



Rising Thunder '13

An enduring partnership

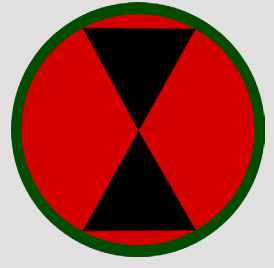


Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Corey Ray/5th MPAD
Members of the Japanese Ground Self Defense Force stand in formation with Soldiers from 7th Infantry Division during the opening ceremony for Operation Rising Thunder 13 at Yakima Training Center, Wash.



Photo by 1st Sgt. Jason Shepher/5th MPAD
Maj. Gen. Stephen R. Lanza visits troops at YTC.

Rising Thunder reveals similarities across cultures

By Maj. Gen. Stephen R. Lanza, 7th Infantry Division commander

As Adm. Locklear III, PACOM Commander, told the House Armed Services Committee, "The Pacific Ocean does not separate the United States from Asia; it connects us. We are connected by our economies, by our cultures, by our shared interests and our security challenges."

It is absolutely vital that we retain and strengthen the connection to our Japanese brethren. For more than 50 years, the U.S. - Japan Alliance has been the foundation of peace and security in Northeast Asia and the cornerstone of U.S. engagement in the Pacific Region.

Operation Rising Thunder is an annual exercise that has been conducted for the last 20 years with the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force, and continually increases in scope and sophistication as it improves capabilities and cooperation

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American, Japanese forces train together on common ground

Story by Staff Sgt. Miriam Espinoza, 5th MPAD

American and Japanese snipers came together to exchange their knowledge and learn from each other to enhance their combat readiness at the Yakima Training Center, Wash. They focused on target detection, reconnaissance techniques and cover and concealment.

The training was part of Operation Rising Thunder 13, a three-week exercise designed to develop all warfighting functions for both Japanese and U.S. forces. More than 800 Soldiers from I Corps and almost 500 members of the 16th Regimental Combat Team, Japanese Ground Self Defense Force, trained together on full-spectrum operations.

Snipers from the two nations spent the first day of training, Sept. 5, getting to know each other. They were mixed together and broken down into teams of three — a spotter, sniper and senior sniper. Since the teams consisted of soldiers from both nations, they had the opportunity to work together to enhance their skills as they learn the different techniques they use to accomplish their job.

"Japanese snipers are great marksmen, for our first job is reconnaissance, so we are focusing our training on that," said Staff Sgt. Mitchell Shaw, battalion sniper section leader, 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment.

Although communications might seem difficult between members who speak different languages, the snipers are finding creative ways to overcome the obstacle — whether it's using hand signals, drawing, or asking a translator for help.

"We want to train them as much as they want to be trained and vice-versa, we want to learn from them anything they can teach us," said Shaw.

Before the snipers began firing, they received a class on the operation and dynamics of the sniper weapon system, then separated into teams. The teams then went onto the firing lane to begin their hands-on training.

"Our members want to learn from the combat experience of their American counterparts, they see in them a wealth of knowledge," said Sgt. Maj. Matsuba Munetsugu, 16th RCT, JGSDF.

This is the 20th year of the exercise and the scale is much larger since the JGSDF brought additional resources.

"The result from this change is: it provides a better training opportunity and the relationship that it builds with soldiers from both militaries is going to be really important as we move forward," said Maj. Gen. Stephen Lanza, commander, 7th Infantry Division, during the opening ceremony, Sept. 4.

According to Lanza, this year's training will include all capabilities and weapons for a combined training exercise and build more opportunities to give soldiers the best training possible.

"There is a professionalism that exists between our soldiers even though we are from different countries," Lanza said. "While our cultures may be different, and our languages may be different the similarities between soldiers are the same.

"As we work and train together we will sustain the bonds of trust that unites us professionally. The United States military must be globally aligned and regionally focused in this exercise with the Japanese Defense Forces. We look forward to working together, training together and learning from you as we continue this great training opportunity."

Japanese troops get a taste of American hospitality

Story by Staff Sgt. Mark Miranda, 7th ID

During a break in training Sept. 15, several members of the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force, who were at Yakima Training Center, Wash., taking part in the annual Operation Rising Thunder exercise were invited to spend time with families in the Yakima community.

"Every year, our military family sets up cultural exchanges with sponsor host families," said Judy Jacobson, the YTC Morale, Welfare and Recreation director. "The idea is to share a typical American meal or evening out with a sponsoring American family."

Each sponsor family hosted a group of three JGSDF members, sharing and exchanging cultural and hospitality customs.

"In the past, they've enjoyed barbecues, rode horses, played games, enjoyed swimming pools, hayrides or just looking at photos at a host family's home," Jacobson said.

