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June 20, 2013

NJ Army National Guard NCOs show Albanian soldiers how to lead by example

By Michael L. Lewis, NCO Journal

As one of the original participants in the State Partnership Program, the New Jersey National Guard has built a solid and valuable relationship with Albania during the past 20 years. But at the core of the partnership lies a discrepancy that is common to many SPP pairings: American NCOs often have far more responsibilities and authority than their counterparts in other nations' armies. Consequently, as they support the bilateral SPP missions directed by combatant commands, U.S. Army NCOs have the additional job of imparting what being the "backbone of the Army" means as they help their fellow noncommissioned officers develop professional NCO corps in their own countries.

Albania's top NCO said he is grateful for the help in raising the profile of NCOs in his country, whose armed forces are celebrating the "Year of the NCO" this year.

"Albanian NCOs have not been used very much in the past," said Command Sgt. Maj. Proletar Panxha, the sergeant major of the Albanian armed forces. "But now, we have been trying to build a good NCO corps with the support of the United States, especially through training and education.

"Our NCOs have learned a lot," Panxha said. "There are a lot of NCOs who benefit from this, not just me. First of all, we have made a good friend. Second, we have learned how the United States' and the New Jersey National Guard's NCOs do business and cooperate with officers."

Old ways of thinking still dominate Albanian officers' attitudes toward enlisted soldiers, said Staff Sgt. Toby Tirrito, a plans and operations NCO with the New Jersey National Guard.

"Three years ago, we were shipping surplus bulletproof vests over there, and I remember specifically speaking with one of the Albanian NCOs. Then an officer came over and stood in front of him and said, 'No, you're going to talk to me.' It's a totally different climate over there. An officer is way up here, and NCOs are really just soldiers who just do what their told."



New Jersey National Guard NCOs and Albanian soldiers carry a casualty on a litter during a medical evacuation training exercise at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center at Hohenfels, Germany, May 29, 2011. (Department of Defense photo by Pfc. Stephen Solomon/Released)

Nonetheless, Albania's armed forces gradually understand the vital role of professional NCOs, said Maj. Richard Karcher, the state partnership coordinator for the New Jersey National Guard.

"It wasn't that long ago that they got rid of conscription. So they are still in that mind frame — if you're not an officer, you're a worker bee," he said. "But slowly they are getting there. In my one-year deployment [with Albanian forces], I could see the change start to happen. Once they saw our NCOs leading convoys, being convoy commanders and doing convoy briefs, and me giving them responsibilities, they were just astonished."

"We do still have some officers with the old mentality," said Sgt. Maj. Ilmi Popshini, the Albanian armed forces' J-1 sergeant major. "It is not so easy for them to change. But for our young generation of officers,

they have had good cooperation with the NCOs. They accept the NCOs to be close to them, and that is very important. For sure, we cannot say we're at 100 percent. But that mentality has been changed a lot."

Leading and learning by example

Learning the differences between the U.S. Army NCO Corps and that of a foreign army helps New Jersey National Guard NCOs appreciate what they have, said Master Sgt. Brian Holderness, a senior intelligence analyst with the New Jersey National Guard.

"I think we take a lot for granted as NCOs in the U.S. Army," Holderness said. "But when you deal with some of these countries that come from different systems that are much more class-oriented, you see that, as an NCO, you've been developed

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and trained to take on more responsibility, to have more decision-making power, to be able to be in charge and lead troops. You see that is not always the case in these other cultures, Albania being one example. But they are coming along with that. They benefit tremendously by interacting with us and seeing what we're capable of doing without always seeking continuous guidance and direction and permission for everything. That benefits them certainly, but it also allows us to reflect on the kind of training and the kind of benefits that we enjoy here."

Exceeding expectations is the best way to showcase the professionalism of American NCOs, said Sgt. 1st Class Richard St. Pierre, an administration operations NCO with the New Jersey National Guard.

"Over there, the officers are more controlling than we are here," St. Pierre said. "Here, the officer tells the NCO what to do and knows it's going to get done. That's in the Creed: Officers 'will have maximum time to accomplish their duties; they will not have to accomplish mine.' There, I think the mentality is, 'The NCO's not going to do it, so I'll have to do it.'"

