former soviet republics to join NATO; a mere thirteen years after regaining their independence, and eleven years since partnering with Maryland.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell (left) welcomed Prime Minister of Estonia, Juhan Parts, to NATO membership on March 29, 2004. (Photo courtesy of NATO website)



“Before the accession to NATO, they [Estonian leaders] knew that we will eventually be there. So, we have to implement all the standards, we have to do things as it’s done in NATO.” – Col. Janek Lehiste, Estonian Air Force Chief of Staff.



Participants of the 1997 Baltic Challenge stood in formation, saluting the NATO flags. Baltic Challenge 1997 was hosted by Estonia in their journey toward NATO membership. (Photoby MDNG Public Affairs)

COMBINED EXERCISE BALTIC CHALLENGE

In their journey toward NATO membership, Estonia and the other two Baltic states participated in their first NATO-run exercise, Operation Baltic Challenge. The Baltic Challenge exercises were created as part of the Partnership for Peace initiative. Active duty troops, reservists, and Guardsmen, some from including Maryland, practiced peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, and honed their military interoperability skills. The exercise also gave the NATO forces opportunities to work with the three Baltic states in their home countries. The challenge rotated annually through the Baltic nations: Latvia hosted Baltic Challenge 1996, Estonia hosted Baltic Challenge 1997, and Lithuania hosted Baltic Challenge 1998.





Ground Crew members refuel a MDANG 175th Wing A-10 on the flightline from a fuel bladder in the cargo compartment of a C-130 during Operation Atlantic Resolve 2017. (Photo by MDANG Maj. Benjamin Hughes)

DEDICATED TO PEACE AND SECURITY IN EUROPE: OPERATION ATLANTIC RESOLVE

“It’s extremely important to show that every square inch of the native territory is going to be protected. It’s not only going to be protected by your own means, but our friends and allies are taking it very seriously.” –Maj. Gen. (res) Meelis Killi, former Commander of the Estonian Defence League



NATO’s Operation Atlantic Resolve emerged as a result of Russia’s forcible annexation of Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula in 2014. To reassure NATO member states, particularly the former satellite states of the dissolved Soviet Union, Atlantic Resolve demonstrates NATO’s continued commitment to the member countries’ collective security and the region’s stability. A number of joint, multinational exercises annually deploy under the umbrella of Atlantic Resolve. The Maryland and Estonian partnership flourished as they jointly participated in the different exercises such as Saber Strike and Baltic Ghost.

Maj. Gen. Meelis Killi, Estonian Defence League Commander, watching A-10s simulate an assault on enemy boats during Operation Heat Wave in the waterways around Roomassaare Port, Estonia as part of Operation Atlantic Resolve. After the mission the A-10s landed at Kuressaare Airfield, Saaremaa, Estonia, August 2017. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)



COMBINED EXERCISE BALTIC CHALLENGE



Soldiers participating in Exercise Baltic Challenge 1997. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)

When Estonia hosted Baltic Challenge 1997, nine countries and more than 2,800 military members participated—the largest multinational exercise on Estonian soil since their re-independence. These exercises showed the citizens of Estonia that NATO was ready to be their partner. This was also the first demonstration of the newly formed Estonian Special Forces paratrooper unit, which jumped from Maryland Air National Guard C-130s. At the closing ceremony of Baltic Challenge 1997, the president of Estonia, Lennart Meri declared,

“Estonia is still a small country. But no longer is she the secluded, isolated and forsaken small country whose fate was decided behind our back. Estonia has been keeping pace with the progress of democracy in Europe and the world at large, and she knows that a small country, too, has its rights and responsibilities. As long as she exercises them she will never be alone.”

Baltic Challenge, and the active participation of Maryland National Guard in the State Partnership Program proves to Estonia that she, indeed, will never be alone.



Maryland Air National Guard 135th Airlift Squadron Commander Lt. Col. Warren Thomas (right) speaking with Estonian Air Force Chief of Staff Lt. Col. Valeri Saare, Riigikogu National Defense Committee Chairman Peeter Lorents, and Acting Air Force Commander Col. Teo Krüüner during Baltic Challenge 1997. (Photo by EDFTõnu Noorits)



MDANG pilot Capt. Scott Pinkham and Capt. Michelle Murray speak with a foreign officer at the airfield at Palanga, Lithuania during Exercise Baltic Challenge 98. (Photo courtesy of MDANG Col. Wayde Minami)



MARYLAND AIR GUARD SUPPORTS ATLANTIC RESOLVE

Exercise Saber Strike is a training and exercise series that began in 2011, initially focusing on the Baltic States. In 2013, Saber Strike expanded to encompass the U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard units, including A-10s from the Maryland Air National Guard's 175th Wing, and the UH-60s from the Maryland Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 169th Aviation Regiment. Estonian pilots Capt. (res) Kallis and Maj. Noorsalu, who were by that time integrated into the 169th, also deployed to their home country in support of Saber Strike 2013.

Maryland's A-10s also deployed in August 2017 to Estonia in support of Atlantic Resolve. This proved to be the largest deployment to date of MDANG personnel to the Baltics. Ten A-10C Thunderbolt II aircraft and more than 270 airmen supported this training event. The Estonian Air Force's recently renovated airfield in Ämari and, according to Estonian Air Force Chief of Staff, Col. Janekl Lehiste, "we still didn't have much air operations going on. So, suddenly, we had a squadron of A-10s landing and operating from there. I enjoyed seeing an apron full of A-10s and tankers, and operations going on."

This two-week training accelerated both units' learning, including Estonian JTAC training using Maryland's A-10s. To train the airmen in how to operate from an austere airfield, for the first time, A-10s landed at Kuressaare Airport in Saaremaa, Estonia, and refueled directly from an RAF MC-130J Commando II aircraft, which carried a fuel bladder in its cargo compartment.



An Estonian AN-2 prepares to land before four A-10C Thunderbolt II assigned to the 104th Fighter Squadron take off for a familiarization flight at Ämari Air Base, Estonia during Exercise Saber Strike, June 2, 2013. (Photo by MDANG Capt. Joseph Winter)





The public highlight of the training was watching an A-10 land on a closed highway in Jägala, Estonia. Col. Lehiste worked with the Maryland Air Guard to make this happen. “It was cool and resonated in the media, even. After long years, A-10s tested the highway landings,” remembered Lehiste. The landings were virtually error-free, although one A-10 landed short of the designated landing area, causing minor damage to both aircraft and a highway sign. Without delay, the 175th aircraft maintainers repaired the fighter so that it could fly to Ämari, then turned their attention to the highway. Brig. Gen. Randolph Staudenraus, 175th Wing Commander, commended the airmen, noting that “our maintenance folks can not only do roadway landings, but roadway repair.

MDANG Brig. Gen. Scott Kelly, Commander 175th Wing, speaks with EDF Lt. Col. Rauno Sirk, Estonian Air Base Commander, at Ämari Air Base, Estonia during Saber Strike, June 5, 2013. (Photo by ANG Lt. Col. James Doyle)

The 175th Wing supported Saber Strike in 2013 and 2015. Shown here, an A-10 Thunderbolt II takes off for a training mission from Ämari Air base, Estonia, during Saber Strike 2015. (Photo by MDANG Tech. Sgt. Christopher Schepers)



EXERCISE BALTIC GHOST 2017

Brig. Gen. Robinson remembered when the Maryland National Guard began planning its participation in Operation Atlantic Resolve in 2017. The 175th Wing Commander, Brig. Gen. Randolph Staudenraus, insisted on the MDANG joining the cyber exercise portion called Exercise Baltic Ghost. “I want to, no kidding, run an exercise on how we can protect and defend in Estonia; our assets and Estonian assets,” remembered Robinson.

To fulfill Brig. Gen. Staudenraus’s insistence on the Air Guard fully participating in the exercise, the Wing planned to demonstrate that, if another cyber attack hit Estonia, Maryland could help — while physically still in Maryland. They wanted to prove that if the Maryland National Guard was called upon by Estonia, they could connect remotely. This would happen using Maryland’s own Virtual Interconnected Training Environment (VITE), a platform that simulated real world networks being attacked electronically. Purchased by the Maryland Air National Guard in 2016, it was the first VITE to be owned by a National Guard unit, and the 175th Cyberspace Operations Group (COG) was eager to test it with the EDL.

To push the exercise further, Maryland’s A-10s were incorporated into the cyber exercise Maryland National Guard’s first completely joint and combined cyber exercise. Additionally,



members from 175th COG and the EDL were integrated into the four cyber teams that comprised the exercise. British cyber operators watched as VITE simulated hacking the Estonian critical infrastructure and simulated malware attempting to disrupt the A-10 operations at Ämari Airbase. Exercise Baltic Ghost successfully demonstrated how allies can defend each other from cyber attacks using multi-domain and multinational forces.

Cyberwarfare operators serving with the 175th Cyberspace Operations Group of the Maryland Air National Guard at Warfield Air National Guard Base, Middle River, Md., monitored cyber attacks on the operations floor of the 275th Cyberspace Operations Squadron, known as the Hunter’s Den, December 2, 2017. (Photo by MDNG J.M. Eddins Jr.)



Participants at the Baltic Ghost Joint Planning Conference, March 2016. (Photo courtesy of MDANG Lt. Col. Janice Hernandez)





MDANG Capt. Ashley Oates, 275th Cyberspace Operations Squadron flight commander, briefs Airmen assigned to the 275th Cyberspace Operations Squadron at Warfield Air National Guard Base at Martin State Airport, Middle River, MD, January 10, 2023. (Photo by MDANG Master Sgt. Chris Schepers)



Outside the Maryland Air National Guard Cyber Operations Center at Warfield Airbase. From left to right: Col. Jason Barrass, Deputy, COG, MDANG; Maj. Harrison Bittenbender, MDARNG and SPP Director; Lt. Col. Charles Gruver, Lead Exercise Planner, 275th Operations Support Squadron; Mr. Margus Matt, Estonia Ministry of Defence; Col. Reid Novotny, MDANG, COG Commander; Col. Vahur Valjamae, Embassy of Estonia; Ms. Berit Marksoo, Ministry of Defence; Ms. Laura Oolup, Ministry of Defence; and Ms. Nele Loorents, Embassy of Estonia. (Photo by MDARNG Spc. Tom Lamb)



MEDEVAC CO-DEPLOYMENT TO AFGHANISTAN

Estonia partnered with the Maryland Army National Guard to develop an Estonian pilot training program for medevac missions in the UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter. Two Estonian pilots embedded into the Medevac C Co., 1-169th for a three-year tour to learn how to lead a squadron. They would form the nucleus of the Estonian Defence Force's emerging Air Force with the planned purchase of UH-60 helicopters. Capt. (res) Rene Kallis and then 1st Lt. Martin Noorsalu piloted this unique partnership program, which included the pilots deploying in 2012 to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Although experienced pilots, the Estonians needed to qualify in the Blackhawk, so attended helicopter flight training at Ft. Rucker, Alabama. They successfully graduated, but then required U.S. congressional approval to jointly deploy with the Maryland National Guard. The MDARNG 1-169th General Support Aviation Battalion (GSAB) deployed on February 3, 2012, but Kallis and Noorsalu had to wait six more months before they could join their unit in Afghanistan, in August 2012.

The deployed medevac company consisted of National Guard members from Maryland, Tennessee, and Georgia. Once in Afghanistan, the company operated out of multiple locations and under the call sign "Devildog Dustoff," because they primarily supported the United States Marines in Helmand Province. Their headquarters was located at Camp Dwyer in Afghanistan's Helmand Province, but they also conducted missions out of forward operating base (FOB) Payne, FOB Shukvani, and FOB Edinburg, as well as FOB Delaram in the Numruz Province.



Estonian pilots Capt. Rene Kallis (center) and then 1st Lt. Martin Noorsalu (right) received a preflight briefing prior to a training mission at Warfield MDANG Airbase. Kallis and Noorsalu flew with C/1-169 from 2011–2014. (Photo by 2nd Lt. Jessica Donnelly)

Capt. Kallis's first medevac mission in FOB Shukvani, Afghanistan. (Photocourtesy of MDARNG Maj. Teressa Parotta)





While deployed, the crews flew medevac missions for Marines and soldiers, including their working dogs, as well as flying logistics and resupply missions. (Photo by Capt. Richard Barker)

MDARNG Staff Sgt. Ray Wheatley, a Blackhawk crew chief with C/1-169th Aviation Regiment, attached to the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade, supervised a UH-60 Blackhawk medevac helicopter as it shut down at Camp Dwyer, Afghanistan, after completing a mission on April 4, 2012. (Photo by 25th Combat Aviation Brigade)



“All three years I was like a Maryland National Guard soldier and it was great.” –Capt. Rene Kallis, EDF pilot

In Afghanistan, the weather daily challenged the helicopter crews. Capt. Kallis’ most memorable weather moment came at the end of a long mission. He was flying the second of a two-ship formation returning to Camp Dwyer. Near the Pakistan border, late at night, about twenty minutes from camp, they encountered a sandstorm. “It was like everything was just one color through the goggles – green. You look down on the desert – nothing. You look in the sky – nothing. All I saw was the one infra-red light [from the lead helicopter] blinking. The unit before us lost a helicopter because

of that [the sand]. They just flipped over and crashed, losing all four crew members.” That helicopter crew had experienced spatial disorientation due to residual dust in the air. Fortunately, on this mission both helicopters landed safely.

Maj. Noorsalu remembered a night medevac mission to a remote outpost with an unimproved landing zone. After three missed approaches they finally landed and retrieved the Marine, living up to the legacy of the Dustoff crews that they “have your wounded.”





Capt. Rene Kallis preparing for another medevac mission with aircrew of C Co. 1-169th. (Photo courtesy of EDF Maj. Martin Noorsalu)

Aircrews flew their Blackhawks through the ever-present dust to accomplish the mission. (Photo courtesy of MDARNG Maj. Teresa Parotta)

The Maryland Army National Guardsman C Co. 1-169th Commander, Maj. Teresa Parotta, created a cohesive unit from individuals who had not previously trained together. The first time we all came together was when we mobilized at the mobilization site in Ft. Hood, Texas. The unit was not only comprised of joint U.S. services but it also combined nations. "This added a layer of complexity that had never been explored before," said Maj. Parotta. She mixed the unit's members to build cohesion with a "one team, one fight" mentality, while distributing a balance of experiences within the crews' capabilities throughout the company. These drove home the fact that they were all on

the same team, not divided by state or international boundaries, fighting a common enemy.

Parotta recalled, "The various accents of our aircrews, at times, became a challenge. In our company were southern accents, Estonian accents, and Baltimore accents. Additionally the British staffed one of the main control towers. They could barely understand us and we couldn't understand them. Someone started "accent days," in which all the radio calls were made with a random accent. Being able to laugh at one's own accent released some of the tension and bridged the divide among the different cultures."



Upon their return, the 1-169th GSAB was awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation for “exceptionally meritorious conduct in their performance of outstanding services during the period of military operations against an armed enemy.” Capt. Kallis and Capt. Noorsalu also individually earned the Maryland National Guard Distinguished Service Cross for their loyal and distinguished service with the 29th Combat Aviation Brigade (the higher headquarters for the Maryland elements of the 1-169th GSAB). The Estonian pilots continued flying and training with the 1-169th after they returned to Maryland, rotating through various staff positions, gaining additional experience in managing a rotary aviation unit. During their tour with the MDARNG, they flew over 28 combat hours, personally flying or flying as aircrew on more than 20 medical evacuation missions, recording more than 230 hours combined in the UH-60. Most significantly, Kallis and Noorsalu became the first Estonian pilots to have gained combat experience since World War II.

