



Two nations exchange Leadership Perspectives

By SSG David Abrams

In a year filled with WWII commemoration ceremonies, two U.S. NCOs went to Germany to learn a thing or two about leadership from that nation's army. At the same time, two German NCOs arrived at Ft. Bliss, TX, to absorb American-style leadership from the local NCO Academy.

"This was an absolutely worthwhile experience," SSG Edward Chandler exclaimed after returning from the four-week Platoon Leaders Course held in Rendsburg, Germany in late 1994—the first of its kind conducted by the German Army.

Chandler, a Basic NCO Course (BNCOC) instructor at Ft. Bliss, along with ANCOOC instructor SFC Antony Hanna, traveled to Europe both to absorb the German method of teaching NCOs and to offer informal advice on how to fine-tune the course.

The international and historic exchange of soldiers and ideas could lead to further attendance at other NCO training courses by both armies.

"Really, the only difference between us and them was the fact that their officers did all the teaching," Chandler said during a BNCOC cycle break at Bliss'

NCO Academy. "Other than that, everything was the same. They're NCOs just like us. They go home and 'talk Army' to their wives and buddies, too."

While Chandler and Hanna were talking shop with the Germany Army, SFC Frank Muller and SFC Andreas Markmann were going through the rigors of early-morning physical training and attending classes on American tactics at Ft. Bliss.

"We've learned some interesting things here at ANCOOC about the battlefield," said Markmann near the end of the common core portion of the class. "It's going to be good for my soldiers when I can go back and tell them what the American Army is like. That way, they'll know what's going on when we cross-train together."

Markmann and Muller each work in Germany's only two Stinger units. The air defense soldiers, with less than 15 years of military experience between the two of them, said they were selected to be their country's "guinea pigs" based in part on their knowledge of English and on their learning aptitude.

Though both armies' NCO courses use the small group leader process, the differences in teaching and learning styles were readily apparent to the two sets of NCOs.

"The soldiers here work together more than they do in Germany," Muller said. "In our army, NCOs go through school work alone with everyone trying to be the best one in the class. Here, it's more like a partnership. You can always ask other soldiers to help you during class and when doing homework."

After a couple of weeks in Germany, Hanna said he noticed the focus was different in the Platoon Leaders Course. "In the U.S., we train our soldiers *how* to be leaders," he said. "In Germany, they teach their NCOs NATO tactics,

rather than combining leadership and tactics."

Chandler and Hanna spent hours in the classroom studying, among other topics, how to build sand tables, the political role of the military and methods for drawing map overlays. Only a few days were spent in the field putting tactics into practice. "When we did leave the classroom and go to the field, we did everything one step at a time until it all came together," Hanna noted. "They're very methodical—which is not necessarily wrong, it's just different."

Before returning to the U.S. the two ANCOOC instructors had dinner with the school's commandant. "At one point, I leaned over and told him that if he wants to see his NCO Corps grow stronger, he should take some of his top-notch NCOs and make them the instructors rather than leaving all the teaching up to officers," Hanna said. "The potential for NCO instructors in that country is very good."

In fact, the "Success" block has already been checked for the trial program. Both countries have approved further exchanges between the two armies' NCO programs—a move, Hanna said, which can only benefit the allies. "When it comes down to it, they're just like us. We're continuously looking for ways to enhance the Noncommissioned Officer Education System." ■

Abrams is senior journalist for The NCO Journal.