NCOs can engender the most respect just by leading by example, Holderness said.

"In any new situation, there's a lot of judgment going on," he said. "Their NCOs are watching their officers, and their officers are watching you. It's all your interactions, your mannerisms, and your social interaction. So you have to present yourself as a professional. You gain their respect, and you go from there."

Once mutual respect is attained, a true partnership develops that is based on genuine cooperation, Holderness said. He saw it happen first-hand during his own deployment with Albanian troops to Afghanistan. He was one of 12 U.S. troops on a small military advisor team led by an Albanian commander and sergeant major.

"It was challenging for me and for the team at first, because you're thrown together," he said. "It took a while for the two parts of us, the two halves of us, to mesh and get that single focus, and I think both sides had to compromise. You can't go into this with the expectation that we're going to make the Albanians work with our system. That's not going to happen, and it shouldn't happen. You have to find some kind of compromise, and that comes through

different ways — talking together, eating together, socializing together, as well as performing the mission together."

Bringing it back home

Being able to interact with fellow NCOs as true peers means a lot to Albanian NCOs, Panxha said.

"We had two NCOs go to the NCO academy [in New Jersey], and when they got back, they were very excited. They learned a lot from your NCOs, even how to exchange information and exchange experiences NCO-to-NCO. Whether officially or socially off-duty, they felt equal; they discussed things seriously.

"This is new for us," Panxha continued. "For you, it may not look so special. But for us, that was very special. When you see them speak of their experiences there, they are very excited. And they spread it among their friends and the NCO corps here through their jobs as instructors at our NCO academy."

But Albanian NCOs aren't the only ones developing as professionals, Holderness said. New Jersey Guard members have improved as leaders and trainers through their work with the partnership too.

"As NCOs, we're sometimes charged with training foreign troops and communicating with foreign troops, even just getting along with foreign troops," he said. "This partnership really helps that. Our ability to get along with them, to communicate with them and to familiarize ourselves with them, I think, makes us better NCOs when it comes to some of these other missions we have."

Missions such as training troops stateside, Karcher said.

"When you are sitting in front of a bunch of Albanians or a bunch of Afghans, you are teaching all the way down to the lowest level," he said. "So you really have to think about every step of that process as far as what you're trying to train them. You have to look at your slides, you have to watch your acronyms, and you have to watch your speech. So I think [working with partner nations] hones our NCOs' skills to train junior Soldiers when they get back and are sitting in front of a squad of folks who just got out of [Advanced Individual Training]."

Holderness agreed. "I think this program makes all of us more effective NCOs," he said. "We're more effective in our jobs, whether that's training foreign troops or preparing for our next deployment and dealing with another culture, or training within our own corps. It's having that flexibility and that sensitivity, that ability to adapt."

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 MetLife Stadium, 1 MetLife Stadium Dr, East Rutherford, NJ
June 22, 2013

HIRING FAIR: 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM

EMPLOYMENT WORKSHOP: 10:00 AM

This hiring event, held as a part of NBC 4 New York and New York Giants Health & Fitness Expo, is being conducted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, NBC4 New York, NBC News, the New York Giants, the Meadowlands Regional Chamber, the U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL VETS), the New Jersey and New York Committees of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, The American Legion, and other local partners.

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A workshop for veterans and other military job seekers that focuses on resume writing, tips for successfully navigating hiring fairs, military skill translation, and interviewing will start at 10:00 AM. To register for the Hiring Our Heroes Employment Workshop, visit hohworks.eventbrite.com/

For registration questions, please contact us at hiringourheroes@uschamber.com or call 202-463-5807.




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HIGHLIGHTS



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12 to 4p.m.

JB-MDL McGuire Library
2603 Tuskegee Airmen Ave, JB-MDL
June 11 and 24
12 to 4p.m.

Camden County Veterans Affairs
3 Collier Dr.-Lakeland Complex, Blackwood, NJ 08012
June 10, 17 and 24
1 to 3 p.m.