The deployment also marked two milestone moments for the Maryland National Guard. The deployed company successfully integrated foreign air force officers into a U.S. Army flight company, successfully completing a combat deployment composed of operational Guard units from three different U.S. states. The second milestone impacted not only how medevac missions are conducted, but also increased en-route medical capability to provide lifesaving care to patients. Assigned under Task Force Hammerhead, the 3-25th General Support Aviation Battalion, 25th Combat Aviation Brigade, C Co. 1-169th’s deployment was the first conventional medevac unit in the U.S. Army permitted med-

ics to administer blood products to patients while in flight. Code named Vampire Missions, the ability to conduct blood transfusions to start triage procedures while airborne mitigated against combat shock and saved time after landing to care for the patient. By the end of December 2012, more than 80 medical patients had received blood products through the program.



1stLt.NoorsaluandCapt.Kallisdebriefingafteramission.(Photo courtesy of EDF Maj. Martin Noorsalu)

Capt. Kallis (left) and 1st Lt. Noorsalu (right) prior to a medevac missioninAfghanistan.(PhotocourtesyofEDFMaj.MartinNoorsalu)



COMBINED CYBER OPERATIONS DEVELOPMENT

Thirty years ago, Estonia had no cyber operations and no electronic capabilities. Rising to become one of the world's leaders in cyber operations required a focused effort on the part of the Estonian people. Starting from scratch with a very limited national budget, however, had its advantages, as Mr. Mihkel Tikk, Deputy Commander of Estonian Cyber Command noted. "We just had to think outside the box and also invent the technology for ourselves." Lacking any legacy systems, they skipped immediately to creating and adapting digital resources to suit their needs.

In 2007, Russia attacked Estonia's digital state and private-sector systems. In the words of Mr. Tanel Sepp, Ambassador-at-large for cyber diplomacy, Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs, it brought Estonia to its knees. This first nationwide cyber attack was a wake-up call for the entire country. Estonia pulled itself together quickly and stood up stronger and more determined to create a tight cyber security net and develop a national cyber security strategy. Part of their strategy included strengthening the partnership between the cyber units of the Maryland Air National Guard and the Estonian Defence League.



Relaxing after a hard day at the computers at the Gunpowder Cellar in Tartu, Estonia, are Estonian Lauri Kriisa; Estonian Ambassador at Large for Cyber Diplomacy, Tanel Sepp; MDANG Capt. Jeffrey Clark; MDANG Capt. Daniel Keffer; and MDANG Master Sgt. Martin Bartkowski. (Photo courtesy of MDANG Master Sgt. Martin Bartkowski)

Estonia's cyber capabilities, cyber security, and electronic interoperability have increased to the point that they now call themselves "e-Estonia." Fast forward eleven years to August 1, 2018, when the EDF officially activated their independent Cyber Command, becoming one of the few nations at the time to have an organization dedicated to cyber operations and information operations.

In parallel to Estonia growing their electronic capabilities, MDANG also had been developing their cyber operations. At the time, the Maryland Air Guard's 175th Information Operations Squadron consisted of only a few people who could see that the future of military security lay in the cyber world. However, by 2015, the 175th Wing boasted a full Cyber Operations Group (COG) with then Lt. Col. Jori Robinson, future 175th Wing Commander, commanding one of the three COG squadrons. As the EDL and MDANG grew electronically, they continued to interact, culminating in the 2017 multinational, joint Exercise Baltic Ghost/Baltic Jungle, the cyber portion of Operation Atlantic Resolve.



Maj. Gen. Linda L. Singh, Maryland Adjutant General, spoke to Elizabeth Horst, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy, and Mihkel Tikk, Director of the Cyber Policy Department, Estonian Ministry of Defence, Aug. 10, 2017. (Photo by MDANG Airman 1st Class Sarah M. McClanahan)





StaffSgt. AndrewCustead, Capt. ThomasPaszek, and StaffSgt. EdgarCastellano from the MDANG 175th Cyberspace Operations Group respond to cyber activity on Estonian networks during Spring Storm exercise, May 8, 2019. (Photo by U.S. Army)

The two cyber commands now conduct whole-of-government, large-scale exercises in a virtual environment. According to Lt. Col. Janice Hernandez, former commander of the MDANG 275th Operations Support Squadron, part of the 175th Cyberspace Operations Group, Maryland and Estonia have evolved to where they together “hone the craft for defensive measures in cyberspace, increasing our capability as well as expanding the sharing of data through NATO portals and the cyber nine line. It’s larger than just Maryland and Estonia, it’s feeding into the Department of Defense, expanding the security cooperation on a larger scale.”

Estonia often conducts site visits to Cyber Command that are not directly related to the partnership. However, the relationship is such that they continue to include MDANG COG either in those meetings or stop to visit them at the airbase. Robinson explained, “It’s always great to have partnerships with nations that are outstanding in an area. Estonia is one of those countries that, because of necessity, have

really become a leader in cyber operations. So, for our Guardsmen to bring their awesome skill sets over and learn from another incredible nation what they’re doing, and to share their skill sets, it just makes our operators that much better.”



Estonian Cyber Command provides command support to the governance area of the Estonian Defense Ministry. The command was established in 2018 as part of the effort to strengthen Estonian cyber defense posture and contribute to ensuring the security of Estonia in general. (Photo by U.S. Department of Defense)



EXERCISE DEFENDER EUROPE 2022

“A lot of the NATO countries don’t have many airplanes in their air forces, but they do have forward air controllers so we bring the airplanes to them.” –Col. Paul Kanning, MDANG



Airmen assigned to the 352nd Special Operations Wing, Royal Air Force, prepared to refuel an MDANG A-10C Thunderbolt II aircraft at Kuressaare Airport in support of the Defender 22 exercise, May 23, 2022, in Saaremaa, Estonia. (Photo by MDANG 2nd Lt. Enjoli Saunders)



Maryland National Guard Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Timothy E. Gowen, stood with MDANG Airman 1st Class Sven Wichman, 175th Wing security forces, as an A-10C Thunderbolt II lands, at the Kuressaare Airport in Kuressaare, Estonia, May 22, 2022. Wichman, an Estonian by birth, previously served with the Estonian Defence Forces. (Photo by MDANG Airman 1st Class Alexandra Huettner)

Defender Europe is an annual multinational, joint exercise that builds readiness and interoperability among the U.S., NATO, and NATO partner militaries. Defender Europe 2022 comprised several notable ‘firsts’ for the Maryland Army National Guard, Air National Guard, and the Estonian Defence Forces. The MDANG brought their entire wing to Europe to practice Agile Combat Employment (ACE) operations, which was the ability to operate out of austere

or unique locations. The MDARNG brought its 291st Digital Liaison Detachment (DLD) and High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) to Estonia to pass Estonia’s directions for long-range artillery fires from their system into NATO’s system. Both these events required extensive planning, which began in 2019 before COVID-19 curtailed Defender Europe 2020 and canceled Defender Europe 2021.

Col. Paul Kanning, 175th Operations Group Commander, worked on planning for the A-10 missions. He remembered that, “Canceling Defender Europe 2020 allowed more time to get creative. We realized the European Command had an exercise called Swift Response, which is a joint forcible entry of large airdrops of paratroopers in two primary locations, north Norway and North Macedonia. That led nicely into our segment of Defender, which was happening in the Baltics.” The A-10s supported Swift Response in both countries by separating their personnel between Norway and North Macedonia, after which they rejoined in Lielvārde, Latvia, to begin the Defender 2022 portion of the exercise. The airmen and aircrews continued practicing split operations, this time between Ämari Airbase and Lielvārde, and Kuressaare Airfield and Lielvārde.





Spring Storm 2019 was the first year that the Estonian Cyber Command authorized Maryland National Guard's 275th Operations Support Squadron to access Estonian networks for the exercise. (Photo courtesy of MDANG Lt. Col. Janice Hernandez)

EXERCISES SIIL AND SPRING STORM

"[Defender Europe] is a good opportunity to exercise the mobilization of reserve forces to work with NATO and EUCOM, and Estonia is working to solidify some of the relationships they have with all the different countries involved in an actual mission like this." –Maj. Gen. Timothy Gowen, MDNG Adjutant General

In the Estonian national epic poem, *Kalevipoeg*, a hedgehog is featured as a wise counselor. This attribute may be why Estonia's quadrennial exercise is named Siil, which translates to hedgehog in English. Spring Storm is the largest Estonian national exercise performed annually which includes Estonian, U.S., British, Finnish, and Latvian personnel. As a NATO country, Exercises Siil and Spring Storm are run simultaneously with and incorporated into the larger set of NATO exercises called Defender Europe. The Maryland Army and Air National Guard have participated in Exercise Siil since its inception in 2014 when Maryland sent its long-range surveillance unit to Estonia. Since then, Exercise Siil has grown into hosting more than 16,000 personnel from up to 15 NATO member countries in 2022.



Army Capt. Timothy Reynolds, commander of the 290th Military Police Company, Maryland National Guard, spoke with First Lt. Mart Sildnik, company commander of 1st Infantry Brigade military police, Estonian Defense Force, during the Spring Storm exercise, May 6, 2019, in Ida-Viru County, Estonia. (Photo by MDANG 2nd Lt. Enjoli Saunders)



JOINT DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS DURING DEFENDER 2022

“Oftentimes, a lot of real wins are happening behind the scenes of people just nugging through it; and testing, and testing, and testing.”
–Lt. Col. Charles Funk, MDARNG 291st DLD Executive Officer

Simultaneous to the A-10 flight operations, airmen worked with U.S. Marines and EDF Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTAC) located on Estonia’s Tapa Range and a maritime range in support of the Estonian Exercises Hedgehog and Spring Storm. JTACs directed the actions of combat aircraft engaged in close air support from a forward position and coordinated with other units in a theater of operation to synchronize long-range artillery fires.

In this exercise, the Estonian Defence Forces Army Fires Staff worked with the Maryland Army National Guard’s 291st DLD and the Colorado National Guard’s Fires Brigade in a breakthrough digital mission. Lt. Col. Adam Smith, Deputy J-3 for the MDNG Joint Staff, remembered planning for Defender Europe 2022 after the 2020 exercise collapsed due to COVID-19 restrictions. “Let’s just put the DLD at the Estonian headquarters and see how far we can push the integration process,” he said. As it turned out, the process was seamlessly integrated across all joint warfighting functions.



Maj. Gen. Timothy E. Gowen, the Maryland National Guard Adjutant General (left), observed the work area of the 291st Digital Liaison Detachment with Col. Kristine Henry, the 291st DLD Commander at Camp Taara in Voru, Estonia, May 23, 2022. (Photo by MDANG Sgt. Lamb, 29th MPAD)





Soldiers of the 291st Digital Liaison Detachment, Maryland Army National Guard, posed with members of the 169th Field Artillery Brigade, Colorado Army National Guard, and Estonian Defense Force fire team on Taara Army Base in Võru, Estonia during Defender Europe 22 and Estonian Siil 22 on May 18, 2022. (Photo by MDARNG Spc. Tom Lamb. This photo has been altered for security purposes by blurring out sensitive materials.)

The Digital Liaison Detachment (DLD) enables interoperability, or liaison, with multinational systems. During Exercises Defender Europe 2022 and Siil, the priority was on multinational fires system interoperability of systems belonging to the EDF and the U.S. Army. The EDF identified a target and digitally passed the information from their unclassified command and control system to a U.S. unclassified system. The DLD then manually uploaded the information from that unclassified U.S. system into another U.S. unclassified system, and swivel-chaired it to the NATO secret system to complete the fires request. The Colorado National Guard then actioned the target with the U.S. high mobility artillery rocket system (HIMARS) artillery system. “It worked for, not only live fires, but several different dry runs plus cross boundary between Estonia and Latvia. It really changes the face of the battlefield,” said Col. Kristine Henry, Maryland National Guard Joint Staff Chief of Staff and 291st DLD Commander during the exercise.

“This exercise proved an Estonian National Guard equivalent [soldier] can use a cellphone to quickly send good, timely, actionable data all the way up the chain to whoever is controlling long range fires.” –Lt. Col. Adam Smith, MDARNG



EXPANDING THE PARTNERSHIP: CIVILIAN-TO-CIVILIAN ENGAGEMENTS

“Some of the mayors in the U.S. have nice budgets, but when they talked to some of the mayors over in Estonia to see how creative they were in getting things accomplished, as far as regular routine things like trash removal, water supply, and their difficulties, our mayors just opened their eyes to how to do things creatively to make things work.”
–Maj. Gen. (ret) Grant Hayden, 29th Infantry Division, Commanding General

The State Partnership Program is designed to develop and maintain security relationships between the United States and other nations. While this begins with military-to-military engagements, long-term security and the economic strength of a nation are intertwined. When Maj. Gen. Linda Singh visited Estonia in 2015, she was “floored by the level of the Estonian entrepreneurship.” She was determined to increase the civilian-to-civilian exchanges as a logical extension that would strengthen both Maryland and Estonia.

The intersection between civilian growth and military security runs through both the Maryland National Guard and the Estonian Defence League’s structure. Because both organizations comprise civilian militia, or home guard, armed forces members could see both the military as well as the civilian aspect of SPP engagements. “In some [SPP] events someone like a lance corporal was assigned but he was also a mayor of somewhere,” said Lt. Col. (res) Ragnar

Koemets. An early example of this dual role was Thomas Beyard. In his civilian career, he was director of planning and public works for the town of Westminster, Maryland. However, in 2000, he traveled to Estonia as command sergeant major in the Maryland National Guard.



Estonian dancers in traditional dress hug Maryland National Guard Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Beyard during Maryland National Guard Unity Day, April 12, 2019 (Photocourtesy of Command Sgt. Maj. (ret.) Thomas Beyard, MDARNG)





Then MDNG Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Linda Singh, shows off her dance skills after she and other Guardsmen learn some basic moves from the Estonian Folk Dance Group at the Fifth Regiment Armory, Baltimore, Maryland, July 6, 2017. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)

Beyard and others recognized the potential of partnering civilian entities. Two years later, he spearheaded the first partner city agreement between the two countries. In 2002, the Mayor of Westminster, Maryland, and the Mayor of Paide, Estonia, signed a declaration of understanding to “explore and promote opportunities for cooperation between Westminster and Paide.” From that first partner city agreement, seven additional governments in Maryland and in Estonia have partnered to exchange ideas and strengths in culture, economics, governance, philanthropy, and education: Oakland–Valga, Bel Air–Narva, Cumberland–Viljandi, Annapolis–Tallinn, Salisbury–Tartu, St. Mary’s County–Pärnu County, and Charles County–Jõgeva County.



Maryland Guardsmen dance with Estonians in Tallinn during an early MLT, 1999. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)



The Estonian Folk Dance Group from Paide, Estonia demonstrate traditional dances for members of the Maryland National Guard during Unity Day, April 12, 2019. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)



PARTNERSHIPS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Civic leaders regularly reaffirm their joint commitment to civilian partnerships. In 2009, Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley and Mr. Nikolai Vojeikin, Deputy Governor of Harju County, Estonia, signed a memorandum of understanding to combine knowledge and resources to further research in academia, industrial, and economic sectors. In 2017, Lt. Gov. Boyd K. Rutherford led a team of trade officials to Estonia to learn about the country's approaches to

and practices in cybersecurity and drug misuse. He also met with private companies to promote Maryland as an ideal U.S. location for trade and investment. In 2019, Gov. Larry Hogan and Estonian Ambassador Jonatan Vsevirov signed a five-year Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen the civilian partnership in the areas of economic development, tourism, education, and the arts. Cities and counties across the world face the similar daily challenges of governance. These partnerships provide the forum for business and civic leaders to share both their challenges and their successes.



