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By Tim Hipps
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JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (Army News Service, June 29, 2006) – Two Soldiers earned berths in the NATO Chess Championships by virtue of their top-six finishes in the 2006 Inter-Service Chess Championships June 12-15 at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla.

Reigning All-Army chess champion 2nd Lt. Arthur Macaspac of Fort Hood, Texas, and Lt. Col. David Hater of Fort McPherson, Ga., placed fourth and fifth respectively. They qualified to compete in the 17th annual NATO Chess Championships scheduled Aug. 20-26 at Wellington College in Crowthorne, England.

Hater is scheduled to make his eighth appearance in the NATO Championships.

“It’s probably the highest level of competition I’ve ever been able to play in,” said Hater, 40, who has competed at NATO tournaments in Norway, Denmark, France, England, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. “In the Netherlands in 2004, I actually achieved a World Chess Federation rating for the first time. Even though I’m one of the best players in the Army, I normally finish in the middle of the field in NATO.”

The Army placed more than one representative on the U.S. military team for the NATO Championships for the first time since 2001 when Sgt. Rudy Tia Jr., Spc. Joseph Kruml and Staff Sgt. Charles Costales swept the top three spots at the Inter-Service Championships.

Master Sgt. Andre Hortillosa of Fort Polk, La., finished 15th in the seven-round Swiss tournament waged between six-man teams from the U.S. Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy. A 10-time member of the All-Army chess team, Hortillosa, 44, competed in six NATO Championships. He plans to retire from the Army next June.

Air Force won the Inter-Service team title with 26.5 points, followed by Navy (20.5), Marine Corps (18) and short-handed Army (12). Because of budget restraints, the Army did not field a full team, said Kris D’Alessandro, recreation center program manager at the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center in Alexandria, Va.

After serving nearly a decade in the Navy without getting to play in the Inter-Service Chess Championships, Macaspac, 32, wasn’t about to be denied this opportunity.

“When I was active duty back in 1994 until ’98, there was no funding for the Navy so I didn’t have a chance to play,” he said. “When I got out and joined the reserves, they said I couldn’t play because I was in the reserves. That’s why I’m so grateful now to qualify to play NATO.”

Navy Personnelman 1st Class Narciso Victoria won the Inter-Service individual crown for the third consecutive year. Stationed at Naval Support Activity in Philadelphia, Victoria is a master-rated player with a U.S. Chess Federation rating of 2,202. His only loss in the tourney was a first-round setback at the hands of 11th-place finisher Master Gunnery Sgt. James Adkins of Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C.

Air Force Master Sgt. Dan Ranario of Pope Air Force Base, N.C., finished second, followed by teammate Staff Sgt. Robert Bucholtz of Schriever Air Force Base, Colo.

Marine Corps Master Gunnery Sgt. Dwaine Roberts, who finished ninth, completed the U.S. military team for the NATO Championships. The top finisher from each branch of service earns a spot on Team USA.

Hater said this is one of the strongest U.S. teams in recent memory.

“I think we actually have a chance of winning a medal with one master and five experts (based on USCF ratings) on the team this year,” he said. “To the best of my knowledge, we haven’t had six experts or better in quite some time. A bronze (team medal) is a very realistic goal. If we could somehow get silver, I would be ecstatic.”

Germany, which has a military chess program similar to the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program, is a powerhouse in NATO chess. Since 1989, the Germans have won the tournament

12 times with second- and fourth-place finishes to boot. There was no NATO tourney in 1993, and the Germans skipped the event in 1996.

Although the odds are stacked against Team USA winning the NATO championship, Hater said Soldiers relish competing at the pinnacle of military chess.

“It’s a tremendous honor any time you get to represent your country in anything,” he said. “We get to meet other Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines from other countries. We establish friendships with them and I think that’s important, too.”



Chess Daily News from Susan Polgar

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Schriever's chess champ to compete in NATO tournament

By Staff Sgt. Don Branum, 50th Space Wing Public Affairs / Published July 27, 2006



SCHRIEVER AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. -- Staff Sgt. Robert Bucholtz, 50th Space Communications Squadron here, won his second straight Schriever Chess Tournament at the Peterson Air Force Base Chapel March 4. He will compete in the NATO Chess Championship in Berkshire, England, Aug. 20 to 26. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Don Branum)

SCHRIEVER AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. -- Schriever's chess champion is moving up.

Staff Sgt. Robert Bucholtz, a member of the 50th Space Communications Squadron here, will fly to England to compete in the NATO annual chess tournament at Wellington College in Berkshire Aug. 20 to 26.

The United States will bring its strongest team to the competition in at least 10 years -a strength Sergeant Bucholtz credits to the Air Force's participation. The Air Force rejoined the inter-service tournaments in 2001 after a 10-year hiatus and has placed either first or second in every tournament since. Airmen make up a third of this year's six-person chess team: Sergeant Bucholtz and Master Sgt. Dan Ranario of Pope AFB, N.C.

Every member of the team is an expert or above, with a U.S. Chess Federation rating of at least 2,000.

"I think we actually have a chance of winning a medal with one master and five experts on the team this year," said Army Lt. Col. David Hater of Fort McPherson, Ga., who placed fifth in the inter-service tournament. "To the best of my knowledge, we haven't had six experts or better in quite some time. A bronze is a very realistic goal. If we could somehow get silver, I would be ecstatic."

The U.S. Armed Forces chess team will face stiff competition from about 60 other NATO players. The United States won a silver medal in the 2002 championship held in Brest, France, but has not placed in the top three since then.

"We barely missed the bronze last year," Sergeant Bucholtz said.

German teams have won all but three of the competitions, including a string of four straight victories.

Sergeant Bucholtz -- who won the Air Force Space Command tournament at Los Angeles AFB, Calif., in April, tied for second place in the Air Force tournament and placed third in the 2006 Inter-Service Chess Championship - is not fazed.

"I'd like to play some title players," he said. "I used to play lots of title players when I was in D.C. It's been a while since I've played a big game like that."