Pinelands Public Library
39 Allen Avenue, Medford, NJ 08055
June 18
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Picatiny Arsenal
Army Community Services Bldg #119, Dover, NJ
June 26
1 to 3 p.m.

Warfighter and Family Readiness Center
Bldg. 488, Highway 547, Lakehurst, NJ 08733
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11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Call 1-800-241-4848 option 3 or visit www.usfhp.net for more information.



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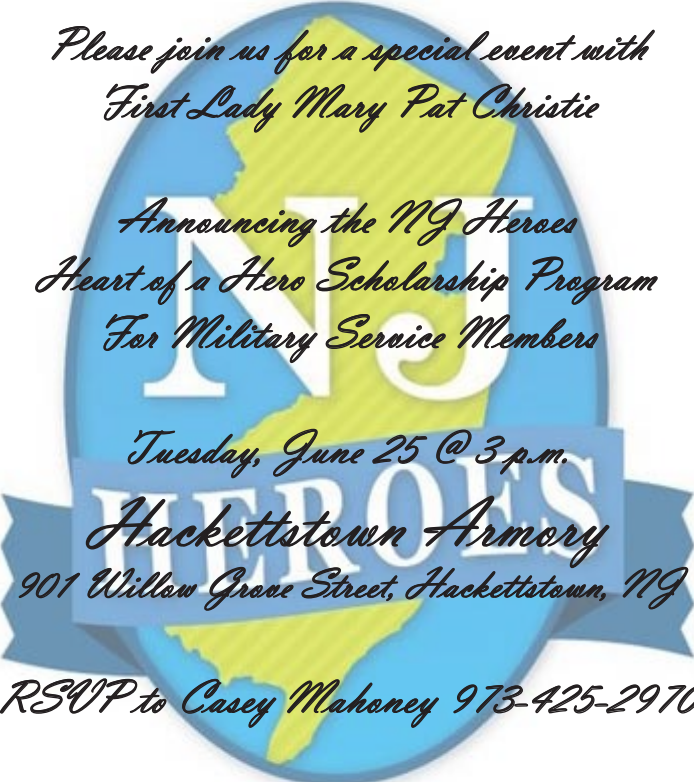
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Chief Warrant Officer 4 Bobby Drapala, center, flies his last mission June 20, 2013 at the New Jersey National Guard's West Trenton Aviation Facility. Drapala's daughter, Christine Hughes, back left, along with her husband, James and sons, Jackson and Jimmy, were present to congratulate him and witness the ceremonial wetdown of Drapala's UH-60 Black Hawk. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Nicholas Young, NJDMAVA/PA)



CONGRATULATIONS KAREN - New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs' employee, Karen Wallace, cuts her retirement cake at a farewell gathering June 20, 2013, at the Lawrenceville headquarters. After 40 years of loyal and selfless service to DMAVA, Karen will retire effective July 2. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Armando Vasquez, NJDMAVA/PA)

Summer safety starts with you

By Diana M. Rodriguez, Joint Services Support

It's that time of year again! The warm weather is upon us, and schools across the country are letting out!

Summer is traditionally the time of year when many people will take vacations; and enjoy sports, activities, and events they've been waiting for all year.

Unfortunately, there is another side of summer fun that can bring very unhappy and dangerous outcomes if proper safety measures are ignored. Summer is a time of year when it is most important to remember that safety should not be taken for granted! Don't let preventable injuries or accidents ruin your summer fun.

Consequently, June is National Safety Month, and a few weeks ago, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel posted a summer safety message to the Department of Defense website. He captured some very informative points and statistics that emphasize how critical it is to be extra cautious during the summer months.

Vehicle safety

As you drive to and from vacation destinations, remember that 81 percent of the non-combat fatalities in the 2012 total took place over the summer.

Last summer, 80 service members died in motor vehicle collisions; 27 in 4-wheel vehicles, 47 while riding motorcycles, 4 were pedestrians, and 2 were bicyclists.