Maj. Gen. James Fretterd, Estonian President Lennart Meri, Annapolis Mayor Dean Johnson, and Maryland Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend sign the Sister City agreement between Annapolis and Tallinn, 1997. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)

Maryland's Gov. O'Malley and Estonia's Harju County deputy governor, Nikolai Vojeikin, sign a Sister State memorandum of understanding while Estonia's ambassador to the United States, Väino Reinart watches, May 18, 2009. (Photo courtesy of Maryland-Estonia Economic Exchange Council)



PARTNERSHIPS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

“The university link is very strong because Salisbury State is an international program, and they’ve tied into the University of Tartu and its sister universities.” —MDARNG Col. (ret.) Milton Davis

The civilian-to-civilian engagements have also been actively endorsed by the leaders of Maryland and Estonia in education and economics, as well as city and county governance. The first joint agreement occurred in 1999 when Kalev G. Stoicescu, Estonian Ambassador to the United States, and Maj. Gen. James Fretterd, Adjutant General of the Maryland National Guard, created a plan for partnering both entities’ institutes of higher education. Since that first outreach, Maryland’s Salisbury University established “study abroad” programs with Tallinn University of Technology and the University of Tartu in areas such as cyber and business, in addition to virtual conferences and instructor exchange programs. The University of Maryland Eastern Shore is a partner with Estonian Aviation Academy to promote international research and teaching and broaden international understanding, and Towson University has hosted guest speakers from Estonia. Additionally, since 1999, young men and women from Estonia have attended the U.S. Military Academy and the U.S. Naval Academy.

Additionally, Garrett College in western Maryland partners with Estonia to offer scholarships to Estonian students to study at the two-year school. The partnership gradually led to community and business relationships between Garrett County and towns in Estonia.



Salisbury University officials gather in Annapolis to sign a memorandum of understanding for a new academic program with Tallinn University of Technology in 2012. The collaboration, which also involved the University of Tartu, allow Salisbury University students pursuing degrees in computer science, mathematics, or information systems to complete their senior year in the program Salisbury Abroad: Cybersecurity Program in Estonia. (photo courtesy of Salisbury University)



Estonian President Lennart Meri visited Maryland in 1999 to discuss opportunities for young Estonians to gain an education in the United States military schools. During this trip, he met with Estonian cadets attending the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, and with Estonian midshipmen attending the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. They also met with Maryland educators who visited Estonia later that month. (Photo by Press Service of the Office of the President Kadriorg, April 27, 1999)





BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

HISTORY AND PARTNERSHIP





Princip's Bridge in Sarajevo spans the River Miljacka. It also marks the location where Archduke Franz Ferdinand was killed, igniting events that led to World War I. (Photo courtesy of Mahir Hamzić, BiH ODC Programs Manager)

On April 6, 1992, the European Community and the United States formally recognized the Balkan nation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). This marked the first time since 1463 that this region was not part of a foreign empire or larger republic. This recognition also marked the beginning of events that cascaded throughout BiH when the Cold War ended.

During World War II, the future president of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz, known as Tito, successfully led one of the resistance groups, which subscribed to communist ideologies. By war's end, Tito and his Partisans controlled much of Yugoslavia. As leader of post-war Yugoslavia, Tito formed six republics within its borders (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia). Politically, Tito charted a middle course between NATO and the Soviet Union's Warsaw Pact. What seemed to be a communist success story, however, was sustained through brutal suppression of ethnic divisions and any suggestion of dissent.

The Balkans' location made it the crossroads of cultures. It was also the crossroads of religions. When the Catholic religion split in 1054, dividing Catholicism into Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, the Balkans also split into those two religious groups. The later invasion of Islamic Ottomans gave rise to the third major religious influence. Ethnicities soon identified themselves through these three religions: Roman Catholic Croats, Orthodox Christian Serbs, and Muslim Bosniaks. These ethnic divisions became fault lines that cracked open when Tito died in 1980. By 1991, the country began to break apart.





Several MDARNG members of SFOR-7, 629th Military Intelligence Battalion stand outside their headquarters in Sarajevo. The Maryland National Guard rotated three times into BiH; in IFOR-1, SFOR-7 and SFOR-10. In this picture, members of SFOR-7 from the MDARNG pose in front of their Task Force headquarters. (Photo courtesy of MDNG)

SUPPORTING THE DAYTON PEACE ACCORDS

Bosnia and Herzegovina seceded from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in March 1992. A country within which all three major ethnicities resided, the declaration resulted in a series of violent incidents that targeted each ethnicity in turn. These attacks became open warfare by April 6, 1992. The people of BiH were engulfed in war until December 14, 1995, when representatives of the Bosniak, Croatian, and Serbian ethnic groups met in Dayton, Ohio, to negotiate and sign the General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFAP). Commonly called the Dayton Accords, this document established a framework around the three major ethnic groups to move BiH forward as one country. It accomplished this by establishing two highly autonomous entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS), as well as one self-governing territory called the Brčko District. Bosnia and Herzegovina's central government would be led by a tripartite presidency, whose head rotates every eight months among a Bosniak, Serb, and Croat member. The country still operates under this tripartite format.

Peace in the country was initially established and subsequently maintained by the mandate of international forces of the UN, NATO, and EU through a twelve-month rotation of a multinational Implementation Force (IFOR). The operation, named Joint Endeavor, sought to assist in reconciling the three ethnic entities and accomplishing the stipulations of the Dayton Accords.

The Maryland National Guard's connection to the people of BiH date back to when C-130 crews from the 135th Airlift Group flew humanitarian relief missions into the country as part of Operation Provide Promise. Once the peace accords were signed, crews then flew support missions into Sarajevo and other locations in support of the Implementation Force (IFOR). The Maryland National Guard's 29th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment served in Bosnia with IFOR-1 in 1996, becoming the first Army National Guard unit to step foot in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Although IFOR succeeded in its specific mission, peace remained tenuous in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, on December 20, 1996, IFOR transformed into the Stabilization Force (SFOR). SFOR operated under Operations Joint Guard and Joint Forge to sustain peace in BiH. Initially implemented for 18 months, Joint Guard rotated national guard units into BiH through 2004. The Maryland Army National Guard participated twice in the SFOR rotations, beginning with SFOR-7 (April—October 2000). The MDARNG's 629th Military Intelligence Battalion, commanded by then Lt. Col. Edward Leacock, deployed on SFOR-7, becoming the first Army National Guard unit to conduct military intelligence operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The following year, SFOR-10 (October 2001– April 2002) deployed, led by the 29th Infantry Division commander, then Maj. Gen. H Steven Blum.

Throughout this time, the Maryland Air National Guard A-10s performed multiple deployments to Aviano Airbase, Italy, where they flew peace enforce-

ment missions over Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similarly, Maryland C-130 crews deployed repeatedly to Ramstein Air Base, Germany, where they flew airlift missions in support of SFOR.

Soon after the Dayton Accords was signed, the Maryland National Guard began assisting BiH in accomplishing the document's stipulations. MDNG attorneys Col. Thomas Hickman and Col. Benjamin Lucas deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996 and again in 1998. They and other National Guard attorneys provided legal expertise to help ensure that the new governmental infrastructure at the federal and local levels included the required democratic processes. They also oversaw the country's first democratic national elections in 1996.

In September 2001, just after the terrorist attack on the United States, SFOR-10 deployed under the 29th Division Commander Maj. Gen. H Steven Blum, a member of the Maryland National Guard for more than three decades. Pictured here are Brigade Commanders of SFOR-10 with Blum center front. (Photocourtesy of MDARNG Lt. Gen. H Steven Blum)





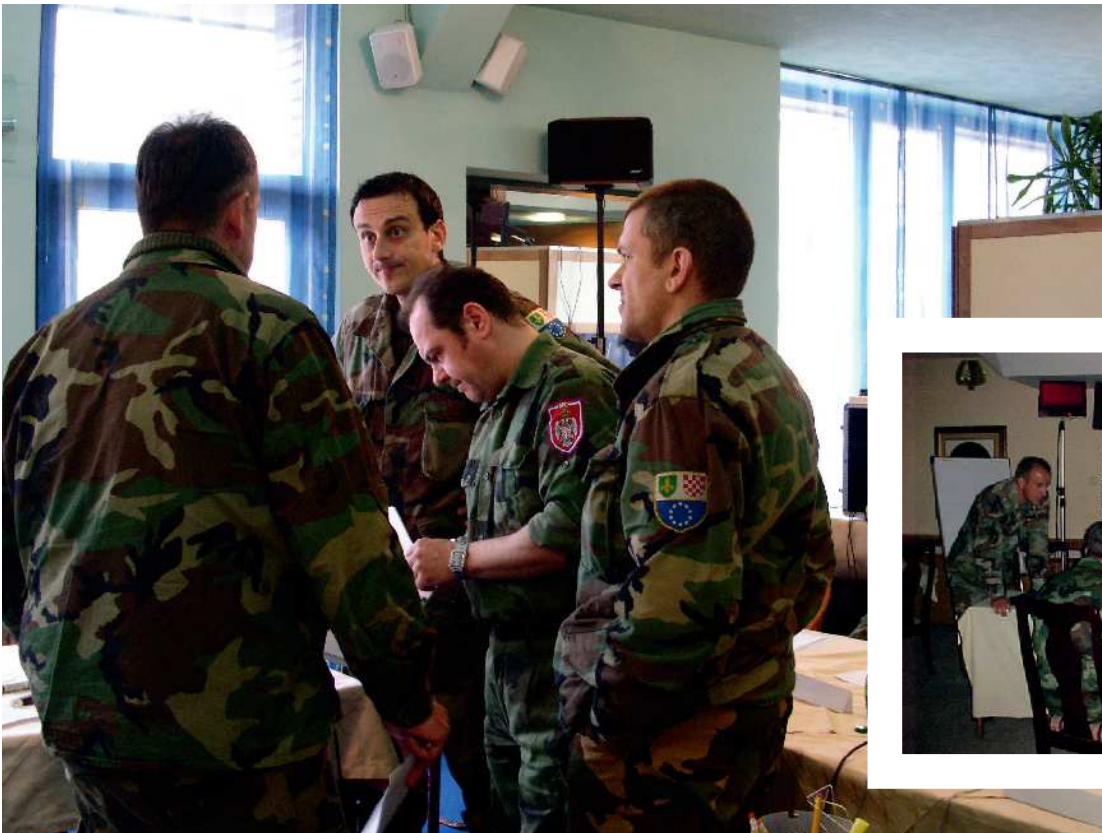
Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum (left), then Chief of the National Guard Bureau, visited Bosnia and Herzegovina in support of the State Partnership Program, 2003. (photo courtesy of MDARNG Col. (ret) William Everett)

BEGINNING OF THE PARTNERSHIP

When Bosnia and Herzegovina partnered with Maryland National Guard in 2003 through the State Partnership Program, there was a mixture of uncertainty and hope as to what the relationship would entail. “We didn’t know what you guys can offer and what we can ask for, and how we can cooperate [in the beginning],” said retired Col. Dževad Burić, the first AFBiH liaison officer to MDNG. On the other hand, Zoran Šajinović, Assistant Minister for International Cooperation, Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Defense, described the program as “an answer to the questions that we were not able to ask at the time . . . the SPP was the missing part that filled in all gaps.”

The partnership began at a time when the U.S. was deeply involved with fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. As a result, the initial events were foundational, building the relationship with small military-to-military engagements. By 2006, BiH had established its armed forces and the MDNG’s wartime deployment rotations had settled into a steadier routine, allowing the partnership to expand and deepen into what it is today.





(Photo courtesy of Col. (ret) William Everett)



(Photo courtesy of Col. (ret) William Everett)

The long-term success of the program depended on the ability of the MDNG and AFBiH, to bring the same men and women together throughout their military careers. This consistency in the people and the units led to developing a true partnership relationship. "It's pretty much the same people every year [in the engagements]. So there's some really deep personal relationships that get built over time . . . we're not starting off from ground zero, because, even if I don't know the guy and he doesn't know me, he knows Maryland and I know Bosnia so we can already start off a little bit of a higher level . . . it's cohesion and trust," said MDARNG Lt. Col. Alexi Franklin. According to Lt. Col. Admir Jusupović, liaison officer of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Maryland National Guard and assistant defense attaché to the Embassy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the relationship has evolved to the point where MDNG members and members of the AFBiH feel a real sense of kinship. "We are celebrating twenty years of partnership with Maryland National Guard. And I would say that this partnership is turning to brotherhood because we have so much in common," he said.



Pictured is a conference during one of the first familiarization events in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Until 2006, two separate militaries existed in BiH: the Army of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Army of the Republika Srpska. Notice the two different uniforms and patches. In 2006, these two entities joined to become one Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Photo courtesy of Col. (ret) William Everett)



BRINGING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO REMOTE VILLAGES

A country that experienced war within its borders for three years, Bosnia and Herzegovina's three primary ethnic groups perceived the United States and its role in forcing a cessation of hostilities in vastly different ways. The State Partnership Program provided an opportunity to help overcome lingering feelings of animosity and demonstrate that Maryland and the United States had friendly intentions toward all citizens of the country. Therefore, the first events focused on direct contact with civilians through humanitarian assistance projects.

"Reaching out was made easier through soft diplomacy such as, 'okay, let us help your children,'" said Vanja Šantić, programs manager for Bosnia and Herzegovina Office of Defense Cooperation. This outreach to citizens of all ethnicities was especially important in areas hardest hit by the war. As Maryland National Guardsmen and Armed Forces of Bosnia and

Herzegovina members worked together to physically build up communities, they also built positive social capital for both countries' militaries. The AFBiH found ways in which their military engineers could assist Maryland Guardsmen in civilian projects, thus demonstrating how the military could benefit civilians. It also opened doors to broader areas of communication and partnership between the two armed forces.



A local woman is given the gift of sight after not having the proper treatment for many years, as Airman 1st Class Jocelyn Campbell of the 175th Wing, Maryland Air National Guard, tests her new prescription glasses in a schoolhouse in Skugrići, Eastern BiH. (Photo by MDARNG Spc. Loni Kingston)

Two medical personnel from the Maryland Defense Force assist a Bosnian villager while others wait for their turn. The humanitarian mission in 2006 was the first time that the Maryland Defense Force activated for an event outside of the United States. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)





AFBiH, MDDF, and MDANG personnel coming together to assist the communities of BiH. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)

In 2006, the 175th Medical Group and medical personnel from the Maryland Defense Force cared for more than 2,000 patients in fourteen different villages in the Srebrenica region, an area in which receiving medical attention was difficult. Approximately eighty medical personnel with specialties ranging from dentistry and optometry to physicians and nurses tended to basic medical needs of children and adults. A traveling laboratory and pharmacy completed the medical team and provided some relief to the patients, some of whom walked miles to reach the clinic.



The long lines show how great the medical needs are in the villages. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)



An AFBiH member translates the medical needs of the village to an MDDF medic. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)



MDANG AND AFBiH REBUILD MEMORIAL AND SCHOOLS

The image in the foreground below marks the location at Mount Igman where, in 1995, a car carrying three American diplomats rested after rolling down the side of a mountain. The Americans were en route to Sarajevo to broker a peace agreement between the warring factions. In 2008, a joint BiH-MDANG team, led by AFBiH Sgt. Maj. Adil Memišević restored the monument that memorializes the three diplomats and their French driver. Sgt. Maj. Adil Memišević had also helped erect the original monument in 2001.

The 175th Civil Maintenance Squadron mount conduit and run electrical wires to restore power and light to the primary school in Vlasenica. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)



Master Sgt. Robert A. Gordon and Tech. Sgt. Shaun Blische, both members of the MDANG 175th Civil Engineer Squadron help restore the memorial to the three diplomats and their French driver. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)





The ceremonial ribbon cutting ceremony in Sarajevo and Pale on December 15, 2016 opened the renovated kindergartens "Dunja" in Sarajevo and "Ladybug" in Pale. These reconstruction projects were realized as part of the joint cooperation of the Maryland National Guard and the Armed Forces of BiH. (Photo courtesy of Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Defence)

"It was funny just to see the interaction of the Maryland soldiers and the people living there," – Mr. Vanja Šantić, Office of Defense Cooperation Programs Manager

Rebuilding the schools also combined the efforts of both armed forces. AFBiH engineers first rebuilt the exterior of Vlasenica school's exterior. MDANG engineers later arrived at Vlasenica and renovated the interior. "This was very important for the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina because it was a young institution that was still developing trust with the civilians," said Maj. Gen. Gojko Knežević, Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina deputy chief of defense for resources. "The people received us very well and went out of their way to help us with anything they could," said MDANG Master Sgt. Janice Grennon. Both Guardsmen and civilians made sincere but sometimes awkward approaches to bridge the cultural and language gaps. "It was funny just to see the interaction of the Maryland soldiers and the people living there," remembered Šantić.

