

Mark's story of his trip to Kosovo...

In early May CPT (CH) Joseph Ledger and I were approached by SFC Benjamin Jarvis, the S3 Training NCOIC for KFOR 15. He requested our assistance with a job fair – either by providing a flyer, a template, or helping him contact other businesses. While Joe and I were discussing how to help him, I asked (somewhat rhetorically), “Joe, wouldn’t it be cool if we could go there to help him?”

Joe, ever the skeptic, said, “You know that will never get approved.”

And with that kind of encouragement I knew that I had to submit the request. I justified the trip based on the increased participation, and the earlier participation, of deployed soldiers in our program; in the diversity of the soldiers in Kosovo (representing over 30 states), and the impact we could make by earlier intervention – the idea being that preventing an issue is always preferable to fixing it after it occurs.



Dinetha received my request to go to Kosovo on May 2nd at 0922 and by 0952 I had my answer: she loved the idea. From then on, it was justifying it and getting approval from NGB, which we did; and for Joe, it was getting approval from the WI chain of command, which he did. We initially planned our trip for the first week of June, but based on Kosovo’s requirements and OPTEMPO, we changed our dates to the 2nd week of June.

We left Madison on June 9th, and after some long flights, arrived in Pristina, Kosovo, at 1300 local time on Sunday. We were met by SFC Jarvis and driven to Camp Bondsteel, where we signed for our linens and our room keys, were given access badges for the Camp, and immediately ran through an orientation and volunteer meeting session. We were given the rest of the day off to recuperate, because classes started at 0800 the next day.



Our daily schedule ran like this: 0800-1000 résumé class, 1300-1500 one on one time, and from 1800-2000 another résumé class. During each résumé class, Joe started out with a ten-minute presentation on résumé writing, and I would follow with another ten-minute presentation on interview skills. After the presentations finished, the class would be divided up, with some class members immediately going into mock interviews and some staying put to write their résumés. Each class member had a laptop in front of them, with résumé templates pre-loaded.

I do not think that any of the classes actually finished within their allotted two-hour block. Joe and I (and most of the volunteers) would stay until the last soldier left; sometimes that was 1130 (mornings) or 2130 (evenings). We were also there every day from 1300-1500 to help those that needed more time or wanted individual attention.



The statistics and the comments tell the tale, but I will briefly sum up: We helped approximately 200 Soldiers (and a few Airmen) develop their résumé and interview skills. We did not receive any negative comments aside from Soldiers wanting more time or more volunteers or internet access. The comments about the class itself, and the instructors, were routinely very complimentary.

For my part, it was the most rewarding work I have yet done as a JCEP contractor. At the beginning of a typical class, the soldiers would be slouching, not truly paying attention, and probably wishing they were somewhere else. As Joe and I gave our briefings, we could literally see them start to engage. They would straighten up, lean forward, and truly start listening. After the presentations, I would circulate amongst the Soldiers, helping them get started. I would then pick the Soldier who was having the hardest time writing their résumé, and sit down with that Soldier. I would say, “How about we try this: You think, I’ll type.” And with that I would start helping them write their résumé.

Above and beyond the recorded comments, the number of times I was thanked, the number of times I had Soldiers telling me that they understand the process much better, and the number of times I saw the light bulb go on above someone’s head, were countless. I truly believe that the earlier intervention and job counseling happens, the better, and it is far better to reach them while they are overseas (due to several reasons – captive audience, more time for them to job-search, etc) than after they return.

Joe and I were aided over there by approximately 30 volunteers from the Command Group, all of whom had their own civilian careers. Their aid was invaluable; without it the sessions would not have gone nearly as smoothly as they did. All these personnel were taking their own free time, in between doing their regular job, to come and help us. They were truly concerned about their soldiers and set a fine example of taking action to help. Every Soldier we helped has Joe’s business card and knows how to contact us for future assistance. We also hope to pass the soldiers off to their respective States’ employment assistance programs (if they exist).

All in all, Joe and I arrived in Madison the evening of June 16th, after a whirlwind of a week, tired but proud of what we had accomplished and hopeful for the future.