

DMAVA HIGHLIGHTS



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From Jersey to Albania and on to Afghanistan *New Jersey-Albanian partnership yields combat-ready training team*



Members of the New Jersey-Albanian OMLT gather at the Albanian Ministry of Defense and are joined by top officials including, from left, Maj. Gen. Maksim Malaj, Chief of Albania's Defense Forces; Maj. Gen.

Glenn K. Rieth, The Adjutant General of New Jersey; Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha; U.S. Alexander A. Arvizu, U.S. Ambassador to Albania; and in blue suit, Arben Imami, Albanian Minister of Defense.

By Staff Sgt. Wayne Woolley, DMAVA/PA

TIRANA, Albania -- The New Jersey National Guard is poised to make history in Albania -- again.

Last week, a delegation of senior military leaders from New Jersey and Albania joined that nation's prime minister and the U.S.



Maj. Gen. Glenn K. Rieth, right, and U.S. Ambassador Alexander A. Arvizu promote OMLT Team Member Eric Heislter, 26, to sergeant following the unit's sendoff ceremony in Tirana, Albania.

Ambassador at a departure ceremony for a combined team of more than two dozen American and Albanian Soldiers who will deploy to Afghanistan later this month.

The Soldiers will serve as an Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) and will be paired with an Afghan Army battalion to train its troops on everything from logistics to combat operations -- the first such pairing since the New Jersey National Guard and Albania launched its partnership more than 15 years ago.

"This is a historic deployment and a testament to the cooperation between New Jersey and Albania," U.S. Ambassador Alexander A. Arvizu said at the ceremony at the Albanian Ministry of Defense.

Maj. Gen. Glenn K. Rieth, the Adjutant General, said that National Guard team and their Albanian counterparts made the most of the pre-deployment training they received at Fort Polk, La., Germany and in Albania.

"The training and team building has been a success and the team is ready," Rieth said. "It will be a very challenging mission."

Members of the OMLT said the joint training helped build trust and overcome any minor communication barriers between the Soldiers from the partner nations.

"It was a little challenging at first, but we now feel like one unified unit and I think together we're going to hit the ground running and provide the Afghans some good training," said team member

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Guardsman taps Croatian family roots on deployment

By 1st Sgt. David Moore/444th MPAD

A patrol notebook containing foreign addresses, social media, and two Croatian Army officers led this New Jersey Army National Guard sergeant down the road to a family reunion during his Annual Training in Croatia.

Sgt. Eugene Butkovic, 24, of Blackwood, N.J., travelled to Zagreb, Croatia as part of the 50th Infantry Brigade Combat Team's participation in the multinational exercise known as Immediate Response, which included more than 1,000 participants, from U.S. Army Europe, Texas, Minnesota and Utah National Guards, and military personnel from Croatia, Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia, Macedonia and Serbia.



Lt. Col. Mario Zabetovasky, left, Croatian Army Chief of Tactical Operations, stands with Sgt. Eugene Butkovic after the two talked of a family barbeque in Kebel, Croatia.

Butkovic said his grandfather, Eugene Gvozdenovich, who is now in his 80s, was a Croatian merchant marine from the coastal Dalmatia region as a young man. But when the country was a republic under the former socialist Yugoslavia, the grandfather left in the 1950s because he wanted the opportunity offered in America.

"My grandfather is always talking about the beauty of the country and how the water is so clear," Butkovic said. "When he found out I might be going to Croatia, he wrote the addresses down in my notebook of family members in Croatia."

He did know one cousin, Kathi Butkovic, an American now teaching at an American international school. He last saw her when he

was a teen-ager. But the challenge would be reaching out to another cousin, Nikolina Hobjak. He didn't even know if she spoke English.

When Butkovic arrived at the Croatian Armed Forces Training Doctrine Command's Simulation Center on June 6, the Croatian Chief of Tactical Operations at the simulation center noticed Butkovic's name and started a conversation with him about it. The American sergeant told his story to Croatian Army Lt. Col. Mario Zabetovasky, about having family in the country.

"I was really nervous," Butkovic said. "I didn't even know if I would have time to see some of the family."

Butkovic, who operated the Joint Conflict and Tactical Simulation System during the Immediate Response exercise, said Lt. Col. Zebetovsky called the family on his behalf and the reunion started coming together. A few days later Croatian Air Force Maj. Danijel Majsec provided transportation so Butkovic could meet Nikolina in downtown Zagreb. "She did speak perfect English," he said.

Lt. Col. Zabetovasky said helping the American Soldier was the least he could do.

"He is a Soldier and his family is here and that is the important thing," Zebetovsky said. "We help one another because we are friends with his family roots in Croatia."

During a professional development day, Butkovic attended a family barbeque in the village of Kebel.

"The Croatian officers jumped through hoops for me to make this happen. The efforts they put in to help me was pretty awesome," he said. "Everyone I talked to in my chain of command was helpful. It seemed liked they felt it was really important for me to see my family."

Along the way to meeting his Croatian family, he also found out there were other family members in the country and is finding them on Facebook.

"Zagreb is beautiful city. The country is beautiful. It was a great experience and I plan on going back hopefully to see the rest of my family," he added.

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Sgt. 1st Class Luis Morales, 29, of Mount Laurel.

The joint team will be led by an Albanian lieutenant colonel and includes an Albanian officer who graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point as well as the Albanian Army's top non-commissioned officer. New Jersey Army National Guard Maj. Keith Mackey is the executive officer.

In addition to the sendoff for the OMLT, the New Jersey delegation visited key training facilities and met with Albanian counterparts who have become friends during the years the two countries have been participants in the State Partnership Program.

Militia Museum Awarded first state grant

The New Jersey State Historical Commission has awarded the National Guard Militia Museum of New Jersey a \$2,499 grant for the construction of the museum's forthcoming exhibit, "Visualizing History: A New Jersey Civil War Camp."

"This is the first time the museum has received a state grant to support our mission," said 1st Lt. Vincent Solomono, Historian of the New Jersey National Guard and the museum's curator. Set to open in January 2012, the exhibit will be a Civil War encampment that features equipment, supplies, and mannequins dressed in reproduction uniforms worn by "Jerseymen" who fought in the conflict and women who supported the effort.

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