Staff Sgt. Tory M. Greer, Sr. Airman Robert E. Gillium and Staff Sgt. Rachael Sindelar, members of the MDANG 175th Maintenance Squadron, install flexible conduit for a new electrical system at a primary school in Vlasenica, Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina July 15, 2008 (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)



EMERGENCY DOMESTIC OPERATIONS SUPPORTING CIVIL AUTHORITIES

Maryland National Guard has partnered with the U.S. Civil-Military Emergency Preparedness (CMEP) Program since 2007 to enhance the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina's capabilities in providing military support to civil authority during times of domestic crises and natural disasters. Maryland's 32nd Civil Support Team (CST), the AFBiH Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) unit, and Bosnia and Herzegovina's first responders work with civilian emergency response experts and members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to design events that encompass relevant emergency response scenarios that Bosnia and Herzegovina might encounter. These events include hazardous materials (HAZMAT) training; chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) protection operations; and natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, and landslides. During these events, participants discuss social media information management during times of crises and how to provide appropriate and timely information to the public.



AFBiH Cpl. Denis Nišić (left) shows a piece of equipment that the AFBiH would use in a chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear incident to MDARNG Sgt. Matthew Taylor from the 231st Chemical Company during training about CBRN and toxic industrial materials incidents in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on March 20, 2019. (Photo by MDARNG Cpl. Elizabeth Scott)



“HAZMAT training was very successful, learning how to operate with hazardous material and how to protect yourself, especially from the perspective of [BiH’s] lack of equipment for CBRN.” – Mr. Haris Pešto, Office of Defense Cooperation, AFBiH

Pictured are images from the 2017 Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the first time. Maryland joined 34 countries to enhance the interoperability and effectiveness in responding to national emergencies by NATO allies and partner nations.



These annual events added skills and knowledge to both AFBiH and the MDNG. For example, the AFBiH supported civil authorities during the 2014 flooding that raged throughout the country. Alternately, the MDNG realized crises occurring in the United States also happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Lt. Col. Warren Bryant, Maryland Army National Guard Deputy U.S. Property and Fiscal Officer attended several tabletop exercises and learned that “a lot of the challenges that we experienced are not unique to the United States.” He said that these events provided a way to cross-pollinate ideas among different agencies and between Maryland and Bosnia and Herzegovina.



AFBiH began developing standards for CBRN training in accordance with US and NATO procedures starting in 2015. It also integrated AFBiH EOD units with CBRN units in order to fulfill key tasks of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina domestically and in deployable peace support operations. (Photo by MDARNG Cpl. Elizabeth Scott)





MDANG Tech. Sgt. Patricia Medina, performs a two-person carry with members of the AFBiH during a medical training exercise August 26, 2019 in Banja Luka, BiH. (Photo by MDANG Staff Sgt. Enjoli Saunders)

MEDICAL EXCHANGES AND EVENTS

Exchanging medical practices and techniques regularly brought together medical units from across the state of Maryland, such as the 175th Medical Group, 1-169th Aviation Regiment, and the medical personnel of the Maryland Defense Forces, to partner with the Ministry of Health for Bosnia and Herzegovina and AFBiH health care members.

Early in the partnership, Maryland familiarized AFBiH soldiers and medics with tactical-level medical tasks that prepared them for NATO peacekeeping deployments. Now, medical partnership events occur four times annually. The events encompass training and refreshing AFBiH military police, artilleryists, and infantry soldiers in self-aid, buddy care and initial triage capabilities; emergency medical technician training; and basic life support techniques.

As the partnership matured, these multi-annual events began to incorporate discussions regarding the latest medical techniques. Often, the training combines real world medical support for military exercises. During those events, the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina trains the medics and doctors in field tactics.

Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina soldier Maida Grabus (left), a medic with the 7th Logistics Support Battalion, trains in combat medical care with MDARNG Guardsmen Sgt. Colin Winand (center), a healthcare specialist, 1-169th Aviation Regiment, and Sgt. 1st Class Billy Weber, a healthcare specialist with the State Medical Detachment. (Photo by MDARNG 1st Lt. Jasmine Mathews)





175th Medical Group on their first trip to BiH to assist in training soldiers and medics in providing medical aid during combat, March, 2016. (Photo courtesy of 175th Wing Medical Group)

After one combined event in 2022, which also included active duty units from another state, 1st Sgt. Billy Weber, instructor and senior enlisted NCO for the State Medical Detachment, noted that, "These missions not only improve the camaraderie and training of our soldiers with a foreign military but they also improve the morale and cohesion of the U.S. instructor team."



MDARNG Maj. Kritis Dasgupta, a field surgeon with the Maryland State Medical Detachment, receives rappelling training from a service member from the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (right) at Kasarna Manjaca, Dobrnja, Bosnia and Herzegovina on July 18, 2022. (Photo by MDARNG 1st Lt. Jasmine Mathews)



AFBiH participants in a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and toxic industrial materials incident training event demonstrate how to care for an injured member of the collection team during a combined training exercise in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on March 21, 2019. (Photo by MDARNG Cpl. Elizabeth Scott)



EXERCISE SILVER ARROW

“We had the opportunity to not only build public affairs but build air-ground integration. It integrated not only the armed forces of the United States and Bosnia Herzegovina but also the local community.” – Mr. Mahir Hamzić, BiH Office of Defense Cooperation

Silver Arrow is a six-month rotation to Germany of U.S. Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard aircrew and C-130 aircraft in support of surging airlift requirements within the U.S. European Command. In the 2019 Exercise Silver Arrow, the Maryland National Guard augmented their forces with C-130 aircraft and aircrews from the Ohio Air National Guard’s 179th Airlift Wing. These aircrew demonstrated to AFBiH members the tactics, techniques and procedures for cargo loading and unloading, joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) operations, and strategic communications. The hands-on JTAC training culminated in the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina directing a UH-1H Iroquois from the 2nd Helicopter Squadron, AFBiH Air Force Brigade, around a military base several times, and then directing the path of two U.S. Air Force F-16s.

On the final day of the exercise in Tuzla, the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina hosted an



MDARNG conducted JTAC training to AFBiH members in directing a UH-1H Iroquois at Tuzla Airport, Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Photo by MDANG Maj. Benjamin Hughes)

open house to demonstrate its newly acquired skills. Teams from both nations worked together to display AFBiH operational capabilities, vehicles, weapons, and equipment. Attendees included members of the BiH Presidency, senior officials of the U.S. Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Joint Staff of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, local citizens, and school children from the Tuzla region. “We managed to develop another interoperability and JTAC ability. You can only imagine what was the feeling for our members to see F-16s flying over our training area, and our [JTAC] actually [are] the ones that are navigating them,” said Maj. Gen. Ivica Jerkić, AFBiH Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff for Operations.

U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Dylan Rymer, 435th Contingency Response Squadron mobile aerial ports supervisor at Ramstein AB, Germany, trains AFBiH 2nd Lt. Medina Hodzic, Basic Platoon in Transport commander, Battalion of Logistic Support, on securing cargo, at Tuzla International Airport, BiH, Sept. 11, 2019. (Photo by MDANG Sr. Airman Sarah McClanahan)





These images show members of the MDARNG's 115th Military Police Battalion sharing best practices and experiences during Exercise Silver Arrow 2019 with members of the AFBiH at Rajlovač Barracks, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Service members from both countries came to the course with prior experience in their specific careers relating to military police work and some had significant civilian law enforcement experience, leading to deep knowledge transfer. (Photo by MDANG Sr. Airman Sarah McClanahan)



(Photo by AFBiH Pfc. Amin Hadzic)

The 115th Military Police (MP) Battalion also used Exercise Silver Arrow to partner with the AFBiH Military Police at Rajlovač to practice and train in criminal investigation procedures. Because the majority of both armed forces' MP units possessed civilian or military investigations operations experience, this training morphed into sharing experiences and best

practices, which deepened all participants' knowledge and skills. They shared tips and information in their areas of expertise and were challenged to use new tools that enhance criminal investigations. One of the MDARNG course instructors, who quickly adjusted the event based on everyone's experience, said, "When you combine forces, the end result is always success."





Early meeting of the Chaplains from MDNG and AFBiH. (Photocourtesy of Brig. Gen. (MD, ret.) William Lee)

INTEGRATING CHAPLAINS INTO THE ARMED FORCES

In 2004, the AFBiH requested a partnership engagement to discuss how they could establish a chaplaincy corps within their armed forces. When the Maryland National Guard Chaplain Corps received the request, they sent a Catholic and a Baptist chaplain, and a Methodist chaplain assistant to meet with nine representatives from each of the three major religious groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim.

That first meeting set the tone for the chaplains' partnership. As the U.S. chaplains described how they should be the eyes and ears of the commander, they also spoke about painful periods in the history of the United States when the chaplains did not speak up. This openness led to deep discussions regarding the crucial role chaplains play in the command, and how chaplains can ensure all military members have the opportunity and freedom to practice their own religion while in uniform. Maj. Gen. Ivica Jerkić, Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff for Operations, noted that Maryland also learned from Bosnia and Herzegovina. "We have three main religions that are practiced, and I believe that a situation like that can be of great interest to the Maryland National Guard and their chaplaincy service," he said.



AFBiHEasternOrthodoxChaplainand assistant with MDNG Chaplain, his assistantandtheBilateralAffairsOfficer to BiH. (Photo courtesy of MDNG ChaplainMaj.(ret.)WayneStinchcomb)



In the twenty years of partnership, the chaplains of the Maryland National Guard and the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina have worked together as the AFBiH chaplain corps integrated into their armed forces. AFBiH chaplains now offer services and counseling to their uniformed flock and have a robust integrated training for incoming chaplains. MDNG Chaplain Brigadier Gen. (MD) William Lee, who spearheaded many missions, remembered one trip when the AFBiH chaplains told him, “We may not be able to take religion off the table in future conflicts, but we hope by what we do, to minimize its use for violence.”

“We may not be able to take religion offthetableinfutureconflicts,butwe hope by what we do, to minimize its use for violence.” – AFBiH Chaplain



AFBiHCatholicChaplainandassistant with MDNG Chaplain, his assistant andtheBilateralAffairsOfficer to BiH. (Photo courtesy of MDNG Chaplain Maj. (ret.) Wayne Stinchcomb)

AFBiHMuslimChaplain,Imam, and assistant with MDNG Chaplain, his assistant and the Bilateral Affairs Officer to BiH.(PhotocourtesyofMDNG Chaplain Maj. (ret.) Wayne Stinchcomb)



COMBINED EOD ENGAGEMENTS

“Unfortunately, our specialty is demining because we have a lot of land mines [in the country]” – Lt. Col. Dževad Burić, former Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina liaison officer to the Maryland National Guard

The war within Bosnia and Herzegovina resulted in tens of thousands of tons of ammunition strewn across the country, and thousands of acres of mined lands. At the beginning of the partnership, Bosnia and Herzegovina ranked as the third most heavily mined nation in the world. One of the partnership's high priorities was to assist in the safe handling and disposal of these explosives in conjunction with the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Logistics Support Battalion. The Maryland National Guard's 32nd Civil Support Team (CST) is trained to respond to a wide range of weapons of mass destruction threats. These two units have partnered through the years to build the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina's capacity to safely dispose of unexploded ordinances.

The AFBiH's skills and active research and development in meeting the country's disposal challenges, led them to become one of Europe's premier tactical demining units. To share their expertise, Bosnia and Herzegovina established an EOD education center to

train future EOD technicians around the world in the safe handling and disposal of explosives and ammunition. By a combination of demilling, disposal, and donating found weapons, Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts achieved an average monthly throughput of at least thirty tons, dropping the country's rank to eighth in the world in the number of mines still deployed throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina.



(Photos from video by MDARNG Sgt. 1st Class Thaddeus Harrington)

In 2017, the 32nd CST and the AFBiH CBRN unit conducted a relief-in-place mission and participated in a multi-CST exercise at the Mercedita Airport in Ponce, Puerto Rico. (Photos from video by MDARNG Sgt. 1st Class Thaddeus Harrington)





(Photos from video by MDARNG Sgt. 1st Class Thaddeus Harrington)

AFBiH Chief of Defense, Lt. Gen. Senad Mašović thanked the partnership for working with the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina to “develop capacities, not only that are being used here in the country but also in the region.” He noted that the partnership led to long range benefits to other countries. “Our EOD company was also part of the peace support operations across the world,” he said.

After a combined training in June 2015, the after-action report stated, “After attending this training event we [the 32nd CST (WMD)] and the AFBiH CBRN and EOD Company walked away with a better understanding of how to operate in a deployed/multi-national environment with U.S. and other NATO peers. The group also walked away with a better understanding of how to provide support to civilian authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly during natural disasters and during a potential terrorist crisis.”



Pictured from left to right: Maryland Guardsmen Sgt. 1st Class Eric Ogden, Lt. Col. Juan Bryant, Capt. Randolph Nittoli, and Sgt. 1st Class Salvatore Lumarò during a 2017 emergency preparedness event in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Photo courtesy of MDARNG Lt. Col. Juan Bryant, Deputy USPF for Maryland)



PUBLIC AFFAIRS EXCHANGES

“Public affairs builds the goodwill needed to turn positive actions on the ground with armed forces into greater goodwill with the public. It also builds up positive capital for those days when bad news comes in, because there’s going to come a time when you don’t have control of the story and you don’t want that to be the first time the public is learning about the military.” –Lt. Col. Tony Bassham, MDARNG, former Bilateral Affairs Officer

In 2011, the Maryland National Guard and Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina partnered to strengthen and streamline the communication efforts of the AFBiH, particularly to the public. This was accomplished through a series of familiarization visits in which the MDNG public affairs members shared best practices and skills with AFBiH as they together produced and published a series of demining public service announcements. MDNG public affairs had recently worked with Estonia to communicate the importance of practicing safety around unexploded ordnances. They brought that experience to Bosnia and Herzegovina to help protect its citizens from the dangers of land mines and explosives.

In 2019, the Maryland National Guard and Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina public affairs personnel again joined forces, this time to establish a temporary media information center (MIC) for Exercise Silver Arrow 2019. The AFBiH members of the MIC documented this first NATO-run exercise hosted by Bosnia and Herzegovina. They coordinated external media covering the event and published press releases. During the exercise, MDNG public affairs members sat shoulder to shoulder with AFBiH public affairs counterparts “to enhance communications interoperability for producing, editing, and approving products,” said Maj. Benjamin Hughes, MDNG state public affairs officer.



The media information center positively impacted how the public viewed the exercise, and demonstrated the importance of the armed forces controlling their story. “It’s very important that communities are informed about what the Armed Forces of BiH are doing these days. It’s very important that we have that two-way communication,” said Maj. Gen. Gojko Knežević, Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina deputy chief of joint staff for resources.

