



TRANSCRIPT

U.S. European Command Public Affairs
ECPA
INFORM & EDUCATE

Inside USEUCOM, Episode 2: COVID-19 Support to Allies and Partners

March 5, 2021

Host: MC2 Sean Castellano, Armed Forces Network (AFN), Stuttgart

Guest: Colonel Kyle Simpson, USEUCOM J9 Directorate; Jose Colon, U.S. Army Logistic Management Specialist

PETTY OFFICER SECOND CLASS SEAN CASTELLANO: Hello, ladies and gentleman, welcome to "Inside EUCOM." I am Navy Petty Officer Second Class Sean Castellano. I work for AFN Stuttgart. I am joined here by United States European Command's J9 Directorate. I've got Colonel Kyle Simpson here with me and Mr. Jose Colon. So gentlemen, first things first. Thank you for joining us. We really appreciate you coming out here.

JOSE COLON: Thank you for having us.

COLONEL KYLE SIMPSON: It's a pleasure to be here.

P.O. CASTELLANO: Absolutely. So, J9 in a nutshell, for somebody that doesn't know. What does a J9 Directorate at EUCOM do?

COL. SIMPSON: So the J9 Directorate, which is the interagency partnering directorate, really is focused on the civil military component of our relationships here in Europe.

P.O. CASTELLANO: Okay. So, with that being said, I want to jump it back it to about a year ago now. We're sitting here recording this interview. It's March 2021. So back in March of 2020, COVID really surged to impact Europe as a continent. So what did J9's workflow kind of look like when COVID really started to impact us over here?

COL. SIMPSON: So it's interesting. We go back a year and U.S. European Command was in the middle of an exercise called "Juniper Cobra." And so if -- if we think back, of course, you know, you had the -- the issues in Wuhan in China and -- and very near to that the virus had spread to South Korea, and so United States Forces Korea was very focused on trying to tamp it down in that location. Here in Europe, the first place that -- that we really saw COVID was in Italy and there was a huge balloon right at the end of February beginning of March of -- of 2020 and that caused a lot of concern not only for us because we have forces in Italy. But for Europe writ-large because there was concern about the spread throughout Europe.

And what the -- the social and economic impacts would be for the continent and so here within U.S. European Command, we -- we scaled back, curtailed "Juniper Cobra" and we started

planning for how we EUCOM were going to respond to what as at the time an epidemic which would later become a pandemic. So we put together a joint planning group to start -- start analyzing and planning our response. Through that -- through that planning group we -- we got guidance that there were -- there were three functions that we had to do. First we were going to maintain our mission essential functions as combatant command and our components.

Secondly, we were going to focus on keeping COVID out our headquarters and then the third thing we were going to do is to the extent possible we would extend assistance to our allies and partners, which is really what we're going to talk about today. Let me -- let me try to give a brief, if you will, a macro view of -- of where we've come since -- since we were a year ago. So we started in that joint planning group. We came up with some options and as we started looking at assistance to allies and partners one of the first things we had. There's an excess property warehouse down in Livorno, Italy which happened to be right smack in the middle of where the epicenter in -- in northern Italy was at the time.

So we looked at, what do we have in that warehouse that we could donate to the Italians in order to create field hospitals or sites where they could treat COVID. And we found a number of different items that were of use to the Italians and we coordinated with them and -- and so we set up that -- that first delivery which happened on March 20th of 2020. At the same time, we were already in discussion with the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency about a foreign disaster response to help the Italians. That would eventually become \$100,000 of assistance that the president would promise to -- to the Italian government.

Ten million of that would be for immediate response done by the Department of Defense by -- by U.S. European Command and \$90 million of that would be more long term through the United States Agency for International Development. So, it was in April that -- that the president's directive came out and -- and we received authorization from the Secretary of Defense and as we got the funding we started contracting locally and -- and as we talk about everything that we've done here in Europe. Because there was concern about impacting the domestic supply within the United States as COVID started to balloon there. Everything has been contracted locally here within Europe.

So we started doing that contracting, \$10 million worth. In that case primarily for personal protective equipment or what we call PPE and then for sanitizing agents. And so working with the Italian Civil Protection Agency, we ordered gloves, gowns, goggles, masks, everything you needed to protect those -- those first line responders as well as the healthcare professionals and the patients so that we minimize the spread of COVID within Italy. Simultaneously with that -- that we also provided some military airlift in order to help the Italians move that equipment around Italy as the Italian Air Force was the agency that was responsible for it initially.

That would later transition to civilian or commercial options for moving equipment around Italy. So that was -- that was the first response. Everything was focused on Italy but we knew at the time that -- that this was going to spread and there were going to be other countries, particularly those that are not extremely highly developed, that were going to have issues

combating COVID and they were going to need assistance. So we coordinated with the Defense Security Cooperation Agency and using authorities that we already had and funding that we already had, we started coming up with small HA projects in order to provide that -- that personal protective equipment and sanitizing solutions to other countries.

P.O. CASTELLANO: Okay. So I want to -- I want to clarify a couple things. I want to jump back here a little bit. About a year ago, you said March 20th the first supplies started rolling out to Italy and then that acted as a bit of a catalyst if I'm understanding correctly. And then you guys, sort of, support the rest of the continent here and just to clarify how do those -- how do those requests come to you U.S. European Command from our allied and partner nations?

