

National Guard: Wisconsin Guard units take part in multinational training in Africa

Posted on Wednesday, Jul 13, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Two Wisconsin Army National Guard units recently played supporting roles in African Lion 22, U.S. African Command's largest premier joint annual exercise.

The 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery — a High-Mobility Artillery rocket System (HIMARS) battalion with units in Sussex and Plymouth, Wisconsin — and the Madison-based 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment (MPAD) joined more than 7,500 participants from 28 nations and NATO for African Lion 22. The goal of the two-week exercise was to strengthen the ability of participants to operate with one another, enhance readiness for U.S. and partner nation forces, and set the theater for strategic access.

“An overseas training exercise like African Lion is the same as preparing for a deployment overseas, so there's a lot of extra time put into it,” said Capt. Alicia Dorsett, commander of the 121st Field Artillery's Battery A. “But it prepared us better for if we were to receive a deployment notice, and overall, it improved our readiness.”

The 112th MPAD brought 13 Soldiers who supported the Command Public Information Center, partnering with the U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa public affairs team and several other components to provide external public affairs coverage for the exercise. The unit took photos and videos throughout the exercise, facilitated the media covering the exercise, and developed products for publication — operating how they would if deployed.

“African Lion offered us the chance to exercise all our mission essential tasks,” said

Maj. Joseph Trovato, 112th MPAD commander. “It was a good opportunity to produce a lot of content and it gave junior Soldiers a lot of experience taking dynamic photos and videos. I liked the most that junior noncommissioned officers had troop-leading procedure experience, and got to lead a team in an unfamiliar environment.

“I’m really proud of how all our Soldiers performed,” he continued. “They performed well at every step of the way, came up with incredible coverage of the overall exercise, and demonstrated great leadership in the process.”

The 121st Field Artillery brought 78 Soldiers — eight launcher crews, an ammunition support team, a battalion staff team, a combat medic team and other key support staff — to Morocco to demonstrate their ability to work with foreign partners, and to showcase their HIMARS capabilities on a world stage. Their 29 vehicles included launchers, Humvees, ammunition trucks, maintenance trucks, wreckers, and command vehicles for platoon operation centers.

“I think the best part of this exercise was the improvement of my Soldier’s skillsets, and the training was a great value add,” Dorsett said. “Plus, the ability to train with Moroccan counterparts contributed greatly. We enjoyed explaining what HIMARS are to them since they’re receiving them in 2023.”

1st Lt. Blake Nikolai is an operations officer with the 121st Field Artillery who has been with the battalion for several years. He said African Lion was a valuable experience, especially for Soldiers that are new to the unit.

“For our guys it was an opportunity to get into a new training environment and integrate with partner nations and countries that we haven’t worked with before,” Nikolai said, “to see how they operate and to have that worldwide presence which a lot of these guys haven’t had yet. Since we came back from our deployment in 2018, we’ve had new guys come in and this is their first shot at an overseas training. It offers both a new cultural experience and also a new military perspective.”

“I could not be more proud to lead this awesome group of Soldiers,” Dorsett said.

Pfc. Emily Held is the newest MPAD member, with just two years in her Army career.

“This was the first real-life exercise that I’ve ever been a part of,” Held said, “and it

renewed all my school training — but in a more realistic way.

“My mentor was a huge help too,” she continued. “She literally guided me through the whole thing and the steps to take for when something comes up — like what’s important, what to figure out first, and how to tackle the situation. Basically, she helped prepare me for missions that I’ll have to do by myself one day. I now feel more confident for when those arise in the future.”

African Lion 22 took place in Morocco, Ghana, Senegal and Tunisia. In addition to U.S. active and reserve component units, military participants hailed from Brazil, Chad, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The exercise featured a joint task force command exercise, a combined arms live fire exercise, a maritime exercise, an air exercise that included bomber aircraft, a joint forcible entry with paratroopers into a field training exercise, a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear response exercise, and a humanitarian civic assistance program event.