Images on this and facing page show how the Maryland National Guard public affairs assisted the AFBiH public affairs officers in the use of media equipment provided under European Command’s Humanitarian Mine Action program, 2016. (Photo by MDANG Maj. Benjamin Hughes)





(Photo by MDARNG Sgt. 1st Class Thaddeus Harrington)

The MDNG and AFBiH media affairs partnership again paid off when Bosnia and Herzegovina hosted Exercise Defender Europe 2021. This was the first time the country hosted an exercise of this magnitude, and the first time a sizable U.S. military force deployed to BiH since the Stabilization Forces from the late 1990s. Being first to communicate the story of Defender Europe 2021 was critical in gaining citizen support. “For Defender 21 we had media information center members at the borders waiting as our

convoys crossed over, took footage and posted as it was happening,” said Maj. Taib Grozdanić, Office of Defense Coordination chief. Although the MDNG was not in Bosnia and Herzegovina for Defender Europe 2021, the AFBiH PA used best practices learned with MDNG public affairs in prior partnership engagements to ensure they controlled the exercise portrayal in the media. As Maj. Grozdanić explained, “We put our stories out there first, before anyone else got any ideas.”



Members of a combined media information center team photograph JTAC operations training at Tuzla International Airport, BiH, during Silver Arrow 2019. AFBiH public affairs officers were retrained on equipment provided under European Command’s Humanitarian Mine Action program. Much of the training focused on helping AFBiH public affairs officers use digital cameras for photos/videos. The training also included editing and producing communication products to better inform the public on the demining operations throughout the nation. (Photo by MDARNG Maj. (ret.) Kurt M. Rauschenberg)



COMBINED ARMY AVIATION SUPPORT

Because Bosnia and Herzegovina is a relatively small country with limited resources, its armed forces flies, among other types of helicopters, the Huey-2 for its dual-use capability as a military and civilian asset. The Huey-2 is especially useful in assisting the civil government in combatting natural disasters. “When floods and wildfires happen, they don’t just stop at the boundary line. Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole works together during natural disasters,” said Maj. Taib Grozdanić, Bosnia and Herzegovina Office of Defense Cooperation Chief.

The Maryland Army National Guard’s 29th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) and AFBiH 2nd Helicopter Squadron partnered to help train the AFBiH personnel on U.S. and NATO organizational models, procedures, and standards for helicopter maintenance and logistics. An AFBiH team from multiple units of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina first traveled to Maryland to observe how the 29th CAB maintained their helicopters, beginning the regular exchange between the two air units. Current State Partnership Program Director and former Bilateral Affairs Officer to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Maj. Harrison Bittenbender, remembered, “There were always eight to fifteen BiH members attached to the CAB for annual training. One of the biggest benefits was that we had additional personnel to use on our missions.”



CW-3 Patrick Fisher (outside helicopter) briefed the Honorable Zekerijah Osmić, BiH Minister of Defense (right) and Maj. Gen. Anto Jelec, BiH Chief of Defense (left) on the UH-72 Lakota’s capabilities during their visit to Weide Army Helipoint, Edgewood, MD, in 2014. (Photocourtesy of MDARNG Maj. Teresa Parrotta)





Members of BiH Ministry of Defense, Maryland Army and Air Guardsmen in front of the MDARNG's UH-72 Lakota, 2014. This visit further strengthened the partnership between the two aviation units. (Photo courtesy of MDARNG Maj. Teresa Parrotta)

“When floods and wildfires happen, they don’t just stop at the boundary line.”
 – Maj. Taib Grozdanić, Bosnia and Herzegovina Office of Defense Cooperation Chief

Maryland National Guard also unexpectedly benefited from the aviation units’ partnership. Maj. Tony Bassham, former MDARNG bilateral affairs officer to Bosnia and Herzegovina, discovered that the Maryland Air and Army sides shared more than previously thought. “We had certain assumptions, like, what would the Air Guard guys have to say about helicopters? They fly A-10s. Probably not compatible, right? We assumed we spoke totally different languages; we found out that actually, some of this is very compatible,” said Bassham. In finding a common language between Maryland’s Army and Air aviation units, together they became a force multiplier in working with AFBiH aviation.





MDARNG Guardsmen Sgt. Brian Postles (right) and Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Distefano monitoring the BiH soldiers in their LRS Platoon course in 2015 in BiH. (photocourtesy of MDARNG Sgt. 1st Class Eric Zubkus)



Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Distefano and AFBiH LRS Platoon Commander during the LRS course, 2015. (photocourtesy of MDARNG Sgt. 1st Class Eric Zubkus)

LONG RANGE SURVEILLANCE

Long range surveillance (LRS) is a specific infantry reconnaissance doctrine that, due to the advances in technology, has recently been eliminated from the U.S. Army inventory. However, the doctrine and tactics continue to suit the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina because of their emphasis on light infantry. Prior to its disbanding, Maryland Army National Guard had a standing LRS unit. From 2009 until 2019, the MDARNG LRS unit conducted familiarization events and exchanges with the AFBiH Military Intelligence Battalion. LRS teams often used helicopters for transportation and practice in infiltration and exfiltration.



PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS TRAINING CENTER

The heart of the State Partnership Program is developing and expanding military capacities of partner countries to increase and strengthen the combined readiness of the U.S. and partner countries' armed forces to meet emerging challenges. One way in which joint military capacity is built among NATO members and NATO partner nations is through Bosnia and Herzegovina's Peace Support Operations Training Center (PSOTC), located at Camp Butmir in Sarajevo. Considered the jewel of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the PSOTC was established in 2004, two years before the AFBiH became one armed forces.

Although the staff initially consisted of NATO-member instructors, most of the faculty are now AFBiH personnel. Many instructors graduated from foreign military schools and trained in multiple European countries, in addition to having served on multiple military deployments for the UN, NATO, and EU. These wide-ranging experiences enhance classroom instruction and practical applications of the PSOTC instruction. The PSOTC provides internation-

ally approved education and training in multinational peace support and humanitarian operations to AFBiH members and international participants. Its courses range from countering violent extremism and intelligence gathering to NCO training and public relations.

The U.S. State Department recognized the PSOTC in 2014 as the first European training center to achieve full training capability. The Maryland National Guard supports the PSOTC by sending officer and NCO instructors to be guest speakers on a wide range of topics.



U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. David Nunn, NATO Headquarters Sarajevo's senior enlisted leader, shakes hands with graduates of the peace support operations staff non-commissioned officer course on July 14, 2017 at Camp Butmir, Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Photo by USAF Tech. Sgt. Jeremy Bowcock)



In the fall of 2017, the Bosnia and Herzegovina's Ministry of Defense (MOD), Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina personnel, and Maryland Army National Guard Maj. Gen. Janeen Birkhead met in Sarajevo to discuss the National Guard's Equal Opportunity and Sexual Harassment Assault & Rape Prevention (SHARP) programs. The AFBiH Peace Support Operations Training Center (PSOTC) includes a course entitled "Utility in Gender Peace Support Operations" and offer the course to international audiences by sending mobile training teams (MTTs) of gender program lecturers around the world. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)





A good day's work. AFBiH members show a cache of weapons and ordnance found during one of their deployments. (Photo courtesy of AFBiH Lt. Col. Admir Jusupović)

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA DEPLOYS ON NATO PEACEKEEPING MISSION

“I would say that our demining battalion is one of the best within the EUCOM umbrella.”
–Mr. Haris Pešto, Office of Defense Cooperation programs manager



Taking a break before a patrol in Iraq. (Photo courtesy of AFBiH Lt. Col. Admir Jusupović)

The partnership between the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Maryland National Guard reaped benefits beyond the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2004, NATO stood up Multinational Forces, Iraq (MNF-I) to conduct operations that would create a secure environment in that country. Eager to support the nations that helped stabilize Bosnia and Herzegovina, the AFBiH deployed its Infantry Platoon once to conduct on-base security, while its EOD Company deployed twelve times to Iraq between 2005 and 2008. The AFBiH EOD Company provided expertise in demining and explosive ordnance disposal. Lt. Col. Admir Jusupović commanded the EOD Company in its third rotation and served as liaison officer to MNF-I during the sixth rotation. “This was a significant milestone for BiH military. Just over ten years after the Dayton Accords, the AFBiH deployed as a single, multi-ethnic unit to assist the international community in Iraq. In conducting peacekeeping operations, we are significantly increasing our own capabilities,” said Jusupović.



Thanks to regular partnership engagements with the Maryland National Guard in developing its EOD and counter improvised explosive device skills, the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina became a force multiplier for the U.S. military at a time when they were surging in Iraq. In 2015, fifty-three members from the AFBiH EOD Company and Military Police (MP) Battalion again put their skills to the test when they deployed in support of Operation Resolute Support to Bagram Airbase, Afghanistan, to conduct fixed point security. Bosnia and Herzegovina had now become an exporter of peace and security.



Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina soldiers prepare to board their aircraft in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina to deploy to Iraq, April 6, 2013. (Photo by USAF Staff Sgt. Christopher Hubenthal)



CAMP VICTORY, Iraq – Coalition partners honor a contingent of military forces from Bosnia and Herzegovina for their service in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Nov. 19, 2013. (Photo courtesy of Multi National Forces Baghdad)



(Photo courtesy of Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina)



The MDNG and U.S. Army assisted AFBiH in forming and training their first EOD unit, and provided pre-deployment training to support Coalition Forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom. During their deployments, the AFBiH destroyed more than 1 million kg net explosive weight of captured enemy ammunition and disposed of or rendered safe all unexploded ordnance in their area of operation. (Photo by U.S. Army)



(Photo courtesy of Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina)



MILITARY POLICE CO-DEPLOYMENT TO AFGHANISTAN

The partnership between the Maryland National Guard and the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina initially consisted of small teams exchanging ideas and discussing best practices, mostly in a seminar-style setting. As the partnership matured, however, these exchanges expanded into unit partnerships and joint exercises, putting into practice the discussions and learned tactics. The unit partnership between the MDARNG 115th Military Police Battalion and the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Military Police Battalion ultimately culminated in what the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina considers its crowning event.

AFBiH training NCO, Sgt. Maj. Nedžib Smalbegović, participated in the State Partnership

Program since its beginning. He observed that once the conscious decision had been made to partner units the challenge became figuring out how. "We didn't have joint training, we didn't have the equipment, we had different standards, but we started [anyway]." The two military police (MP) units began conducting regular joint training in 2008. When the 115th started its predeployment training for Afghanistan in early 2012, the Battalion commander, Col. Andrew Collins, pressed to include AFBiH MPs in a co-deployment to Afghanistan. Because embedding foreign nationals into a U.S. military unit required congressional approval, it wasn't until months after the initial request that they received the go-ahead.



Key leader engagement with the 1st Garrison of Afghan Uniformed Police. In the picture are MDARNG Col. Collins (left) and AFBiH Maj. Elezović (center). (Photo courtesy of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina)





Daily Patrol of the 115th MPs
(Photo courtesy of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Mentoring and advising Afghan Uniformed Police during a visit to Kandahar Central Jail (Photo courtesy of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

“This deployment changed the partnership into a true friendship.” —Maj. Hamdija Elezović

Twenty-six soldiers from the AFBiH 4th Infantry Brigade and members of the AFBiH military police battalion deployed with the members of the 115th. Their mission, initially a security mission, morphed into their owning the battlespace of Kandahar City as Task Force Chesapeake under the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division. In addition to security, they were tasked to advise Afghan uniformed police in the conduct of Afghan operations so that the environment in Afghanistan would become more safe and secure. TF Chesapeake included components from

the active U.S. Army and Army Reserve, as well as units from other countries. Because of this increase in mission requirements, Col. Collins needed to increase his headquarters staff, particularly in the personnel, intelligence, and operations sections. He turned to the AFBiH members to fill in, as well as augment the companies going outside the wire on patrols. The 4th Infantry Brigade became the first combat infantry unit from Bosnia and Herzegovina to deploy on an international military mission.





AFBiH members earned a U.S. Army Commendation Medal for their actions, while Maj. Marinko Romić and Maj. Hamdija Elezović, earned the U.S. military's Bronze Star (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)

Maj. Hamdija Elezović, then a first lieutenant serving as plans officer, remembered, "This co-deployment gave us the opportunity to serve our country, to contribute to the stability and safety in Afghanistan, and to learn from the best and gain experiences they had." Retired Col. Džaved Burić, the first AFBiH liaison officer to MDNG, observed, "Many people thought the co-deployment beyond our capabilities, but they were trained very well and formed a very good unit. Their experiences were something unbelievable."

Not only were their experiences unbelievable, but their achievements surpassed all expectations. A num-

ber of AFBiH soldiers and NCOs earned the U.S. Army Commendation Medal, while two members of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina who served on the headquarters staff, Maj. Marinko Romić and Lt. Hamdija Elezović, earned the U.S. military's Bronze Star Medal. Col. Collins remembered that approval for awarding a Bronze Star to a foreign national comes from outside the National Guard organization, necessitating a much longer process. He ensured that he traveled to Sarajevo to present the awards in a formal ceremony at the U.S. Embassy almost a year after the unit returned from Afghanistan.



"This co-deployment gave us the opportunity to serve our country, contribute to the stability and safety in Afghanistan, and to learn from the best."

- Maj. Hamdija Elezović

MDNG Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. James Adkins, welcomed the troops home from Afghanistan. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)



According to Lt. Gen. Senad Mašović, Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina Chief of Joint Staff, the deployment demonstrated to NATO that Bosnia and Herzegovina can be a credible and trustful partner to all NATO partners. “Being active participants of the mission actually shows how much Bosnia-Herzegovina has developed and how much our forces of BiH actually strengthened their capacities,” he said.

Maj. Marinko Romić and 1st Lt. Hamdija Elezović after being awarded the U.S. military’s Bronze Star. Standing with them are Lt. Col. Andrew Collins, deployed battalion commander, and Maj. Taylor of the 115th Military Police Battalion. (Photo courtesy of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina)



Taking time to relax and build comradery in Kandahar, the soldiers played a soccer game prior to watching the World Cup soccer match that evening. (Photo courtesy of MDARNG Col. Andrew Collins)



(Photo courtesy of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina)



EXERCISE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE (DEFENDER EUROPE 21)

Defender Europe is an umbrella under which resides Exercises Swift Response, Immediate Response, and Saber Strike. Defender Europe tests the ability of the U.S. Army, European Command, to quickly move a credible fighting force into the European theater against a military threat to NATO countries in Europe. The various exercises also provide an opportunity for the U.S. military to train alongside partner armed forces and enhance its collective capabilities.

Defender Europe 2021 was the first time the Armed Forces of Bosnia Herzegovina participated in a multinational exercise of this size. BiH hosted Exercise Immediate Response, which gathered about 800 U.S. forces into the country. This was the largest mobilization of U.S. forces into Bosnia and Herzegovina since SFOR in the late 1990s. Preparing for such an event took vision and not settling for a token participation. Bosnia and Herzegovina's goal in participating was to demonstrate the integration of AFBiH and NATO forces from the command level to the platoon. "We [U.S. and BiH] went from trying to see if we could put in a platoon- or company-size U.S. element to actually deploying a battalion size U.S. unit, which partnered with the Armed Forces of BiH light infantry battalion group. So, U.S. [army] had a battalion, plus an aviation element of Blackhawks, and then we also hosted all of Defender's division headquarters in Tuzla airfield," said Maj. Grozdanić



During Exercise Defender Europe 21, AFBiH soldiers carried a litter into a UH-60L Blackhawk at Tuzla International Airport, Bosnia and Herzegovina, May 20, 2021. (Photo by NGSpc. Jordan Arnold)





A joint medical training exercise was conducted as part of Immediate Response 21 in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with members of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina instructing U.S. Soldiers on emergency procedures to establish continuity of patient extraction. (Photo by Sgt. Tommie Berry, U.S. Army)

Exercise Immediate Response 2021 demonstrated that the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be a force multiplier for NATO armed forces. Lt. Gen. Mašović anticipates future demonstrations of joint capabilities. "Armed Forces of BiH together with U.S. Army, Europe, elements and Maryland National Guard elements will show the full effect and full implementation of our program and cooperation between Maryland National Guard and Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It will show active participation and how we can cooperate and strengthen each other when we are together on the field," said Mašović.