The Soldiers, eager for a break in training, gathered together in the pick-up lot and held up signs with the names of their designated host family.

One group was picked up for the evening by a motorcycle club, and ended up riding on the back seats. Others attended parties, went for a rafting adventure on the Yakima River or went hiking through nearby Boulder Cave.

Retired explosive ordnance disposal specialist Richard Thompson hosted two groups this year,



Photo by Staff Sgt. Mark Miranda/7th ID
Retired Soldier Richard Thompson receives a gift from members of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force who he invited into his home during a cultural exchange as part of Operation Rising Thunder 13 in Yakima, Wash.

and has invited visiting JGSDF members for the past five years during each Rising Thunder exercise.

"I worked hand-in-hand with them at Yakima (Training Center) during the exercises, so when I learned of the opportunity to host them, I thought what a great chance to learn from each other," Thompson said.

For this outing, Thompson and his wife, Jennifer, along with their daughters, Kaitlyn and Katia, invited their guests to watch Sunday night football at a barbecue restaurant, and then welcomed their new Japanese friends into their home.

"Every time, it's a blessing, a wonderful experience and my kids invite their friends to the

house to meet our guests and learn a little about their culture," Thompson said.

For Sgt. Junya Takahara, 16th Infantry Regiment, JGSDF, the differences in language did not get in the way of an enjoyable evening.

"Being around American Soldiers, we learn a little more English every day – and we carry these small (translation) books to help," Takahara said. "Good food, good time, we're thankful to have done this."

Takahara and his group entertained the Thompson family with magic card tricks and by creating origami paper sculptures.

The evening closed out in traditional manner for these visits, with the host families exchanging small gifts with their Japanese guests.

Forces compete during a friendly softball tournament

Story by Staff Sgt. Mark Miranda, 7th ID

A friendly series of softball games between members of Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force and Soldiers of 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division kicked off a day celebrating the partnership for this year's Rising Thunder combined exercises at Yakima Training Center, Wash., Sept. 9.

The exercises have traditionally offered Soldiers from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., the opportunity to increase language skills, regional expertise and cultural understanding by working with the JGSDF. A break in training that included field artillery, mortar, and small-arms ranges in the days prior allowed service members from both countries the chance to relax and bond over their enjoyment of the sport.

"It's great to be able to interact with the Japanese soldiers, say hello and do something fun outside of work," said Spc. Diane Zuniga, an intelligence analyst from Rochester, N.Y., assigned to 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment. "They're passionate about baseball in Japan, and



Photo by Staff Sgt. Mark Miranda/7th ID
Soldiers from 7th ID play softball with members of the JGSDF.

a lot of the soldiers we're playing against have pretty impressive skills, so the games have been exciting."

The games drew large crowds of cheering fans for the teams. Japanese spectators kept the mood light with small yellow cones used as noisemakers.

Backup pitcher for the Japanese team, Sgt. 1st Class Masaji Kojima, 4th Field Artillery, JGSDF entertained both sides with his comic antics and

pitching style.

"At first we were overwhelmed by the power and enthusiasm displayed by the American soldiers, but they are good sportsmen and we had a lot of fun," said JGSDF Master Sgt. Takedomi Fumiaki, 4th Field Artillery.

"We lost the first game of the day, but then came back and won the second. It feels great, we'll celebrate the victory tonight and talk about all the great plays we made," said Fumiaki, who played shortstop.

At the end, both teams lined up, faced each other and bowed in a show of mutual respect. They thanked one another for a memorable game.

"For me and several others in my unit, it's our first time in the U.S. We've had lots of learning experiences, and we've enjoyed building friendships out here," Fumiaki said.

Enjoying a bit of America's favorite pastime was another step forward in continuing the relationship the JGSDF has had with soldiers from Joint Base Lewis-McChord through 20 years of annual Rising Thunder exercises.

Lanza

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between our militaries.

There's compatibility, there's a partnership, there's a professionalism that exists between soldiers of all nations. While our cultures may be different, and while our languages may be different, the similarities between soldiers are the same, and we are leveraging that to provide the best training possible for both armies.

The JSDF brought additional equipment for this year's Rising Thunder. The result from this change is: it provides a better training opportunity, and the relationship that it builds with soldiers from both militaries is going to be really important as we move forward.

When you look at the two forces in terms of interoperability, there are some amazing similarities in the professionalism of the forces. The parallel between our organizations can be seen in how we operate, how we train and how we fight. It is very refreshing to work so closely with an allied force that we have such great ties with; it allows us to conduct more complex training due to the high level of competency and trust we share.

This year's iteration saw the first joint-aviation live-fire training between the U.S. and the JGSDF, as we tested the interoperability of the AH-64E Apache helicopters with the Japanese Army's AH-64D Apache helicopters in a live-fire exercise using AGM-114 Hellfire Missiles.

