Ohio State Graduate’s Experiences in the Manfred Wörner Seminar
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A year ago, if someone had told me I would be sitting inside the same conference room where German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her Cabinet convene for meetings, I would not have believed it. Yet there I was at the Chancellery building, or Bundeskanzleramt, in Berlin discussing Germany’s military structure with the Defense Ministry’s Deputy Director of Security Policy. Following our meeting, I watched Chancellor Merkel greet the Estonian President outside the main entrance of the Bundeskanzleramt complete with a red carpet, military marching band, and review of troops. So how did I get here?

These experiences were made possible by the Manfred Wörner Seminar— a transatlantic fellowship program sponsored by a prominent think tank based in Washington, D.C. known as the German Marshall Fund of the United States. The Seminar has its roots in the training of German Air Force pilots in the United States where the two groups of airmen developed a network of professional friendships irrespective of distances and helped to strengthen German-American relations over the years. In 1982, Manfred Wörner – one of the pilots who would later serve as the NATO Secretary General – institutionalized the network beyond the military as a means to promote a better understanding of U.S. and German security interests.

My decision to apply to the Seminar was strongly influenced by my daily work at Booz Allen Hamilton where I advise senior U.S. Air Force clients at the Pentagon. Out of the 400+ applications to participate in the 2017 Seminar, I (alongside 14 other Americans and 15 Germans) was selected for the prestigious fellowship in Europe. For two weeks, our cohort attended briefings and study tours hosted by distinguished foreign service, military, and political leaders throughout Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Highlights of the Seminar included a visit to the NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium as well as a study tour of Germany’s Parliament building, or Reichstag, in Berlin.

The mission of the Manfred Wörner Seminar is extremely relevant today, as the fellowship provided a means to engage with some of Germany’s senior defense policymakers, forge new friendships with like-minded peers, and gain new perspectives on long-standing transatlantic challenges, which I would not have obtained in the Nation’s Capital.

Kyle Nappi earned his B.A. in History in 2012. Robyn Rodriguez – another Ohio State alum who earned her PhD in Military History in 2011 – also participated in the Manfred Wörner Seminar with Kyle.