2nd Lt. Galib Omerdić, a doctor with 5th Battalion Logistics Support, Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, reviews the U.S. Army 9-line medical evacuation sheet during a joint medical training exercise as part of Immediate Response 21 in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, May 24, 2021. Merging patient care practices in training helps enhance the skills necessary to get medical assistance to service members quickly and accurately in real-life situations. (Photo by Sgt. Tommie Berry, U.S. Army)





MDANG Lt. Col. Charles Wetzelberger, deputy site coordinator speaks to defense attachés from Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Montenegro and North Macedonia before a visit to the M&T Bank Stadium mass vaccination site in Baltimore, MD, May 13, 2021. (Photo by MDANG Maj. Benjamin Hughes)

COMBINED SUPPORT TO FIGHT COVID-19

“Although we had the greatest challenge called COVID pandemic in 2000, 2021 and beginning of 2022, no matter what conditions were at that time, we didn’t stop with our activities.” – Lt. Gen. Senad Mašović

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent world-wide lockdown touched the lives and actions of everyone for more than two years. Despite the need for physical isolations, international security cooperation and communications among the partnership continued as all entities struggled to help their citizens and share what worked in assisting civil authorities to combat the illness. Just over a year after the COVID-19 pandemic began, defense attachés from five countries, including Estonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, visited

testing and vaccination sites established and staffed by Maryland National Guard members. This was the first in-person State Partnership Program event hosted by Maryland after the COVID-19 lockdown had been lifted in the state.

Defense attachés from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia visited the Baltimore Convention Center Field Hospital in Baltimore, MD, May 13, 2021. This is the first SPP event held in person after the COVID-19 lockdown was lifted. The MDNG State Partnership Program office hosted the defense attachés to provide lessons-learned from operations in supporting state and local partners during the COVID-19 pandemic. (photo by MDANG Maj. Benjamin Hughes)





Defense attachés from BosniaHerzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia visited the BaltimoreConventionCenter Field Hospital in Baltimore, MD, May 13, 2021. The MDNG State Partnership Program office hosted the defense attachés to provide lessons-learned from operations supporting state and local partners during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Photo by MDANG Maj. Benjamin Hughes)

Soon after, in the first exchange event following the lockdown, medical members from the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina met with their Maryland National Guard counterparts in Maryland to share lessons learned and observe the successful practices developed by the Guard as it supported the state in staffing for testing and vaccination sites, as well as distributing personal protective equipment and hospital supplies. During their visit, the BiH contingent experienced the vaccination process when they received their first COVID-19 vaccine at Camp Fretterd Military Reservation in Reisterstown, Maryland.

They toured the Baltimore Convention Center field hospital in Baltimore, which was a walk-up testing, vaccination, and treatment site. They also visited two drive-through vaccination sites. At the time of the visit, Maj. Harrison Bittenbender, State Partnership Program Director, noted that Bosnia and Herzegovina lacked enough vaccination doses, leading to the Maryland National Guard's decision to align that year's SPP training with helping Bosnia and Herzegovina to develop their COVID-19 response capabilities.

A Maryland medical professional explains post-vaccination observation procedures to BiH medical and logistical personnel at the Navy-Marine Corps mass vaccination site tour in Annapolis, MD, June 10, 2021. (Photo by MDARNG Sgt. Chazz Kibler)

Lt. Col. Slobodan Simić, AFBiH chief of staff for training and doctrine (TRADOC), observed first-hand how Maryland conducted its vaccination sites. Impressed with the full spectrum of operations during the fight against COVID-19, Simić emphasized that the AFBiH team subsequently used the procedures and observations to prepare a program for the medical staff of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. "It was the first time that our medical staff was over there in Maryland after COVID-19. And it was special because Maryland National Guard gave us the opportunity for our medical staff to help vaccinate during the visit, train, and get an education [in setting up vaccination sites]."





In 2022, The Maryland National Guard and the state government of Maryland celebrated the joint partnership with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Estonia. Pictured from left to right are Lt. Gen. Riho Ühtegi, Estonian Defence League Commander; Mr. Kristjan Prikk, Estonian Ambassador to the United States; Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan; Lt. Gen. Senad Mašović, Chief of Defense, Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina; and Maj. Gen. Timothy Gowen, Maryland National Guard Adjutant General. (Photo by MDARNG 2nd Lt. Enjoli Saunders)

BECOMING A TRILATERAL PARTNERSHIP

“The benefit of having two partners is that we do trilateral events easily.”
–Maj. Harrison Bittenbender, State Partnership Program director.





Conference in Germany in 2018 brings together the Chiefs of Defence for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Estonia, the Maryland National Guard Adjutant General, the SPP Director, and the Bilateral Affairs Officers for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Estonia.

“We could bring something to the table, you could bring something to the table. And then we can compare notes. We’re rebuilding an institution partnership as well as personal partnership between different members. And in getting to know each other we also create trust” –Tanel Sepp, Estonian Ambassador at Large for Cyber Diplomacy

The long-time individual partnerships naturally began to synchronize into combining events and engagements to create a trilateral partnership. What began at the individual soldier level with military competitions quickly expanded to multinational exercises and sharing best practices at the unit and command levels. These trilateral events led to the overarching goal of the State Partnership Program, which is to expand the regional security and deepen interoperability of the countries and the region.

Now, it is accepted that Maryland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Estonia share a trilateral partnership. MDARNG Capt. Donald Walter, Commander, 253rd Engineer Company, summed up the trilateral partnership in one sentence. “Anytime we do an annual

training or a big training event, there’s often one or two Estonians or Bosnians with us.”

Becoming trilateral partners required the endorsement and active support of the military and civilian leaders from all three entities. Although the concept of formally becoming a trilateral partnership did not emerge until the mid-2000s, many Maryland senior leaders visited both countries during the same trip, while Estonian and Bosnian leaders often met in Maryland. Each year that senior leaders exchange visits, they ensure the strategic goals of the State Partnership Program continue to be met and plan future events to strengthen the ties of security and cooperation among the three partner entities.



TRILATERAL TEAMS BEGIN WITH ADMIRAL PITKA CHALLENGE

“The best part about the Admiral Pitka Challenge is that half the teams are Estonian and half are international. So it’s much more than just the relationship with Estonians, there’s all the teams from all over the world.” – Sgt 1st Class Eric Zubkus, MDARNG

In 2015 the dual partnerships of Maryland–Estonia and Maryland–Bosnia and Herzegovina expanded to a three-way partnership through the Admiral Pitka Challenge. Estonia has hosted the international military competition Admiral Pitka Challenge since 1994. Originally called Erna Raid, the competition was renamed and revamped in 2011. The challenge now commemorates Rear Admiral Johan Pitka (1872–1944), founder of the original Estonian Defense League and founding officer of the Estonian Navy. Considered one of the most difficult competitions of its kind, teams of four navigate a cross-country course of about 150 km in four days while evading an opposing force. They also must stop along the way to complete tasks such as reconnaissance, first aid, marksmanship, and an obstacle course.

Maryland annually sends one team to the Challenge so the Guardsmen can interact with teams from across Europe. Admiral Pitka Challenge team member Sgt. 1st Class Eric Zubkus described an unexpected motivation boost his team received from an unlikely source in the middle of a competition. “It was the middle of the night and we’re trying to cross a river, but the enemy had occupied the only bridge and they were harassing us pretty badly. There was a Polish team nearby that we’d made friends with at base camp, and they saw how frustrated we were, and so they just started chanting, ‘USA, USA, USA!’ In the middle of the woods, in the middle of nowhere, they were trying to motivate us. It helped a lot.”



(Photos courtesy of MDARNG Sgt. First Class Eric Zubkus)

Preparing for the marksmanship task. (Photos courtesy of MDARNG Sgt. First Class Eric Zubkus)





After the competition the camaraderie continues (Photo courtesy of MDARNG Sgt. First Class Eric Zubkus)

“There’s relationship building [during the competition]. Estonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina hardly ever played together.” –Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Winter, former MDNG State Partnership Program Director

One Bosnian soldier, two Estonian soldiers, and one Maryland National Guardsman formed the first trilateral team. The Bosnian spoke no English, one of the Estonians spoke only broken English, and the Marylander spoke neither Estonian nor Bosnian. This immediately added a real-world layer to the experience. Captain Frank Valenza, Executive Officer for the Maryland National Guard Joint Staff, and Commander of C Company, 175th Infantry Regiment, was the guardsman chosen to represent Maryland for this historic event. He recalled that the team overcame the language challenge with a lot of hand gestures and drawings, and finished the challenge within the allotted time except for one stop. Valenza recalled the challenge as one of the highlights of his career. “It was a great experience, especially with the added dynamic of trying to work with folks I’d not met or trained with. Not having a common language with which to communicate made the event both physically and mentally challenging,” he said. Since then, a trilateral team has annually competed in the Admiral Pitka Challenge.

Admiral Pitka First Trilateral team members during the competition: AFBiH Vjekoslav Perendija, MDARNG Capt. Frank Valenza, EDF Martin Merirand and the second EDF soldier.



(Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)



TRILATERAL COMPETITION COMES TO MARYLAND: BEST WARRIOR COMPETITION

“There’s where the SPP has been working not only to inculcate us to Bosnia, and us to Estonia, but also Estonia to Bosnia and Bosnia to Estonia”
–Lt. Col. Alexi Franklin, Battalion Commander, 1-175th Infantry Regiment.



Servicemembers of the Armed Forces of Bosnia-Herzegovina sprint to begin their first weapons challenge in the Best Warrior Competition at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, March 15, 2018. (Photo by MDARNG 2Lt. Enjoli Saunders)

The Best Warrior Competition (BWC) is an annual, U.S. Army-wide challenge that tests soldiers’ and NCOs’ physical and mental skills in a variety of exercises such as land navigation, weapons skills, an assault course, and a written essay. The competition recently expanded to demonstrate the jointness of the Maryland National Guard. In addition to the Army-wide categories of soldier and NCO, Maryland added a category for company grade officers and the Maryland Air Guard sends an airman to participate. Since 2018, both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Estonia have sent their best officers, NCOs, and soldiers to compete.

Sgt. Maj. Thomas Beyard, Maryland National Guard senior enlisted advisor, initiated the conversation about inviting both partners to the BWC. Soldiers from Bosnia and Herzegovina observed the competition in 2015 and competed in 2016. In 2017, both Estonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina competed in the BWC. Former Maryland National Guard bilateral affairs officer, Lt. Col. Joseph Winter, credits the deep relationships that the partnership has built with the ability to expand to trilateral events. “Estonia and Bosnia hardly ever played together in events. It’s because of the relationships that we’ve built which allowed us to have our very first trilateral event.”

“The members of the Armed Forces of BiH came back with the good results, but what’s even more important is the fact that our members realize they can actually compete with the best and that was the great motivation and the great message to all of them.”
–Maj. Gen. Ivica Jerkić, AFBiH Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff for Operations





The competitors of the Maryland National Guard Best Warrior Competition at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Edgewood, Maryland on March 18, 2018. This year's competition includes junior enlisted, noncommissioned officers, and commissioned officers of the Maryland Army and Air National Guard as well as soldiers from the Armed Forces of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Estonian Defence Forces. (Photo by MDARNG Cpl. Elizabeth S. Scott)

Much to the combined delight and chagrin of Maryland leadership, the 2018 BWC resulted in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Estonia sweeping all categories. 2nd Lt. Raul Reiljan, Kuperjanov Battalion, 2nd Brigade, EDF, won best officer category; Sgt. Matija Ivaković, 3rd Infantry Battalion, 6th Infantry Brigade, AFBiH, earned the title Best Noncommissioned Officer; and Sgt. Kristjan Mägi, Kuperjanov Battalion, 2nd Brigade, EDF, won best junior enlisted title. "We send the best in the brigade to Best Warrior. They [Estonia and BiH] send the best in their country," said Lt. Col. Alexi Franklin, a former Best Warrior competitor.

"This competition is for me to broaden my mind," – Sgt. Kristjan Mägi, Estonian Defence Forces

Sgt. Kristjan Mägi, Estonian Defence Forces, reassembles a .50-caliber machine gun during the first weapons challenge in the Best Warrior Competition at Lauderick Creek Military Reservation on the Edgewood Area of Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD, March 15, 2018. Competitors endure a variety of warrior tasks to prove themselves the best of the best. (Photo by MDARNG 2nd Lt. Enjoli Saunders)





MDANG Capt. Thomas Paszek, 175th Cyberspace Operations Squadron cyber officer, French Navy Capt. Christophe Fleury, French Cyber Command, and 1st Lt. Mert Meissaar, Estonian Defense Force Cyber Command view a digital map showing real-time cyber activity during the annual Spring Storm exercise, May 8, 2019, at the Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Tallinn, Estonia. This is the first time the Estonian Cyber Command has participated in the exercise since becoming operational in August 2018. (Photo by MDARNG 2nd Lt. Enjoli Saunders)

CYBER CENTER OF EXCELLENCE AND LOCKED SHIELDS

“Back in the ‘90s, you were nothing in cyber and we were nothing in cyber. But over the years we both became excellent in cyber.” – Ms Kadri Peeters, Estonian Ministry of Defense



Jaak Tarien, director of NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Center of Excellence, 2020. (Photo courtesy of Cyber Defence Center of Excellence)

Because cyber attacks cross national lines, the State Partnership Program also crosses borders and regions to ensure cyber security of their partners. Estonia and Maryland partnership in cyber was established early as they both grew in this area. Maryland also collaborated with the AFBiH to assist in building their cyber infrastructure. Now all three partners share critical training and knowledge in the quickly evolving area of cyber security.

Lt. Col. Joseph Winter, former Bilateral Affairs Officer to Estonia stated, “It isn’t just the Americans assisting the Bosnians in technology and cyber but [also] Estonia, which is a very well-established, high-valued and respected country in cyber security.”





Overtwentyteamspracticedefenceagainstlarge-scalecyberattacksintheEstonia-basedLocked Shields exercise, organised by the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Center of Excellence, headquartered in the Estonian capital, Tallinn. (Photo courtesy of NATO CCDCOE)

Exercise Locked Shields is the NATO-run, multinational cyber exercise conducted from NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Center of Excellence in Tallinn, Estonia. Begun in 2010, its primary objective is to test the skills of cyber and technology specialist teams in preventing, detecting, responding to, and reporting full-scale cyber-attacks. It also provides legal and communications training in technical aspects of cyber defense. The Maryland National Guard Cyber Operations Group and the Estonian Defence Forces'

Cyber Command regularly participate in this exercise, sharing their knowledge and best practices to defend military operations from cyber attacks.

Since 2018, the MDARNG 169th CPT has been collaborating with AFBiH personnel to assess their initial cyber infrastructure, assist in creating AFBiH's cyber Standard Operating Procedures. It also shares knowledge of cyber security during regular exchanges, events, and exercise, such as Locked Shields. According to Lt. Col. Janice Hernandez, Commander, 275th Operations Support Squadron, Cyber Operations Group, Maryland National Guard will continue to meet the AFBiH cyber needs through the Army and the Air sides. And, the process of formulating cyber partnership events helps MDNG hone and improve their own processes.

Maryland's 169th Cyber Protection Team (CPT) partnered with the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2018 when they first participated with the Maryland National Guard, other U.S. units, Estonia, and thirty other member countries in Locked Shields. (Photo by MDANG Sgt. Tom Lamb)



ADRIATIC 5+2+ESTONIA

“The Estonians have been very vocal about the Russian threat against their nation, what that means, and why they need continued support from SPP and from Maryland. We saw what the Russians have done in Ukraine on the cyber side as well.” –Brig. Gen. Jori Robinson



Brig. Gen. Jori Robinson in 2017 as Commander, 175th Cyberspace Operations Group. Her background in cyber has strengthened the partnership in this field. “Since our conversations [between MD Cyber Operations Group and AFBiH] back in 2015–2016, they have come a very long way. At that time, it was, ‘You need to build a network first. They’re now at the point where they’re saying, ‘Okay, let’s start talking about defense in cyberspace and defending what we have.’” –Brigadier Gen. Jori Robinson (Photo by USAF J.M. Eddins Jr.)