These fatalities occurred in spite of state laws and Department of Defense policies requiring the use of seatbelts while in a car and protective gear while riding motorcycles and bicycles.

An untold number of deaths resulted from fatigue - deaths preventable by proper trip planning and fatigue management while driving.

Water safety

Some of you will enjoy water activities such as swimming, snorkeling, scuba diving or water skiing.

Last summer, six service members died while participating in water-related activities. It is important to follow swimming area rules and to be aware of the hidden dangers inherent in participating in water activities.

Alcohol safety

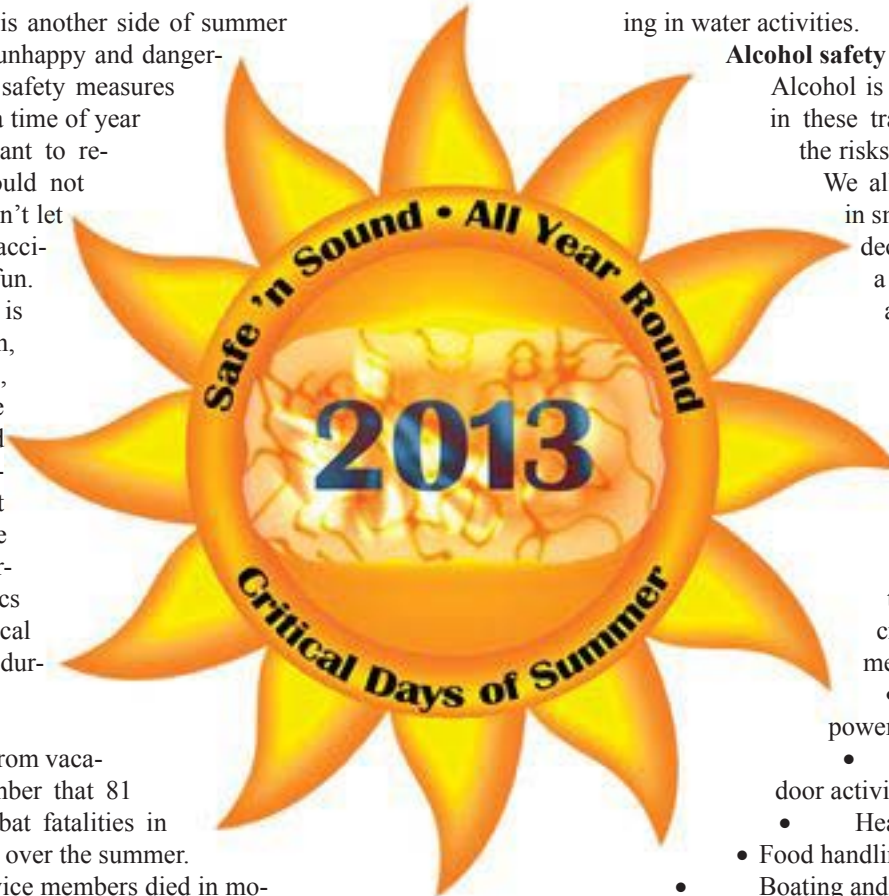
Alcohol is all too often a component in these tragic accidents. Recognize the risks and make good decisions.

We all know that alcohol, even in small quantities, impairs our decision-making and is often a significant factor in many accidents. So before taking our first sip, we need to remember never to drink and drive. Plan ahead and always think before acting.

Adding on to Hagel's safety message, here is a list of examples and activities that also require increased awareness for Summer Safety:

- Lawnmower and power tool safety
- Camping and outdoor activity safety
- Heat index safety
- Food handling and picnic safety
- Boating and rafting safety
- Swimming safety
- Barbeque Safety
- Fireworks safety

The Summer Safety campaign is highlighted every year by the Department of Defense to remind service members and their families that safety concerns are not just about job-related accidents or risk. Safety must be an everyday concern and conscious efforts to adhere to safe and reduced-risk activities.



E-mail your Photo of the Week or
Highlights submissions to:

wayne.woolley@njdmava.state.nj.us OR armando.vasquez@njdmava.state.nj.us

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