

U.S. Army Europe commander presents Legion of Merit medal to Hungary's Chief of Defense

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By **Staff Sgt. Joel Salgado, U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs**

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U.S. Army Europe commander Lt. Gen. Mark Hertling (left) congratulates Gen. Tibor Benko, Chief of the Hungarian Defense Forces, after presenting Benko with the U.S. Army Legion of Merit medal, in Heidelberg, Germany, Sept. 4. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Joel Salgado)

HEIDELBERG, Germany -- U.S. Army Europe commander Lt. Gen. Marl Hertling presented Gen. Tibor Benko, Chief of the Hungarian Defense Forces, with the U.S. Army Legion of Merit medal here, Sept. 4.

"This was a very big surprise for me and I am very happy," said Benko. "This award means that among the United States and Hungary there is very good cooperation. Our task, our goal, is to continue this cooperation in the future."

Benko was presented the medal in the degree of commander for his role in supporting USAREUR's security cooperation mission and the modernization of the Hungarian Defense Forces to meet future security challenges. Benko also played a key role in ensuring that Hungarian forces have supported the NATO missions in the Balkans and Afghanistan.

Hertling said USAREUR is thankful for Benko and Hungary's visionary thinking and contributions to theater and global security.

"The Legion of Merit is presented in the order of commander to the chiefs of the various services who've contributed significantly to the alliance, and General Benko, in the different ways he transformed the Hungarian army, has contributed significantly to operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan and ... 11 other peacekeeping missions," said Hertling.

The U.S. Army created the Legion of Merit in 1942 to recognize meritorious service. The first American decoration awarded to citizens of other nations, it has since been presented to thousands of U.S. allies and partners from more than 30 countries. The LOM can be presented in four degrees: chief commander, commander, officer and legionnaire.

For more information on the Legion of Merit and USAREUR's presentations of the medal, visit the U.S. Army Stand-To! website at <http://goo.gl/aD4FF>.

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