



A student in the Joint Corporals Leadership Development Course takes the opening physical training test in March on Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti. (Photo by Air Force Tech. Sgt. Daniel DeCook)

Camp Lemonnier Offers NCOs Joint, Coalition Development Opportunities

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester, NCO Journal

With its strategic location in the Horn of Africa, Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti is an important part of the U.S. military's efforts to combat terrorism in the Mideast and East Africa. In fact, Camp Lemonnier became the first and only U.S. installation on the continent of Africa shortly after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The camp's unique place on the African continent provides NCOs deployed there opportunities found at few other places.

Sgt. Maj. John Hilton is serving in Djibouti as an embedded liaison officer for the Center for Army Lessons Learned. He had simple advice for NCOs wondering why they might be sent to Djibouti and why it's an important mission.

"I would tell them to take a look at the map and figure it out," Hilton said. "Typically, if they have been in the military for some time, they have some smarts and they'll see that Somalia is right under them; Yemen is right next to them. The strait right off the coast is the second-busiest shipping lane on the planet. So you have that strategic location that is in the nation's best interest to be here."

Hilton said Camp Lemonnier is a great place for U.S. Army NCOs to get joint experience with the other services, as well as with coalition forces.

"What they can expect is not what they experienced in Iraq or Afghanistan," he said. "This is unlike any of their previous deployments. Expect that you are going



Graphic by Spc. James Seals / NCO Journal

to get joint experience. Whether you come over here to work on a joint staff or you're an infantry squad leader in a battalion over here, you are going to be working with the other services by default.

"Expect that you are going to engage with at least the coalition forces and the Djiboutian forces," Hilton said. "And chances are you'll engage with the forces of one of the countries in our area of responsibility. So come over here with a mindset that you are going to be a trainer, to some degree, in addition to what you were sent here for."

Those training missions end up giving NCOs an important opportunity to influence countries in the area, Hilton said.

"You are going to be the face of the United States," he said. "If you are a medic, for instance, and there is a mission to train the medics in Burundi, you may be the only U.S. person a Burundian medic ever sees in his life. You literally are the face of the United States to some of these people. So you have to expect that what you do here will have a strategic influence."

An assignment to Camp Lemonnier is also different because it is a combat deployment — to a garrison environment.

"This is a hybrid environment," Hilton said. "Yes, it is a combat deployment. Yes, there is a threat, whether it's kinetic or not, outside the gate. But inside the walls of Camp Lemonnier, this is a garrison environment. You have to be able to 'flip the switch.' If you've never operated in a garrison environment before — I mean the lifelong National Guardsman or Reservist who has never been in charge of Soldiers in a garrison environment — you are going to have a steep learning curve when you get here."

Joint opportunities

With the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps all sharing space on Camp Lemonnier, creative NCOs

can find lots of joint professional development opportunities that would be hard to find elsewhere. One of those opportunities for junior enlisted is the Joint Corporals Leadership Development Course.

The course is designed for junior enlisted Marines preparing to be small unit leaders. But in Djibouti, members of all four services volunteer to take part in the course. The content and difficulty of the course doesn't

change, despite the participants from the other services being volunteers who won't get official credit for the course.

Army Spc. Jerileigh Bouchard, civil information management analyst with the 403rd Civil Affairs Battalion, was one of those who volunteered for the course recently. She said she found the course useful despite a focus on the Marines.

"We learned a lot about basic warrior tasks," Bouchard said. "We learned a lot about the history of the Marine Corps and how the Marine Corps works. It was really nice to see how another branch sees things and how they do things. Some of their tactical movements are a little different than what we do, so it was good to see that other perspective and just add it to my tool box."

"Even though I'm not in the Marines, it was helpful because we discussed leadership skills," she said. "We had a public speaking thing. We had a land navigation course. We did physical training every morning, so there was a lot to take from it — not just Marine stuff."

Bouchard said she enjoyed meeting members of the other military services during the course. It was her first experience working jointly.

"I had never really interacted with anybody who was in the other services prior to this class, except for my personal friends," she said. "On an operational level, I hadn't seen how the Navy or the Air Force or the Marines do their thing. I'd always been 'Army, Army, Army,' so it's definitely different to see all these people working together."

Army Spc. Nathan Sullivan, civil affairs specialist with the 403rd Civil Affairs Battalion, also successfully made it through the course. Both Sullivan and Bouchard said the physical training test they had to take at the beginning of the course wasn't as bad as they expected — but the combat fitness test administered later was a different matter.

