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Tennessee National Guard Fire Fighters partner with Bulgarian Air Force Firefighters

PLOVDIV, Bulgaria – On June 13, firefighters from the 164th Airlift Wing out of Memphis, Tennessee, participated in an exercise called Falcon Responder with their Bulgarian Air Force counterparts at Graf Air Base just north of Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

Falcon Responder is part of Thracian Sentry 23, a joint exercise between the American, Bulgarian, and Greek armed forces. This part focuses on how firefighters and emergency personnel respond to emergencies on aircraft or the flight line. They are working together to preserve equipment, aircraft, and to protect personnel.

During this four day-long exercise, firefighters from the Tennessee Air National Guard and the Bulgarian Air Force shared response information and performed preventative maintenance on equipment. They also shared best practices on equipment storage, regular maintenance, and emergency response to flight line incidents. Both entities have similar fire response equipment, so they have common ground on which to collaborate.

“I believe in our Air Force partnership,” said Colonel Metodi Orlov, the Deputy Base Commander. “It has been great, and I appreciate the cooperation.”

The teams, after performing preventative maintenance on the fire and rescue equipment, tested the water cannons on all the machinery to ensure proper and effective water delivery in case of an emergency.

“I’ve really enjoyed meeting the people and seeing the culture,” said Staff Sgt. Shane Conady, a fire fighter with the 164th. “The Bulgarian Air Force has a lot of great folks. Everyone has been super nice and a pleasure to interact with. I’m really excited about this mission and this is an exciting opportunity for me to help.”

Thracian Sentry 2023 highlights the 30-year-long partnership between the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense and the Tennessee National Guard and commemorates many years of military cooperation. This exercise also allows Tennesseans to improve their readiness alongside their Bulgarian counterparts and to train combat-ready Soldiers and Airmen.

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Tennessee Air National Guard firefighters and the Bulgarian Air Force firefighters test a fire truck after repairing a water pump on June 13 at Graf Air Base in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. (photo by Lt. Col. Marty Malone)



Tennessee Air National Guard firefighters and the Bulgarian Air Force firefighters pose together as part of Falcon Defender and Thracian Sentry 23 on June 13 at Graf Air Base in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. (photo by Master Sergeant Maya McFarland)



Airman First Class Andrew Davis performs preventative maintenance on a fire truck at Graf Air Base in Plovdiv, Bulgaria on June 13 at Graf Air Base in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. (photo by Master Sergeant Maya McFarland)

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