MR. COLON: So generally, the -- the different ministries are in charge of the COVID response in each country. Usually the ministry of health or sometimes one of the other agencies, like a FEMA equivalent has the lead but they look at what their eternal requirements are and they usually reach out to the U.S. embassy and say hey, these are the types of things that we are in need of. Eventually they get to the Office of Defense Cooperation which works directly with our Humanitarian Assistance Office and they put in projects for those requirements. We staff them. We review. We staffed them here if they are under 75,000 which is what we consider a minimal cost project. We approve it locally and then we either push the money back to that specific country through the GSO to buy locally.

There's also a -- a RPSO office, Regional Procurement Service Office, so high dollar items can be purchased through that office. If they are larger dollar projects anything above 75,000, we don't have the ability to approve locally so we send them up to the DSCA. We get them approved and then we send them out to the executive agencies for contracting. Our primary agency is MEDCOM that has an office here in Germany. We send them the money and then they work directly with the HAP managers, Humanitarian Assistance Program managers, and the other -- other officers at the Office of Defense Cooperation to build the requirements, packages and to contract for those items that are needed at each -- at each different location.

P.O. CASTELLANO: Okay. And then speaking of those items that are needed, I remember about a year ago now there was a big call for respirators. What did it look like? How did it -- how did this relief kind of manifest itself? What were we sending to these allied and partner nations?

MR. COLON: In the beginning, it was mostly PPE because it was a shortage. Everybody was looking for PPE. As we developed from Phase I into Phase II, like the Colonel mentioned, we started getting into longer term assistance where the -- the countries could pretty much get their own PPE but they needed assistance for other items. So, we didn't get into the respirators per say that much but we started doing projects for other things. And again, it's based on what each country was requesting, a lot of ventilators, a lot of ultrasound machines. We did hospital beds, mattresses, linens, things like that. A lot of the things that are needed in the ICUs immediately is what the types of things we ended up providing or our still in the process of providing in some cases.

P.O. CASTELLANO: Okay. Makes sense. So, I can only imagine it's been a pretty busy past year for both of you gentlemen. Is that -- is that correct?

COL. SIMPSON: I'd -- I'd say that's a very fair statement and I'm going to -- I'm going to let Jose expound upon this. So -- so part of this is, you know, there's the old saying you go to war with what you've got. Well we've had to go -- go to war against COVID with what we've got and so, you know the -- the Overseas Humanitarian Disaster and Civic Aid, or OHDACA office, really is a two person office and so with all of these projects rolling in that had to be staffed. That had to be -- make sure that everything is done right, I had two people to do that. That's Jose and -- and then -- and then his supervisor, Mr. (Claude Galuso ?). Keeping up was very much a challenge and -- and a credit to both of them, over the past year I think they have put in comp time hours every single week to make sure that these projects have stayed on track and are getting out in a timely fashion.

Additionally, I -- I did augment that office with -- with one of my civil affairs NCOs in order to provide additional capability. You know, it would have been nice to have, you know, another program manager and a budget analyst in the office but -- but you go to war with what you've got. And so, you know, those were some of the challenges that we faced but -- but they've done a fantastic job of -- of getting these projects out the door so that the -- the contracting agencies can -- can put the right materials into the ODC's hands to -- to donate to the countries.

P.O. CASTELLANO: That sounds -- that does sound challenging. It sounds like you guys have been busy. While it is challenging, I'm sure it's also very rewarding work that you've been doing over the past year. What -- what are some of your guys' most memorable moments you've had since the start of this thing here?

MR. COLON: I -- I wouldn't say there's any one particular memorable -- memorable moment but we get a lot of feedback from the different ODC offices and HAP managers. And they let us know when projects are actually put or -- of items are put into the hands of the partner nation, when they receive them the different clinics and hospitals and seeing those photos is pretty rewarding.

P.O. CASTELLANO: I can only imagine.

(CROSSTALK)

COL. SIMPSON: And I would echo that -- that there is no one -- one moment if you will but -- but really the satisfaction that you get out of this job is that every time you see one of these projects completed. And you know that this equipment is -- is going to the healthcare professionals, you're saving lives. You're saving lives in -- in those allies and partner countries but we're also strengthening our relationship with those countries. Because what we want -- we want them to understand is that the United States wants to be their global partner power of choice and -- and it doesn't just mean for defense of the Euro-Atlantic area. You know, yes we're here with hard power but we're also partners in this fight against COVID.

P.O. CASTELLANO: Absolutely. Well gentlemen, I want to thank both of you here for -- for joining me. We really appreciate it. Sounds like you guys have had a very busy but important past year so I hear. So thank you for taking the time to come over here and talk to everybody that watches this "Inside EUCOM" series. We -- we really appreciate it.

COL. SIMPSON: Absolutely. It's been -- it's been very great to come over here and we hope that everybody will, kind of, understand this little piece of what's been going on. It has been, sometimes under known but -- but we're out there putting a good face up for -- for EUCOM and for the United States government with our allies and partners.

MR. COLON: Thank you for having us here Sean.

P.O. CASTELLANO: Absolutely. Thank you.

-END-