
The United States European Command Rebuilds School for Croatian Children

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March 20, 2009

Through its little-known humanitarian assistance program, the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) unveiled a new playground, two basketball courts, and four renovated classrooms in a dedication ceremony here March 16.

The purpose of the \$130,000 EUCOM-funded renovation, managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Europe District, was to promote regional stability and foster goodwill between the United States and Croatia, said Chuck Brady, EUCOM's Humanitarian Assistance Program Manager.



Croatian and American dignitaries including the U.S. Ambassador to Croatia pose in front of a plaque outside a newly renovated playground here, dedicated March 16, 2009 to the memory of native son Master Sgt. Ivica Jerak, a U.S. soldier killed in Iraq in 2005. [Department of Defense photo.]

As part of a ceremony, a memorial plaque for U.S. Army Master Sgt. Ivica Jerak was laid near the new playground, which will become the focal point for the community. Jerak, a native of Debeljak who grew up playing basketball on the playground, was a highly decorated special forces soldier who was killed while serving in combat operations in Iraq in 2005.

To honor his fallen soldier, the Commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command Europe, Major General Frank Kisner, attended the solemn event.

These renovations will keep Master Sgt. Jerak's memory in our hearts and improve the lives of the children and the citizens of this great village, said Kisner in his speech at the event.

The ceremony was attended by Jerak's wife Hye, his mother Milka, and several dignitaries including the U.S. Ambassador to Croatia Robert Bradtke.

Hopefully this will somewhat lessen the pain for the community by providing a small reminder of the Master Sergeant for his service and dedication not only to America but also to Croatia, said John Thomas, the Corps of Engineers' construction representative for the project.

In addition to a refurbished outdoor basketball court with a new backboard, new asphalt, and new lights to allow for community league night play, Army engineers also oversaw the restoration of cracked flooring in the school, new perimeter fencing around the playground, and new concrete curbs.

EUCOM's humanitarian assistance program funds more than \$20 million in projects throughout Europe annually, said Brady