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## TACOM-RI Hosts Twelve FMS Countries at Users' Conference

By

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Last October, 33 representatives from twelve countries descended upon Jumer's Castle Lodge in Bettendorf Iowa for the first FMS M109 howitzer users' conference. These visitors teamed up with 150 CONUS-based U.S. government personnel and ten security assistance organization representatives to receive briefings on timely topics relative to the M109 howitzer fleet, exchange ideas and make valuable contacts.



Foreign military and SAO participants in M109 conference. Jimmy Morgan, TACOM-R1, and MG Mahmoud Emeira, Egyptian Army, hold memorial poster from the M109 conference. They are flanked by BG Hussain Mohammed Maghrbi, Saudi Arabian Land Forces, and BG Hans Kossik, Austrian Army. Ron Sturgeon, TSAC Director, is second from right in front row.

The conference was hosted by the Rock Island site of the U.S. Army Tank-Automotive and Armament Command (TACOM) Security Assistance Center, a relatively small organization comprised of thirty-three individuals. Mission responsibility for this organization is to develop and manage security assistance programs for field artillery, mortars, small arms, aircraft armament, armor turrets and sets, kits and outfits. The TACOM Security Assistance Center-RI is a division of the TACOM Security Assistance Center, whose Director, Ron Sturgeon resides in Warren Michigan. TSAC reports to the TACOM Deputy for Corporate Management, Dan Mehney. Current commander of TACOM is MG John Caldwell.

Because of the large population of M109 Self-Propelled 155mm howitzers world-wide, we saw a need for a users' conference geared specifically to FMS customers. Invitations went out to the SAOs for all countries which had purchased M109s via FMS or direct sales and twelve

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countries responded favorably: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Egypt, Germany, Morocco, Netherlands, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Switzerland and Thailand. Country teams were composed of both military and civilians and nine of the twelve teams included their SAO representative.

Although the conference forum provided a great deal of information on the M109 system, supportability, upgrades and enhancements, most participants agreed that information exchanged during breaks or sidebar meetings was invaluable. It was a most unique opportunity for country representatives to work directly with FMS case managers, item managers, engineers and representatives from other nations. Highlights of the conference included presentations by FMS country teams for Austria and Belgium on unique initiatives associated with their own M109 programs. Other countries have already requested the opportunity to brief at the next conference.

Because of the co-location of Rock Island Arsenal with TACOM-RI, interested participants were offered the opportunity to take a tour of RIA's facilities and to view a static howitzer display. Among other mission activity, RIA produces gun mounts for the M109 howitzer. Current configuration of the M109, the Paladin, is produced for U.S. Army commercially by the Ground Systems Division of United Defense-Limited Partnership (UDLP) in York, Pennsylvania.

Included among the unplanned events were seven sidebar meetings between FMS country representatives and their U.S. government counterparts, a joint visual inspection by one country team of special defense acquisition fund assets that are currently in storage at RIA and a visit by another country team to the local Defense Reutilization and Marketing Office for identification of materiel for a future FMS purchase.

We observed several side discussions between country delegations relative to parts support, upgrades, maintenance facilities and related topics. There were no noticeable language or cultural barriers as conference participants came together for a common purpose. However, as conference facilitator, I found it a bit challenging to entertain a multi-national audience between briefings.

Two American speakers were able to find the right formula for capturing the attention of this diverse group. Mike Buchanan from USASAC-New Cumberland gave a presentation at a formal luncheon on "Communications in a Multi-National Environment." He effectively used an imaginary hot potato to illustrate the time-honored American tradition of "passing the buck." Another effective communicator was Steve Marriott, an RIA engineer, who found just the right topic in his introductory remarks to enchant the group: "Changing Weather in the State of Iowa." I later learned that Marriott performs locally as a storyteller at community events.

One of the most important lessons learned from this event had to do with briefing presentations by U.S. personnel. Although all briefings had been carefully reviewed by all cognizant Foreign Disclosure Officers for releaseability of data and by TACOM for technical content, we did not fully anticipate audience reaction. Some of the briefings were far too specific for the general audience and at least one failed to address releaseability of the system being briefed to all participating countries. The most common error was failure by the briefer to recognize that they would be addressing an international audience. Some presentations were "canned" DoD briefings and many briefings were replete with acronyms that were not understood by our foreign counterparts.

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Overall, we received positive feedback from foreign and American participants on the value of the conference as a tool for enhancing international partnerships. We are already receiving inquiries as to the time-frame for the next TACOM M109 users' conference, which hopefully will be in 2001-2002.

### **About the Author**

Terry Ratcliff is Chief of TSAC-Rock Island (U.S. Army Tank-Automotive and Armament Command (TACOM) Security Assistance Center-Rock Island, Illinois). She has had 25 years experience in the field of security assistance with assignments at U.S. Army Armament, Munitions and Chemical Command, Rock Island, IL; U.S. Army Security Assistance Command, Alexandria VA; U.S. Army Aviation and Troop Command, St. Louis, MO; and TACOM-Rock Island, IL. In her current position, she is responsible for supervising an organization whose main mission is to develop and execute security assistance programs for field artillery, mortars, small arms, aircraft armament, tank turrets and sets, kits and outfits.