



# Ohio Adjutant General's Department

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May 17, 2018  
Log# 18-21

For Immediate Release

## **On its 25th anniversary, Ohio-Hungary partnership is more like a family**

**Story by Stephanie Beougher  
Ohio National Guard Public Affairs**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — In 1993, the original “Jurassic Park” premiered in theaters around the country, Michael Jordan ruled the basketball court and the average price of gasoline was just over a dollar per gallon. It was also the year the Department of Defense established the State Partnership Program (SPP) and the Ohio National Guard was paired with the Hungarian Defence Forces as one of the new initiative’s first partnerships.

The goal of SPP is to link U.S. states with a partner country to promote regional stability and develop civil-military relationships. The Ohio-Hungary partnership was developed during a historical period for Hungary, including their membership in NATO.

Today, Ohio’s partnership is one of more than 70 in the program managed by the National Guard Bureau. The Ohio National Guard has committed its forces to regularly conducting joint military exercises and senior military and civic leader visits for the last quarter century. Twenty-five years and more than 300 combined events later, the partnership is still going strong.

Maj. Gen. Mark E. Bartman, adjutant general of Ohio, said the partnership has evolved through the years to more closely resemble a family.

“Members of the Hungarian Defence Forces have come to Ohio and stayed in some of my members’ homes and we’ve done the same when we’ve gone over to Hungary,” Bartman said. “We are brothers and sisters in arms. We are part of the same community working toward a common goal.”

Throughout the partnership, there have been a number of cooperation activities focusing on missions ranging from peacekeeping and joint training to leadership development. In 2008, the first Hungarians graduated from the Army’s Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course and a Total Army Instructor Training Course at the Ohio Army National Guard’s 147th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) in Columbus.

A significant accomplishment, according to Bartman, has been the ability of Ohio and Hungary to deploy together. Since 2009, there have been 10 rotations as part of the Operational Mentor

and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) in support of the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to Afghanistan. "To be able to go overseas and participate in the fight on terrorism with our Hungarian partners is one of the things our Soldiers who participated in those OMLTs will never soon forget," he said.

Gen. Tibor Benkő, chief of staff of the Hungarian Defence Forces, said he has seen the value of exchanging ideas and sharing information with the Ohio National Guard.

"This is a very good example for our different countries, a very good example for the civilians, how we two work together, how we can serve the common interest," Benkő said.

In 2017, Hungarian Defence Force soldiers deployed for nearly a year with Ohio National Guard Soldiers to Kosovo in support of Operation Joint-Kosovo Force (KFOR). Maj. Gen. John C. Harris Jr., assistant adjutant general and commander of the Ohio Army National Guard, is a firm believer in the importance of co-deploying.

"The partnership is important because we have to maintain a sense of trust with our NATO allies, but that trust, both at the Soldier level and the senior-leader level, is something you can't develop overnight. If we have to put our forces on the ground, on the same piece of real estate, at some point, that's not the time to exchange business cards," Harris said.

David Kostelancik, chargé d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Budapest, Hungary, said the Ohio National Guard and Hungarian Defence Forces relationship has many benefits.

"At the individual level, a generation of soldiers from both countries has developed friendships that extend far beyond deployments in places including Afghanistan and Kosovo, where soldiers worked shoulder to shoulder. All of these things strengthen the entire NATO alliance," Kostelancik said.

There are 74 SPP partnerships between U.S. states, territories, the District of Columbia and countries around the world. In addition to Hungary, Ohio has also been paired with Serbia since 2006.

"The national security environment is ever-changing," observed Army Brig. Gen. Christopher F. Lawson, the National Guard Bureau's vice director of strategy, policy, plans and international affairs. "In order to promote greater peace and stability in the world, long into the future, we will need a program like the SPP, because it helps nations transition from security consumers to security providers."

Lawson congratulated Ohio and Hungary for their "exceptional cooperation" in the past two-and-a-half decades as society and technology have changed.

Today, in 2018, the fifth movie in the "Jurassic Park" series will premiere in theaters this summer, some would argue LeBron James is the king of basketball and the average cost of gasoline is just under \$3.

It's also the year the Ohio National Guard celebrates a 25-year partnership with Hungary, a relationship built on commitment, trust and family-like bonds that have been strengthened since 1993.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** High resolution photos to support this story are available on the [Defense Video Imagery Distribution Site \(DVIDS\)](#) and the [Ohio National Guard Flickr page](#).

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