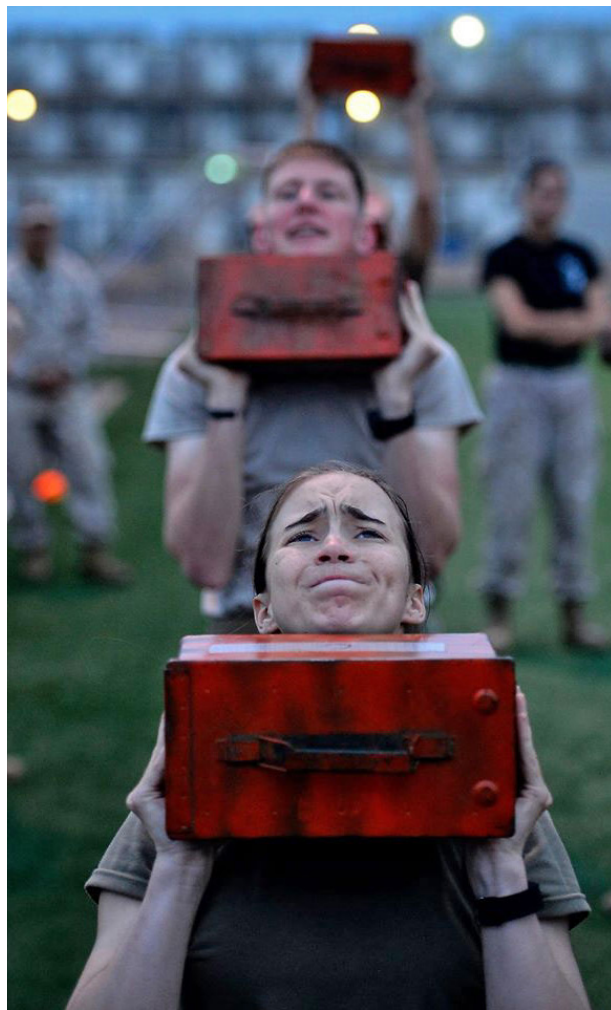
“The PT test was easier than I thought it would be,” Sullivan said. “Just different: I’m not used to doing pull-ups. The combat fitness test, however, was a lot harder than I expected it to be. That was a smoker. After we were done doing that, I was ready to go to bed.”

Sullivan said one of the main things he got from the course was inspiration.

“There is a lot of passion there in the Marines, and the leadership was giving us that passion during the course, even though we weren’t Marines,” he said. “Taking that passion and using it in the Army is something I hope to take with me.”

Bouchard said the course gave her a greater understanding of what is required of a leader. That preparation should help her eventually become an NCO.

“It helps you understand why leaders do what they do,” she said. “As a junior Soldier, I’m sure I’ve questioned something that an NCO told me, or wondered



U.S. Army Spc. Jerileigh Bouchard, a student in the Joint Corporals Leadership Development Course, lifts a weighted ammunition can during a combat fitness test in March on Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti. (Photo by Air Force Tech. Sgt. Daniel DeCook)

why they did it the way they did it. It helps you see where they are coming from and why they do it the way they do it. It definitely helped me think like a leader rather than as a junior Soldier.”

Senior enlisted opportunities

Camp Lemonnier offers plenty of professional development opportunities for senior enlisted Soldiers, as well. One recent effort is the Joint Forces Senior Enlisted Leader Professional Development Course, which is a coalition-focused mentoring and profession development session. Participants, in addition to members of the U.S. military, have been enlisted soldiers from Djibouti, Japan, Italy and Germany.

“It’s typically a half a day every other month,” Hilton said. “We learn the history and culture of each other’s armed forces. We learn what their noncommissioned officer rank structure is like, their NCO education system, what military life is like for them. We learn their capabilities, what their mission is here in Djibouti, and we start building those relationships.

“It’s led to mutual support between us,” Hilton said. “For instance, recently the U.S. Navy Seabees here on base assisted the Italians with some maintenance issues on one of their bigger trucks that they didn’t have the equipment for. It has increased that interoperability, coordination and cooperation.”

Senior enlisted Soldiers are also heavily involved in reaching out to the other countries in the Horn of Africa, Hilton said. They have participated in two engagements with the Kenyan military, and one with the Rwandan military. Future engagements are planned in Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania.

“The main focus is to show them how we use our NCOs,” he said. “Typically, we’ll go to their country first, for an initial meet and greet, get a tour of their training centers and things like that. Then we will bring them to Camp Lemonnier for two days.”

On the first morning of the engagement, the African countries’ senior enlisted soldiers receive a series of briefs. After introductions, the briefs are conducted by U.S. junior enlisted Soldiers.

“The main focus is the role of the NCO within the joint staff,” Hilton said. “What their responsibilities are, what their daily duties are, how they manage their sections. That’s not something that you typically see in another country’s military, the use of NCOs as staff members. So we try to showcase how we use our junior enlisted, our NCOs.”

The second morning, the engagement focuses on specific problems of the attending country. They will often receive briefs on how the U.S. military handles things such as mild traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder “because they suffer from those problems, as well,” Hilton said.

The sessions end with a town hall meeting, where senior enlisted leaders from the other countries take questions from the U.S. junior enlisted NCOs. Popular questions include age (“because these guys are old,”) what their typical day is like and if they have some of the same ethnic strife the Soldiers have seen in places like Iraq and Afghanistan.

“The town hall has turned out to be more beneficial than I anticipated,” Hilton said. “The junior Soldiers in our Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps get to see these gentlemen who have served their defense force for, some of them, more than 40 years. Because in these other countries they join for life. Our junior Soldiers find out they have the same issues we do. They miss their families just like we do. They have personnel and financial problems. They like hearing about what it’s like to be in the Kenyan army or the Rwandan navy.”

NCOs deploying to Djibouti should know that their mission is important and necessary, Hilton said. In addition, the opportunities to gain knowledge, especial-



Sgt. Maj. John Hilton is serving in Djibouti as an embedded liaison officer for the Center for Army Lessons Learned. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

ly from joint and coalition forces, are plentiful. Hilton suggests NCOs read up and study the area before they arrive, at the least completing Level 1 of Senior Enlisted Joint Professional Military Education.

“Bring your ‘A game’ when you come over here,” Hilton said. “It’s important, and the whole world is watching.” ■

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