Recognizing the need to promote and strengthen regional cooperation and security, countries in the western Balkans established the Adriatic 5 group. Member countries of Albania, Croatia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina conduct joint exercises and cooperative activities to increase regional interoperability. One cooperative activity is their annual Adriatic 5 Cyber Conference. Maryland National Guard hosted the 2019 Conference in Maryland with all five Adriatic countries attending, in addition to observers from Kosovo, Slovenia, and Estonia. The 169th Cyber Protection Team, the 175th Cyberspace Operations Group, and other cyber organizations shared the latest in cyber security. The conference also provided a forum for the representatives to discuss regional cyber issues. By the end of the three-day conference, each country had built and shared a long term cyber plan with the group.



“This [partnership] program became, on many occasions, a trilateral program with participation of Maryland personnel and Estonia, particularly in areas such as cybersecurity and other programs that are relevant for transition and integration into NATO.” –Zoran Šajinović, Bosnia and Herzegovina Minister of Defense, assistant minister for international cooperation (Photo by MDARNG Cpl. Elizabeth Scott)



EXERCISE VIGILANT GUARD

Exercise Vigilant Guard is a National Guard exercise that trains state forces in how to respond to domestic crises and coordinate actions with federal and state agencies. In 2018, the exercise came to Maryland as a hypothetical catastrophic hurricane landfall in the Mid-Atlantic region. The Maryland Military Department and 42 federal, state, and local agencies collaborated and tested their interoperability during the simulated national level exercise.

During the 2018 Vigilant Guard, a number of AFBiH and Estonian EDF personnel participated for the first time as Joint Staff members. Five AFBiH officers participated in the combined planning working group, after which they, along with their sergeant major, were embedded into the joint operations center to track and report on the operations. The Estonian officers and NCOs integrated into the different staff sections.

This large-scale exercise demonstrated the close cooperation and communications that exist between the National Guard and civilian authorities. According to the AFBiH deputy chief of defense for operations, Maj. Gen. Ivica Jerkić, “We could see the structure of the support of the Maryland National Guard to civilian structures, and actually take the good examples and good lessons learned, and make it part of our operations.”

Members of the 175th Fire Department and Department of Veteran Affairs Fire Department practice giving medical treatment to victim role-players rescued from a collapsed building. Nearly 2,000 servicemembers participated in the Vigilant Guard exercises in Maryland and Virginia. (Photo by MDANG Airman 1st Class Sarah M. McClanahan)



AFBiH Lt. Col. Dzevad Buric meets with MDANG Chief Master Sgt. Richard Petrush, 175th Wing emergency management flight chief, at Martin State Air National Guard Base, Middle River, MD. Buric is among several members from the Armed Forces of Bosnia-Herzegovina who are attending incident command system training in preparation for Vigilant Guard in 2018. (Photo by MDANG Staff Sgt. Joseph Courtney)





Estonia Staff Sgt. Maru-Mehis Kores and Maryland Command Sgt. Maj. David Harry, March 2023 at Ft. McHenry, Baltimore, MD. (Photo by MDNG Public Affairs)

THE FUTURE OF THE PARTNERSHIP: RELATIONSHIPS BUILT TO LAST



While deployed to Bosnia, Co. F, 224th AVN sponsored the Modrac School. They solicited donations and educational supplies for the children.

The original goal of the partnership, from the United States' perspective, was to assist the former soviet republics in their journeys toward western democracy, western military, and NATO membership. When Estonia became a NATO member in 2004, seemingly the goal of the SPP was accomplished. Lt. Col. Gavin Meadows, MDARNG Bilateral Affairs Officer to Estonia from 2006 through 2009, was told to prepare to be the last BAO, that "these countries had developed to a point where the program wasn't needed." However, Estonia had not gotten that memo. They expected the partnership to continue so that they could achieve the goals they had set for their country. Additionally, as a NATO Partnership for Peace member country, Bosnia and Herzegovina has supported numerous NATO missions and also expected the partnership to continue. Fortunately, the partnership has not only remained part of the National Guard mission, but has increased in depth as it expands into the civilian sectors.

Maryland, Estonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to build upon the trust and rapport begun 30 and 20 years ago." The early familiarization trips that gave the EDF, EDL and AFBiH the opportunities to develop their armed forces in the ways in which they envisioned them, grew to include joint and combined exercises and competitions. These multi-layered engagements expanded all three program members' capabilities in defense, security and domestic operations.



As the military-to-military engagements deepened, military-to-civilian and civilian-to-civilian engagements also expanded, proving the wisdom of employing the National Guard in the State Partnership Program. Lt. Col. Gavin Meadows observed, “[In 2014] when I got [to EUCOM] in the Joint Strategy, Plans, and Policies office, there were a lot of active duty officers there, considering the Russian invasion of Crimea. What they found is that the relationships from the partnerships became the conduit for information to EUCOM. The Russian border states’ chiefs of defense called the adjutants general of their partner state to say, ‘Here’s what’s going on.’” As long as there are conflicts and crises, the need to enhance each country’s national security stance is attainable through the state partnership program.



Soldiers from Maryland, Estonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina waiting to begin as the first trilateral partnership team competition in the Estonian Admiral Pitka Challenge 2015.

Maryland Air National Guard airmen volunteer their time at an animal shelter while another group sand and paint a fence in Tallinn near Freedom Square in 2017 during Atlantic Resolve (Image from MDNG Public Affairs)



U.S. Army Sgt. Hannah Hawkins (left), assigned to the 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Oregon Army National Guard, discusses interview techniques with a soldier from the AFBiH and Ms. Zlata Veselinović, U.S. Embassy interpreter in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Nov. 17, 2021. (Photo by MDARNG Sgt. 1st Class Zachary Holden)



CHIEFS OF DEFENSE AND ADJUTANTS GENERAL

Bosnia and Herzegovina Chairmen of the Chiefs of Joint Staff	Estonia Chiefs of Defence Forces	Maryland National Guard Adjutants General
Lt. Gen. Sifet Podžić 2006–2008	General Aleksander Einseln 1993–1995	Lt. Gen James Fretterd (1987–2003)
Lt. Gen. Miladin Milojčić 2008–2013	Lt. Gen. Johannes Kert 1996–2000	Maj. Gen. Bruce Tuxill (2003–2008)
Lt. Gen. Anto Jeleč 2013–2018	Lt.Col. Aarne Ermus (acting) (2000–2000)	Maj. Gen. James Adkins (2008–2015)
Lt. Gen. Senad Mašić 2018–present	Vice Adm. Tarmo Kõuts (2000–2006)	Maj. Gen. Linda Singh (2015–2018)
	Gen. Ants Laaneots (2006–2011)	Maj. Gen. Timothy Gowen (2018–2023)
	Gen. Riho Terras (2011–2018)	
	Lt. Gen. Martin Herem (2018–present)	



STATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM DIRECTORS

2003–2007	Col. Drake McGraw, MDARNG
2007–2009	Col. Kirk Pietsch, MDARNG
2009–2011	Maj. David Roberts, MDARNG
2011–2012	Col. Mathew Dinenna, MDARNG
2012–2014	Col. David Dement, MDARNG
2014–2015	Lt. Col. Jonathan Preteroti, MDARNG
2015–2018	Lt. Col. Joseph Winter, MDANG
2018–2019	Maj. Teresa Parotta, MDARNG
2019–2020	Maj. Vernon Garner, MDARNG
2020–present	Maj. Harrison Bittenbender, MDARNG



BILATERAL AFFAIRS OFFICERS

Estonia
Col. Larry Guderjohn, MDARNG 1994–1998
Maj. Gen. Grant Hayden, MDARNG 1998–1999
Col. John Miller, MDARNG 1999–2000
Col. Maynard Shepard, MDARNG 2000–2002
Lt. Col. Anthony Keyech, MDARNG 2002–2004
Col. Mark Teel, MDARNG 2004–2006
Lt. Col. Gavin Meadows, MDARNG 2006–2009
Lt. Col. Christopher Mackin MDARNG 2009–2012
Maj. T. J. Sullins, MDARNG 2012–2014
Lt. Col. Daniel Griffin, MDANG 2014–2016
Lt. Col. Jason Burns, MDANG 2016–2019
Lt. Col. Jerad Hand, MDANG 2019–2022
Capt. Andrew Coffey, MDANG 2022–present

Bosnia and Herzegovina	
2003–2004	Col. William Everett, MDARNG
2004–2006	Lt. Col. Rick McConaughy, MDARNG
2006–2009	Lt. Col. Jon Eisberg, MDARNG
2009–2013	Col. Andrew Canfield, MDARNG
2013–2016	Lt. Col. Tony Bassham, MDARNG
2016–2019	Maj. Harrison Bittenbender, MDARNG
2019–2021	Capt. Fiodor Strikovski, MDARNG
2021–present	Capt. Aaron Thomas, MDARNG



Lt. Col. Danial Griffin and Lt. Col. Jerad Hand remembering our Estonian partner while deployed to Turkey. (Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Jerad Hand)



SPP DIRECTORS AND BILATERAL AFFAIRS OFFICERS



Capt. Fiodor Strikovski and Capt. Aaron Thomas, BAOs to Bosnia and Herzegovina



Lt. Col. Daniel Griffin, Lt. Col. Jerad Hand, and Lt. Col. Jason Burns, BAOs to Estonia



Col. Kirk Pietsch,
SPP Director



Maj. Teresa Parotta,
SPP Director



Lt. Col. Jonathon Preteroti,
SPP Director



Lt. Col. Joseph Winter,
SPP Director



Col. David Dement, SPP Director, Staff Sgt. Christian, and Lt. Col. Tony Bassham, BAO to BiH



Lt. Col. Tony Bassham and Maj. Harrison Bittenbender, BAOs to Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the BiH Chief of Defence Senad Mašović



AFBiH Maj. Faruk Ganic, SPP Directors Maj. Harrison Bittenbender and Col. Drake McGraw, and AFBiH St. Oliver Skocibusic



MEMBERS OF THE OFFICES OF DEFENSE COOPERATION PAST AND PRESENT

Estonia
Veronika Arumets
Mari-Liis Käärt
Katrin Kaljulaid
Maris Krumm
Pille Pakane
Maarja Paide
Merje Peri
Piret Ploompuu

Bosnia and Herzegovina	
Amar Čaušević	Igor Remović
Ermin Cero	Vanja Šantić
Mahir Hamzić	Dalibor Šmit
Emir Helić	Mirsad Taso
Amra Ljubović	Emina Tokić
Haris Pešto	Alena Vajukić
Jasna Panjeta	Zlata Veselinović
Jasmin Porobić	



CURRENT STATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM DIRECTOR AND COORDINATORS

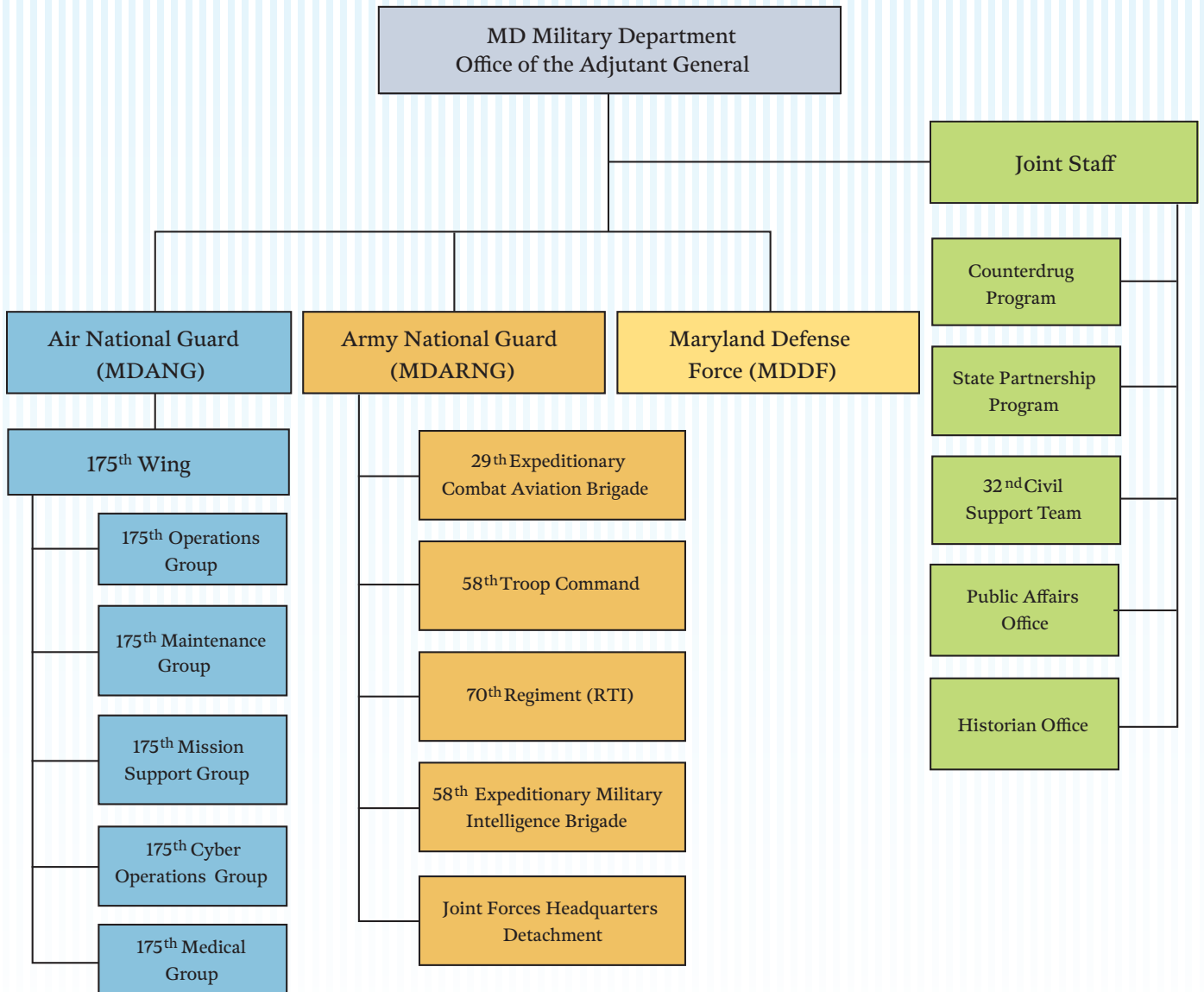


(left to right) Capt. Nicholas Boeh, MDARNG; Maj. Harrison Bittenbender, MDARNG, State Partnership Program Director; Lt. Col. Admir Jusupović, AFBiH Liaison Officer; Capt. Phuoc Le, MDARNG





MARYLAND NATIONAL GUARD ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE



RANK ILLUSTRATIONS

UNITED STATES ARMY AND AIR FORCE












Army Enlisted

-  Private
-  Private 1st Class
-  Specialist
-  Corporal
-  Sergeant
-  Staff Sergeant
-  Sergeant 1st Class
-  Master Sergeant
-  1st Sergeant
-  Sergeant Major
-  Command Sergeant Major

Air Force Enlisted

-  Airman
-  Airman 1st Class
-  Senior Airman
-  Staff Sergeant
-  Technical Sergeant
-  Master Sergeant
-  1st Sergeant
-  Senior Master Sergeant
-  Chief Master Sergeant
-  Command Chief Master Sergeant

