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## **Tenn. Air Guard lead patrol course ahead of multinational exercise, Defender Falcon 22**

**LAVINIA, Tenn.** – Security Forces Airmen assigned to the 164th Airlift Wing hosted an annual two-week patrol course at Milan’s Volunteer Training Site, Aug. 6-20, to strengthen relations with their Bulgarian counterparts and reinforce airbase ground defense skills.

The course included participation from the Air National Guard, U.S. Air Force, and the Bulgarian Armed Forces.

“Joint training like this is very useful for us, it helps us bridge the language barrier and learn from one another,” said Bulgarian Forces Junior Sgt. Desi Stoyanova. “Additionally, we can use what we learned here in Tennessee and share it with our security forces back in Bulgaria.”

This course is structured in a fast-paced crawl, walk, run format that concluded with a culminating field training exercise. It is designed to test each member in all leadership positions while challenging them both physically and mentally. The success of each member depends upon his or her ability to work as a team, overcome obstacles, and complete each assigned mission.

“When this course was first being developed, we wanted to expand upon force protection capabilities and integrate allied forces,” said Tennessee Air National Guard Master Sgt. John Hogue, the Patrol Course superintendent. “We designed it to reinforce those defense skills, enhance our ability to rapidly deploy, and continue building upon our long-lasting partnership with our Bulgarian counterparts.”

To maximize simulating realistic deployment scenarios, the class was broken down into two fire teams to form a 10-man squad. The leaders were tested on their ability to receive information, develop a movement plan, and communicate it. Leadership roles rotated every few days to test all participants on their abilities.

“We have trained a lot in squad tactics, and I think this is the best training I’ve ever received,” said U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Samantha Sheridan, a participant of the patrol course. “This kind of training allows security forces to not just stick to stateside operations but to embrace combat operations and become more lethal against any future threat. This course has really opened my eyes and I am excited to go back to my unit and effectively train those below me and prepare them for any future deployments.”

The course began with several training classes, led by both Tennessee Army and Air National Guard instructors, to prepare them for the field tactical exercise. The classes included patrol tactics, land navigation, survival skills, urban assault, squad maneuvers, combat lifesaving, and troop leading procedures.

The field tactical exercise replicated a reconnaissance mission where the squad tactically maneuvered behind enemy lines while encountering numerous obstacles. It began with a designated squad member coordinating air transportation with assistance from the Tennessee Army National Guard's 1-107th Air Operations Battalion. The squad navigated through harsh terrain to a landing zone and airlifted by one UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter and crew. The 20-minute flight included several rotary-wing maneuvers to further simulate combat.

Both fire teams were inserted at their target location, regrouped, and began a night reconnaissance mission.

“The Blackhawk insertion really added to the squad’s experience and helped immerse them in the mission at hand,” said Hogue. “It was great to be able to show these Airmen and Bulgarians what a real mission would look and feel like while demonstrating the partnership between the branches.”

Using just the dim light from the overcast clouds, the squad stealthily moved throughout the dense woodland terrain for nearly 10 hours. That was just the first day for the field exercise. By the end of the two-week course, the squad estimated they rucked over 60 miles.

“Although this course is not part of Defender Falcon, it does serve as an opportunity for our Airmen, both participants and instructors, as well as our Bulgarian counterparts, to prepare for this large-scale exercise and further operations,” said Hogue.



Senior Airman Laurence Rodgers simulates first-aid during the two-week patrol course, Aug. 6-20 held in Lavinia. (Photos by Capt. Kealy Moriarty)



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U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Samantha Sheridan, a participant of the patrol course, maintains perimeter security during the two-week patrol course, Aug. 6-20, held in Lavinia. (Photo by Capt. Kealy Moriarty)



Staff Sgt. Colin Wheeler applies tactical camouflage prior to the squad's field training exercise during the two-week patrol course, Aug. 6-20, held in Lavinia. (Photos by Capt. Kealy Moriarty)



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