

# Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin Guard demonstrates rapid deployment capability to Baltic region

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GOTLAND, Sweden — A Wisconsin Army National Guard field artillery unit became the first high-mobility rocket artillery system (HIMARS) to launch in Sweden, as part of a special operations training event to demonstrate the ability to rapidly deploy HIMARS in the Baltic Sea area.

The 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery was invited by Special Operations Command Europe and the Swedish Air Force to take part in exercises Voldemort 22 and Adamant Serpent 22. Battery B in Plymouth, Wisconsin, sent 14 Soldiers — a full launcher crew, a full fire direction center crew, two mechanics, one communications specialist, a platoon leader and a two-person liaison team — along with a HIMARS launcher and a pod of reduced range practice rockets to support the mission.

Maj. Matthew Mangerson, the battalion's executive officer, noted that Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Seefeld, the battalion's senior enlisted leader, recently deployed with the Special Operations Command, and those contacts may have factored into the 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery being chosen for this training. But that would not have been the only factor, he said.

"There are only five HIMARS battalions in the active Army component, and two in the Marines," Mangerson said. "That leaves the bulk of HIMARS battalions coming from the National Guard. HIMARS has recently become a very sought-after asset across the force, so there is often a desire to include that asset in exercises."

Mangerson said the battalion was approached about participating in this exercise after it had already completed annual training at Camp Ripley, Minnesota.

Sweden, a neutral country, is not a NATO member but has participated in NATO and U.S. training exercises.

A Swedish C-130 Hercules and a U.S. Air Force MC-130J Commando II flew out to the Swedish island Gotland in the Baltic Sea on Oct. 23, landing on a paved highway. The HIMARS launcher disembarked from the MC-130J for a few minutes, then was loaded on the aircraft again and flown to northern Sweden for a live-fire exercise.

“Everything went very well,” said Lt. Gen. Michael Claesson, chief of joint operations for the Swedish Armed Forces. “The joint exercises conducted this past weekend demonstrate how far we’ve come in our cooperation with the U.S.”

Capt. Trenton Manderle, officer in charge of the Bravo Soldiers who deployed to Sweden, agreed.

“The training event was extremely successful,” he said. “Battery B of the 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery was the partner force to conduct [HIMARS rapid infiltration] operations with our partners in the Swedish Air Force, and conduct the first HIMARS live-fire exercise in Sweden.”

Manderle said the Battery B artillerymen who supported the mission developed and refined standard operating procedures which can be applied to training back in the United States, as well as develop relationships with other services and partner nations which could lead to future training opportunities.

“We now have a group of subject matter experts that will be able to train the rest of the battalion on HIMARS rapid insertion capabilities and tactics, policies and procedures,” Manderle said.

Some information for this article was provided by the Swedish Armed Forces Headquarters.