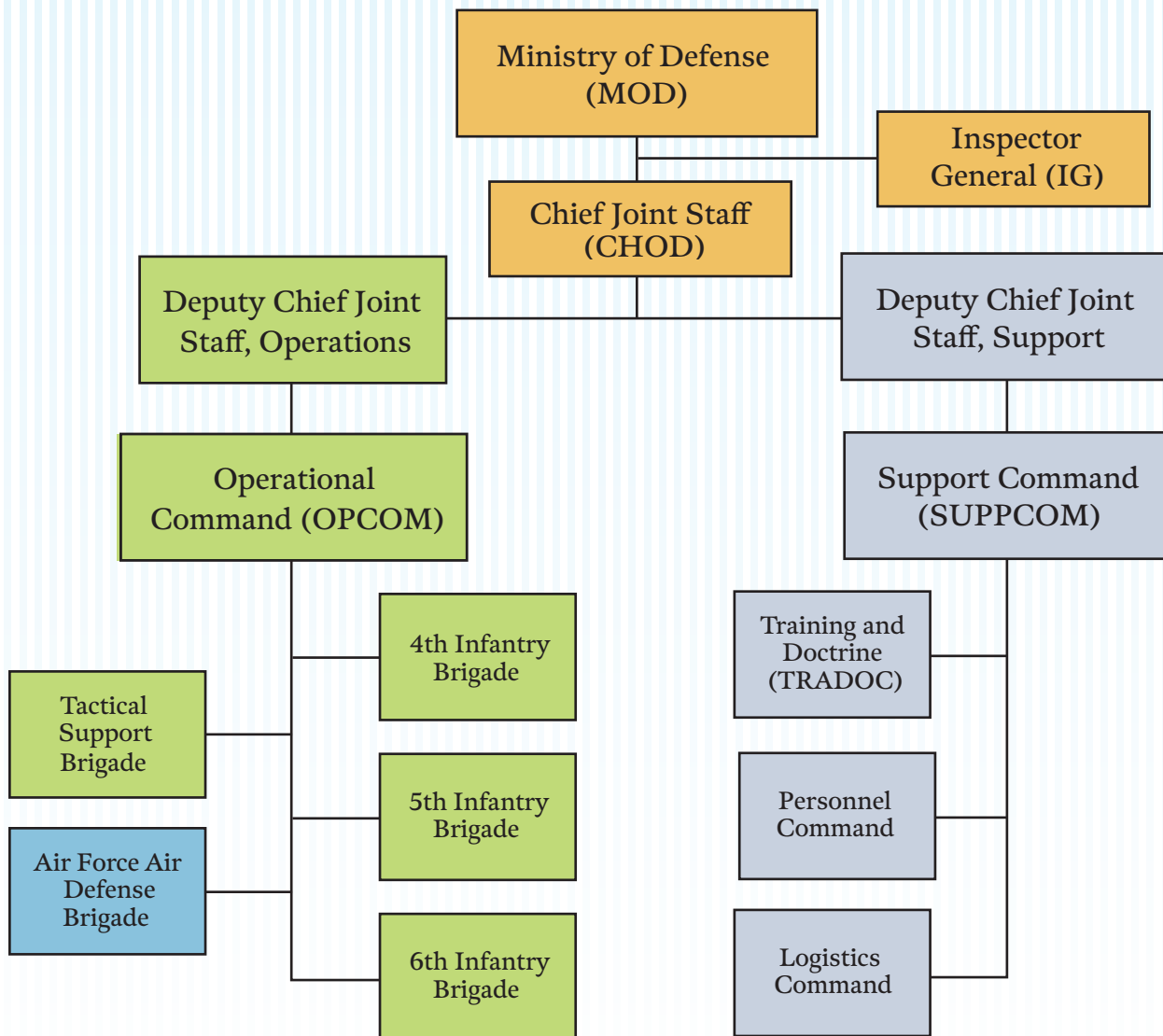
Military Officer

-  2nd Lieutenant
-  1st Lieutenant
-  Captain
-  Major
-  Lt. Colonel
-  Colonel
-  Brigadier General
-  Major General
-  Lieutenant General
-  General
-  General of the Army or Air Force





ARMED FORCES OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



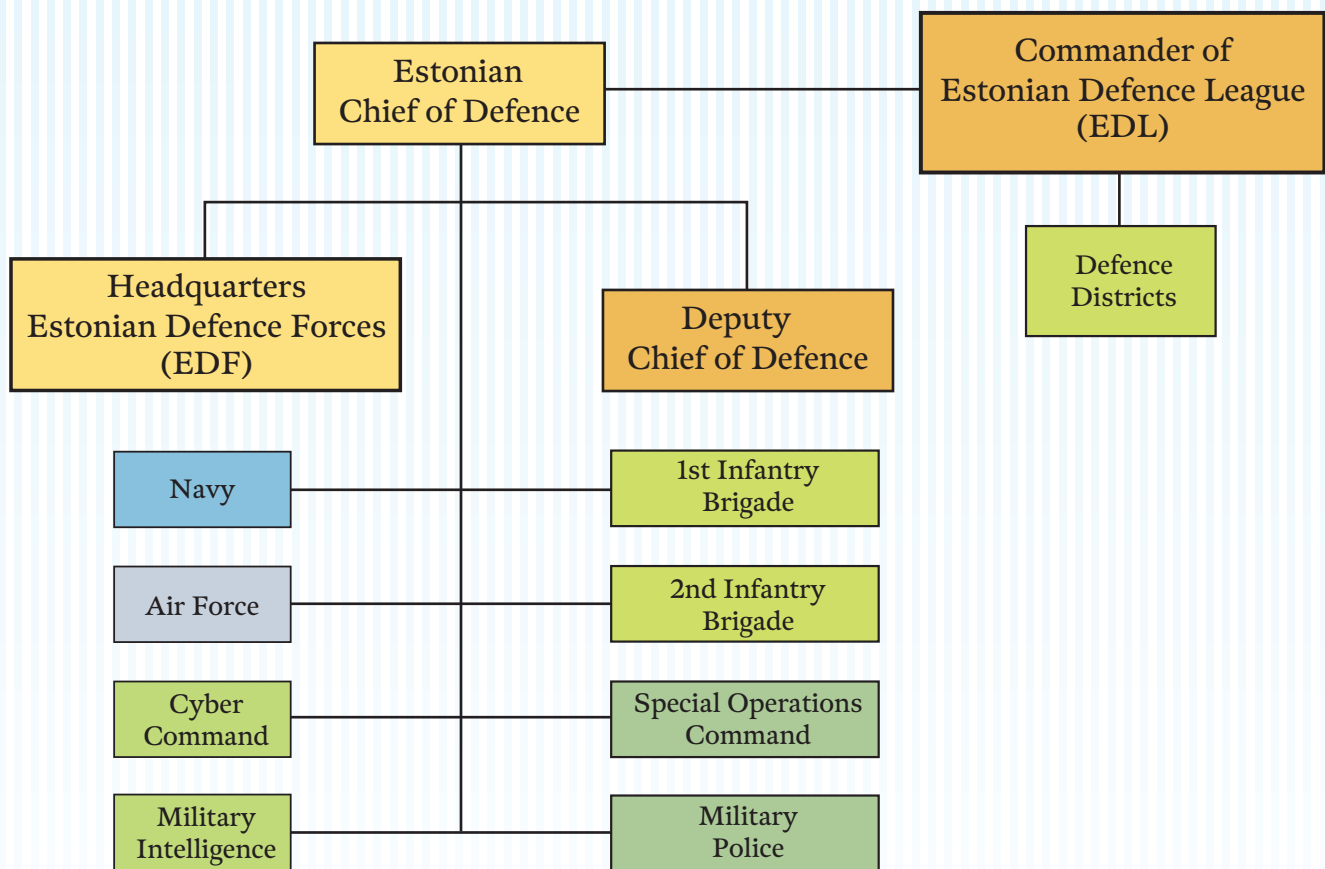
RANK ILLUSTRATIONS AFBIH GROUND FORCE

	English	Bosnian	Croatian	Serbian
GENERAL OFFICERS	 Lieutenant General	generalpukovnik	general pukovnik	general-pukovnik
	 Major General	generalmajor	general bojnik	general-major
	 Brigadier General	brigadni general	brigadni general	brigadni general
OFFICERS	 Colonel	brigadir	brigadir	brigadir
	 Lieutenant Colonel	pukovnik	pukovnik	pukovnik
	 Major	major	bojnik	major
	 Captain	kapetan	satnik	kapetan
	 Second Lieutenant	poručnik	poručnik	poručnik
	 First Lieutenant	potporučnik	potporučnik	potporučnik
NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS	 Command sergeant major	zastavnik prve klase	glavni narednik	zastavnik prve klase
	 Master Sergeant	zastavnik	stožerni narednik	zastavnik
	 Sergeant First Class	stariji vodnik prve klase	narednik prve klase	stariji vodnik prve klase
	 Staff Sergeant	stariji vodnik	viši narednik	stariji vodnik
	 Sergeant	vodnik	narednik	vodnik
SOLDIERS	 Corporal	kaplar	razvodnik	kaplar
	 Private first class	vojn timer prve klase	desetnik	vojn timer prve klase
	 Private	vojn timer	vojn timer	vojn timer





ESTONIAN DEFENCE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



RANK ILLUSTRATIONS ESTONIAN LAND FORCES



Private
Reamees



Sergeant 1st Class
Veebel



Ensign
Lipnik



Colonel
Kolonel



Corporal
Kapral



Master Sergeant
Vanemveebel



2nd Lieutenant
Nooremleitnant



Brigadier General
Brigaadikindral



Junior Sergeant
Nooremseersant



Sergeant Major
Staabiveebel



Lieutenant
Leitnant



Major General
Kindralmajor



Sergeant
Seersant



Command
Sergeant Major
Ülemveebel



Captain
Kapten



Lieutenant
General
Kindralleitnant



Senior Sergeant
Vanemseersant



Major
Major



General
Kindral



Staff Sergeant
Nooremveebel



Lieutenant Colonel
Kolonelleitnant



GLOSSARY

AAR After Action Report

ACE Agile Combat Employment

AFBiH Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina

ANG Air National Guard

ARNG Army National Guard

ATAG Assistant to The Adjutant General

BiH Bosnia and Herzegovina

BAO Bilateral Affairs Officer

BWC Best Warrior Competition

CAB Combat Aviation Brigade

CBRN Chemical, Biological, Radiological,
and Nuclear

CCDCOE Cooperative Cyber Defense Center
of Excellence

CHOD Chief of Defense (Defence)

CINC Commander-in-Chief

CIV Civilian

CJCS Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

CMEP Civil-Military Emergency Preparedness

CNGB Chief, National Guard Bureau

Co. Company

COG Cyberspace Operations Group

CPT Cyber Protection Team

DLD Digital Liaison Detachment

CST Civil Support Team

DOD Department of Defense

DSCA Defense Support to Civil Authorities

EDF Estonian Defence Forces

EDL Estonian Defence League

EOD Explosive Ordnance Disposal

EU European Union

EUCOM European Command

FAM Familiarization Visit

FBiH Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Gov. Governor

GFAP General Framework Agreement for
Peace (Dayton Accords)

HAZMAT Hazardous Materials

HIMARS High Mobility Artillery Rocket System

IFOR Implementation Force

J-3 Joint Operations

JCS Joint Chiefs of Staff

JCTP Joint Contact Team Program

JTAC Joint Terminal Attack Controller

LRS Long Range Surveillance

MD Maryland

MDANG Maryland Air National Guard

MDARNG Maryland Army National Guard

MDDF Maryland Defense Force

MDEM Maryland Department of
Emergency Management

MDMD Maryland Military Department

MDANG Maryland Air National Guard

MDARNG Maryland Army National Guard

MDDF Maryland Defense Force

MDNG Maryland National Guard



MEMA Maryland Emergency Management Agency (now MDEM)

MIC.....Media Information Center

MIL.....Military

MLT.....Military Liaison Team

MNDMultinational Division

MNF..... Multinational Forces

MNF-I Multinational Forces–Iraq

MOD Ministry of Defense (Defence)

MPMilitary Police

MSCA..... Military Support to Civil Authorities

MTT Mobile Training Team

NACC..... North Atlantic Cooperation Council

NATO..... North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NCO..... Non-Commissioned Officer

NDAA National Defense Authorization Act

NDSNational Defense Strategy

NG National Guard

NGB National Guard Bureau

NGO.....Non-Governmental Organization

ODC..... Office of Defense Cooperation

OEF..... Operation Enduring Freedom

OIFOperaion Iraqi Freedom

OSD Office of the Secretary of Defense

PAPublic Affairs

PfP Partnership for Peace

PSOTC..... Peace Support Operations Training Center

Res..... Reserved forces (EDF)

ret.retired

RS Republika Srpska

SACEUR..... Supreme Allied Commander, Europe

SecDef..... Secretary of Defense

SFOR Stabilization Force

SHAPE.....Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe

SMESubject Matter Expert

SPP..... State Partnership Program

SPPCState Partnership Program Coordinator

SPPDState Partnership Director

TAG..... The Adjutant General

TCT..... Traveling Contact Team

TF Task Force

TRADOC..... Training and Doctrine

UCMJ.....Universal Code of Military Justice

UNUnited Nations

USA United States Army

USAF United States Air Force

USAFA..... United States Air Force Academy

USAREUR..... United States Army, Europe

USCENTCOM..... United States Central Command

USEUCOM United States European Command

USG United States Government

USMA United States Military Academy

USNA..... United States Naval Academy

USNORTHCOM.....United States Northern Command

WMD Weapons of Mass Destruction





More than 100 airmen from the 175th Wing deployed to Air Defender 2023, the largest Air Force deployment exercise since NATO was founded. They spent their first week supporting the exercise from Estonia, flying 56 training sorties. (Photo by MDANG Staff Sgt. Laura Weaver)

MDNG Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Janeen L. Birkhead, and Maj. Gen. Ivaca Jerkić, Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff of Armed Forces, Bosnia and Herzegovina for Operations, watch a UH-1H Huey II Multi-Mission helicopter demonstration using a Bambi Bucket for firefighting operations at Rajlovac Barracks, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, June 19, 2023. (Photo by MDANG Sr. Airman Rachel Underwood)





During the 2023 Estonian Spring Storm exercise, Secretary of Defense representative Rachel Ellehuus (who hails from Baltimore) and Estonian-U.S. Ambassador George Kent pose with MDARNG Spc. Tom Lamb, MDARNG Staff Sgt. Jackson Vassighi, MDANG Capt. Andrew Coffey (Photo by MDARNG Spc. Joshua Whitaker)





The Maryland Army National Guard's 169th Cyber Protection Team collaborate with members of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina during a combined team-building cyberevent at the Pvt. Henry Costin Readiness Center, Laurel, MD, July 10-14, 2023. (Photo by MDARNG 1st Lt. Dylan Bradford)



Col. Ed Clements, MDARNG Deputy Joint Operations Director, discusses future missions with an Estonian officer in Tapa, Estonia, during Spring Storm 23. For the first time, the Estonian exercise was led by the new EDF division established in 2022. Guardsmen from the MDARNG 291st Digital Liaison Detachment and a contingent of joint fires support specialists supported the exercise, which took place in May, 2023. (Photo by MDARNG Spc. Joshua Whitaker)





Senior officials from the Maryland National Guard, the Estonian Defence Force, and the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina receive a briefing in Annapolis on the Maryland National Guard's role in supporting state civil authorities, then toured the historic Maryland State House in celebration of their combined 50 years of partnership. Mr. Christopher J. Kintzel, Director, Maryland Commission on Artistic Property, Maryland State Archives conducted the tour of the State House (front row right). Members of the briefing and tour included, from Mr. Kintzel's right, Maj. Gen. Limar Tamm, Deputy Chief of Defence of the Estonian Defence Forces; Maj. Gen. Janneen L. Birkhead, Maryland National Guard Adjutant General; and Lt. Gen. Senad Mašović, Chief of Defense, Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, July 19, 2023. (Photo by MDARNG Spc. Christina Chang)



