

## NATO on Ramstein: dynamic alliance helps secure European airspace

By Nate Cairney

Kaiserslautern American

Feb 16, 2007, 09:27



Photo by Lt. Col. Meinrad Angermayer

Col. Tip Wight, Allied Component Command-Air-Headquarters Ramstein director of staff, is one of more than 100 U.S. servicemembers assigned to the NATO team at Ramstein. More than 500 people from nearly two dozen NATO member countries serve at Ramstein.

A passenger plane takes off from Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, bound for a short hop to Munich. Somewhere over central Germany, the plane drops off the radar screens of civilian air traffic controllers. What happens next?

According to Bundeswehr Lt. Col. Meinrad Angermayer, NATO forces at Ramstein stand up and take attention. “(Our) Combined Air Operations Centers get very interested,” he said. “If something like that happens, civilians have no way to react. The military has the means to solve the problem.”

Colonel Angermayer, who serves as the public information officer for NATO’s Allied-Air Component Headquarters-Ramstein, said that helping to police the busiest airspace in the world is just one part of the HQ’s duties. The Allied Component Command-Air-Headquarters Ramstein members also provide heavy support for the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and the NATO Response Force, which is designed to provide immediate assistance in crisis situations around the globe.

### Missions possible

Since the transfer of the military mission in Afghanistan from U.S. to ISAF control, every aircraft that goes in and out of that country is conducted and guided by NATO, said Colonel Angermayer.

“This headquarters is responsible for all ISAF air movements,” he said. “The CC-Air-HQ Ramstein provides an air forces point-of-view to higher headquarters, and is responsible for procuring supplies from fuel to radios to the units in Afghanistan.”

The Ramstein headquarters also plays an important role in keeping European skies safe. Through a series of radar posts, command-and-control centers and Combined Air Operations Centers that stretch from Scotland to Lithuania, NATO forces have five distinct air policing areas over the continent.

According to Colonel Angermayer, the CAOCs are set up to deal with threats in two distinct forms. The first responsibility is dealing with anomalies that occur with civilian aircraft, such as planes that deviate from flight plans or are lost on civilian radar.

NATO air forces must also be ready for the “renegade concept,” which has evolved away from a Cold War-era emphasis on foreign fighters, said Colonel Angermayer. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the use of passenger planes as weapons during the 9/11 terrorist attacks, allied forces now prepare to deal with a more subtle sort of renegade threat.

The NATO Response Force is relatively new to the alliance, said Colonel Angermayer, and was formed after the 2002 NATO Summit in Prague as a proactive way to ensure global stability.

“NATO heads of state decided that they needed a force that is able to be sent out in five days around the globe to react to a crisis before the crisis reaches NATO countries,” he said.

Making sure that many different troops from different countries are prepared to deploy in support of the NRF can be quite a challenge.

“NRF troops must be trained and in a high state of readiness,” said Colonel Angermayer. “For instance, they must have different types of gear for different situations, and must be immunized.”

The NRF has been activated twice thus far, during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and following the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan.

### **Who makes it happen**

To help support such a wide range of responsibilities, over 500 military and civilian personnel from 21 different NATO countries work together in the bright, modern CC-Air headquarters building, located in the middle of Ramstein Air Base. The largest contingents come from the U.S., Germany, the U.K., Belgium and the Netherlands. All member countries are represented except Portugal, Hungary, Iceland, Luxembourg and Greece.



*Photo by Lt. Col. Meinrad Angermayer*

Manfred Reudenbach, CC-Air HQ translator, is one of more than 40 civilians working for NATO on Ramstein.

The Ramstein CC-Air HQ operates under the command of Gen. Tom Hobbins, USAFE commander, and also has a three-star deputy commander, a position that rotates between Germany and the United Kingdom. As established under the original treaty agreement, French forces at Ramstein are politically part of NATO but have a separate, though highly complementary, military mission.

For Americans assigned to CC-Air HQ Ramstein, working with NATO is about being part of the greater effort.

“The U.S. is very committed to the alliance,” said Col. Tip Wight, CC-Air HQ director of staff. “We’re here as one of the member nations. We’re part of the NATO team.”

Though the vast majority of personnel at CC-Air HQ Ramstein wear a uniform, there are approximately 40 NATO civilians who serve the alliance in different roles. Manfred Reudenbach, for instance, works as a translator inside the headquarters building. He is fluent in both of NATO’s official languages – English and French – and is, of course, highly proficient in his native German.

### **Going forward**

At the end of the day, NATO has seriously evolved during the past two decades. “During the Cold War, NATO was merely a command structure,” said Colonel Angermayer. “Had war broken out, the alliance would have been given authority over the armed forces of the member countries. Now, the structure has totally changed: our staff is busy planning and conducting real-world operations.”

- **DON’T MISS:** the NATO music festival, 7:30 p.m. June 2, Fritz-Walter stadium, Kaiserslautern. Military bands from around the world will perform.

© Copyright 2007 by kaiserslauternamerican.com