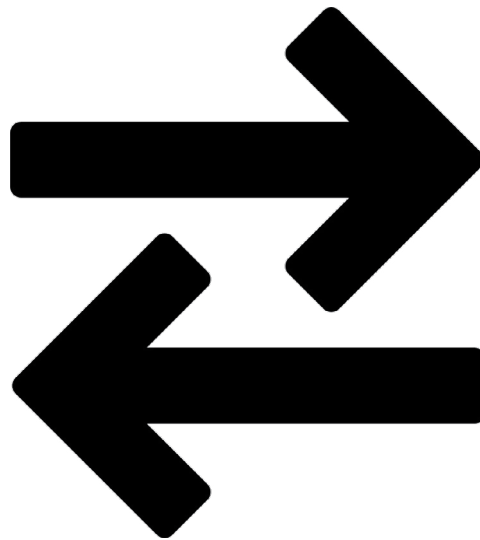


Military Personnel Exchange Program

By 1LT Mariah Love



Left: CPT Travis Vaughn of 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade, who is currently serving as the Air Defense Exchange Officer with the Netherlands' Ground-Based Air Defense Command.

Right: MAJ Nick HoetJes of the Netherlands' Ground Based Air Defense Command is currently serving as the 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade Deputy Brigade Operations Officer and Foreign Exchange Officer. (Photo by 1LT Mariah Love, HHB ADA BDE)

The Military Personnel Exchange Program is a one-for-one exchange of personnel between allied countries. This program was established to build and maintain positive relationships between coalition partners and allies. A successful exchange partnership will enhance relationships between militaries and prepare participants for multinational operations.

The 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade has proudly participated in the MPEP since its start in 1996. Currently, CPT Travis Vaughn of the 11th ADA BDE serves as the Foreign Exchange Officer with the Ground-Based Air Defense Command in the Netherlands. While working with the Dutch military, Vaughn says, “Primarily, I am responsible for planning and super-

vising brigade-level Patriot exercises for the GBADC. Whenever necessary, I work to ensure shared understanding between the GBADC, U.S. Air Defense Artillery units and U.S. embassy personnel.” Here at Fort Bliss, the current Foreign Exchange Officer, MAJ Nick HoetJes, from the Royal Netherlands Air Force, is serving as the Brigade Deputy Operations Officer. In addition to typical duties of a Deputy Operations Officer like writing orders and planning exercises, HoetJes says, “I am always looking for opportunities to conduct joint training whether it be with my home country or another foreign ADA unit. I am the lead for foreign relations, so my main objective is to better understand and utilize other militaries’ capabilities and maintain international relationships.”

Both officers had the opportunity to plan and execute joint, large-scale operations during their time abroad. For HoetJes, “I arranged for my brigade to participate in Roving Sands 2022 with 11th ADA BDE, but, unfortunately, they had to deploy a few weeks before due to a real-time mission. It was a higher priority, but I am hopeful that we will conduct Operation Shining Star exercise again with the Japanese, Dutch and American Air Defenses soon.” Vaughn completed several joint operations with another operation on the horizon, “Over the summer, I participated in a binational Patriot live fire exercise at the NATO Missile Firing Installation. My colleagues and I are currently preparing for Joint Project Optic Windmill in spring 2023. One of the most obvious differences between Dutch and U.S. Army operations is the strong focus on building interoperability during certification events like the live fire.”

The Royal Netherlands Air Force is comprised of 6,500 active-duty Soldiers, with about 800 of those making up the ADA branch. The Netherlands’ ADA branch is organized differently: Short Range Air Defense is in the Army, while High to Medium Air Defense is in the Air Force. Vaughn says that the U.S. Army’s size can be an advantage and disadvantage, “I’ve come to realize that the size of the U.S. Army has clear advantages in warfighting capability, but it also impacts our implicit attitude toward interoperability and integration with partner nations. Nations like the Netherlands are proficient in these tasks because multinational integration is often a necessity, and the importance of maintaining these unit-to-unit relationships is obvious.” The size and operational style of the Dutch military compared to the American military is vastly different. When asked what challenges HoetJes faced integrating into a different military, he said, “The biggest growing experience here has been the planning scale that you have to work on; it still baffles me. I look out my office window here and see two battalion motor pools that would comprise all the Netherlands’ air defense capabilities.” Vaughn found that in addition to a different mindset regarding joint operations, he struggled with the difference in tactics, “I would say that my biggest challenge was becoming familiar with NATO-centric plan-

ning processes found within the Dutch military. Understanding the roles and outputs of various syndicates and control groups added a layer of complexity that I did not anticipate.”

Upon completing this two-year assignment, HoetJes will assume the equivalent of battalion command, and he plans to integrate a few American military practices into that command. “You have a set battle rhythm every week, like Maintenance Monday and Leader’s Time Training Thursday. It may feel tedious at times, but Soldiers know exactly what is expected of them. I think that is valuable and will try to integrate that into my command.” After Vaughn’s experience with GBADC, he plans to incorporate lessons he learned about collaboration, “Military culture in the Netherlands prizes collaboration at all levels regardless of rank. I think it is important to remember that the quality of someone’s feedback is not a function of their rank. The Dutch military demonstrates this constantly; that is certainly something I will work to emphasize in my future positions.”

HoetJes applied for the MPEP because he wanted to grow both as a person and a Soldier. “I wanted the experience of living abroad and serving in a much larger Air Defense Artillery community. I knew there were valuable lessons to be learned by integrating into a different military and culture.” Vaughn applied for the cultural experience and opportunity to represent his country. “If you have an interest in immersing yourself in another culture and becoming more knowledgeable about multinational operations, I highly recommend applying for any exchange position. As an exchange officer, you’ll be viewed as a U.S. Army representative first and an Air Defender second.” Both officers have greatly enjoyed their time in the MPEP. To American and Dutch Soldiers interested in MPEP, HoetJes simply says, “Do it. It is the experience of a lifetime.”

1LT Mariah Love graduated from Cedarville University in 2019 with a Professional Writing and Information Design degree. She is a former 14A Air Defense Artillery Officer who served as the 11th ADA BDE Public Affairs Officer.