This was a tremendous achievement, because we had Japanese aircraft and U.S. aircraft operating in the same airspace, taking the same commands from the tower, working air-space de-confliction, air space management, fire control and gunnery. The interoperability was tremendous.

It speaks volumes to the adaptability of our forces, and I could not be more proud at watching Bayonet Soldiers conduct complex, rigorous training next to our Japanese counterparts. We truly are a Team of Teams, in every aspect.

Every effort must be made to maintain and enhance our connection between our two forces and other allies in the Pacific region. Training exercises and operations conducted with allies and partners will be a top priority. Through these military-to-military training opportunities, like Rising Thunder, we have better prepared ourselves for the challenges that will require our militaries to conduct operations with Soldiers of many different backgrounds.

What is clear to me, after being a part of Rising Thunder, is that we will always have our similarities as Soldiers that span cultural boundaries. We are all committed to service, sacrifice and something greater than ourselves. With the expertise we have throughout our formations and the support we have at home and abroad, I have full faith and confidence that our two nations will successfully meet any challenge put before us.



U.S. Army Soldiers with 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment, conduct a live fire exercise in support of Operation Rising Thunder at Yakima Training Center, Wash., Sept. 20.

US, Japanese fire big guns

Story by Sgt. James Bunn, 17th PAD

From a firing point somewhere in the vast grasslands of Yakima Training Center, artillerymen from the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force and A Battery, 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment, started the final training event of a combined U.S.-Japanese training exercise, Operation Rising Thunder, with a boom Sept. 20.

The exercise gave U.S. Soldiers insight into how their international partners from across the Pacific operate their artillery.

"We didn't know what to expect going in," said Capt. Peter Middleton, commander of A Battery, 1-37 FA. "I think coming out, both American and Japanese have really gained a lot of appreciation and understanding for how the other country accomplishes the same task."

This training simulated a battlefield environment where a separate unit called on artillerymen from both sides to provide supporting fire and destroy simulated targets.

Middleton said training with the Japanese was valuable because it demonstrated to his Soldiers what their partner nations are capable of on the battlefield.

I Corps, Middleton's unit's corps headquarters, is transitioning its focus to the Pacific where it collaborates with militaries from that region.

Yakima Training Center, with its huge training and firing areas, is familiar ground to many of the Soldiers with 1-37 FA.

However, the JGSDF are used to training in much smaller areas in Japan, which limit the distances they are able to fire their artillery. "It's good to have so much space to fire," said Sgt. Koki Masumoto, a JGSDF artilleryman.

Rising Thunder lasted 20 days and afforded plenty of opportunities for the JGSDF and U.S. Soldiers to improve their skills on the artillery pieces with enough time left over to make some personal connections.

Whether trading patches and buttons or showing pictures of families back home, the friendships made by the Soldiers and JGSDF are not ones they will soon forget.

"U.S. forces have very high morale and I felt like American Soldiers are very professional," said Masumoto. "I look forward to telling my co-workers back in Japan about my experience here in the United States."

Japanese leader's final thoughts

By Maj. Gen. Takeyoshi Omori, deputy commander, 4th Div., JGSDF

At the end of the Rising Thunder 2013, I would like to send my sincere gratitude for the support and cooperation we've received from Major General Lanza, 7th Infantry Division Commanding General, all of the soldiers in 5-20 Battalion and the supporting units, LTC Osteen and all of the YTC staff who provided logistic support for us. I also want to show my respect for both of the JGSDF and U.S. Army soldiers who completed the mission.

The JGSDF 16th Regimental Combat team learned many lessons from the U.S. Army which has a great deal of real combat

experience. In addition, I also felt that the hospitality we received during the exercise was extraordinary. I believe the experiences and trust obtained in the Rising Thunder 2013 will make the Japan-U.S. alliance even stronger.

I again express my appreciation from the bottom of my heart to all of the members who supported Operation Rising Thunder 2013.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Miriam Espinoza/5th MPAD
Maj. Gen. Takeyoshi Omori speaks with Maj. Gen. Stephen R. Lanza.

TOP SHOTS

Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Corey Ray



Photo by Staff Sgt. Miriam Espinoza



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Corey Ray

ABOVE Soldiers with the 7th Inf. Div. and members of the 16th JGSDF stand together for a group photo during the opening ceremony.

LEFT Members of the JGSDF fire mortars during Operation Rising Thunder 13.



Video capture by Sgt. Bryan Spradlin

LEFT A Type 74 tank from the 16th Regimental Combat Team fires on a target during a live fire exercise.

RIGHT U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Mitchell Shaw, left, evaluates Japanese Master Sgt. Kazunori Takao during combined sniper training.



Photo by Staff Sgt. David Chapman

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