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Blowing up ordnance in paradise

702nd EOD team trains Albanian EOD Soldiers

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GRAFENWOEHR, Germany – Not all explosive ordnance disposal units are created equal, nor are their demolition and training ranges.

Several 702nd Explosive Ordnance Disposal Company Soldiers learned just that when they deployed to the pristine mountain ranges east of the Albanian capital of Tirana to train the Albanian Armed Forces EOD teams on the international standards and techniques of explosive ordnance disposal.

“We dispose of our unexploded ordnance in a range in the middle of the woods. Personally, I would vacation where the Albanians dispose of their ordnance,” said Sgt. 1st Class Shawn Daniels, a native of Fairfax, Va., who works as the 702nd EOD senior team leader.

The 702nd EOD team conducted four weeks of training Aug. 17-Sept. 18. The first two weeks of training covered standard practices in the classroom, while the last two weeks were for practical training with live ordnance in the Albanian ranges. The field work consisted of five or six training detonations a day with a net explosive weight of 250 kilograms.

“As EOD technicians, the Albanian Soldiers had a relaxed attitude toward their UXO, but took to our training style very quickly. Afterwards their attitudes regarding safety procedures and

UXO were greatly improved,” said Sgt. John Bechthold, a native of Woodland, Calif., who works as a 702nd EOD senior team member.

“Historically, the U.S. Armed Forces are far more safety conscious about their UXO procedures because of all the lessons they have learned throughout the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. The procedures on engaging ordnance downrange change almost monthly due to the ever adapting enemy,” said Bechthold.

The Albanian soldiers were eager to work with the 702nd EOD team and proved they knew what they were doing. They provided new techniques, procedures and ways of looking at solutions to problems.

“I had a great time teaching the Albanian EOD guys new safety tactics and procedures, which also allowed them to use their own procedures. It was an amazing training exercise and a great opportunity to increase international relations,” said Sgt. Jeremy Rininger, a native of Canton, Ohio, who works as a 702nd EOD team member.

“As far as demolition went, they have a great system in place and are as proficient as we are,” said Daniels.

“This was a good experience for me. Albania has a 75 percent Muslim population, yet from what I have seen they have zero hatred or bitterness towards the United States and its Soldiers. We were completely welcomed,” said Bechthold.

CUTLINES:
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20100901-A-6979D-017-- Sgt. William Hattersley, a native of Honesdale, Pa., who works as a 702nd Explosive Ordnance Disposal team member, observes Albanian EOD non-electric demolition procedures before a demolition operation in the practical portion of EOD training at the Albanian range Sep. 1. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Shawn Daniels)



20100901-A-6979D-035-- Sgt. Jeremy Rininger, a native of Canton, Ohio, who works as a 702nd Explosive Ordnance Disposal team member, explains the finer points of non-electric demolitions procedures to Albanian EOD soldiers in the practical portion of EOD training at the Albanian range Sep. 1. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Shawn Daniels)



20100914-A-6979D-067-- One of the standard load shots, roughly a 250 kilogram of net explosive weight, was used by 702nd Explosive Ordnance Disposal team members to help instruct Albanian soldiers on detonation procedures during the Albanian EOD training Aug. 17-Sept. 18. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Shawn Daniels)