

Operation Onward Liberty 2010-2016

Michigan National Guard Partnership Building in Liberia

Compiled by Angela Simpson, MING Public Affairs Office

What began as a formal United States Marine Corps Forces Africa-led mission to promote Liberian democracy and internal stability after many years of civil unrest, Operation Onward Liberty became more of a personal, partnership-building effort supported almost exclusively by Michigan National Guard Soldiers and Airmen.



Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf welcomes Maj. Gen. Thomas Cutler, adjutant general of the Michigan National Guard and Ambassador J. Anthony Holmes, AFRICOM's Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Activities, to her home, Oct. 26, 2010, to discuss the plans for the new State Partnership Program pairing between Michigan and Liberia and the ongoing U.S. security force assistance efforts in the West African nation. (U.S. African Command photo by Kenneth Fidler/www.africom.mil)

Operation Onward Liberty was officially chartered in 2010, the same year that the Michigan National Guard and the country of Liberia were paired in the U.S. State Partnership Program. While the Liberia-Michigan Partnership framework was taking shape (under the guidance of then Michigan National Guard Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Thomas Cutler and Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf), Operation Onward Liberty launched simultaneously under Marine leadership. OOL was described in the charter document as 'a U.S. Marine Corps Forces Africa operation comprised of joint U.S. service members to mentor and advise Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers and their leadership in order to develop a new national military in Liberia that is responsible, operationally capable, and respectful of civilian authority and the rule of law.' In short, the basic purpose of the operation was to guide the AFL toward building a self-sufficient, professional and capable military force that could effectively contribute to the overall security environment throughout Liberia.

Operation Onward Liberty grew from American military and humanitarian efforts in 2008 when a U.S.-supported aid organization, African Partnership Station, and its subsidiary, the West African Partnership Training Cruise, delivered more than \$3 million in humanitarian supplies and equipment to civil war-weary Liberian citizens. In addition to supplies and equipment, the APS and WAPTC effort brought hope, services and skilled personnel to help Liberians 'who needed that service most desperately', according to Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf who spoke with gratitude to U.S. military representatives at the Redemption Clinic in New Kru Town, Liberia, in March 2008. The first Michigan National Guard contingent to assist in Liberia hailed from the 127th Logistics Readiness Squadron located at Selfridge Air National Guard Base, in Mount Clemens, Michigan. The group departed for a 6-month deployment in July 2011.

The Selfridge Airmen who accepted that first deployment built a strong partnership foundation as they worked with Liberian military counterparts in the newly formed Liberian military. Master Sgt. Leslie Blanks, a member of the 127th LRS group, outlined his mission in a 2012 interview with Tech. Sgt. Daniel Heaton [Michigan builds partnerships in Liberia, DVIDShub.net]. Blanks said he helped supervise a crew of about 30 Liberian soldiers and coordinated transportation needs for roughly 50 U.S. military personnel. In the interview Blanks said, “The two biggest challenges to personal safety in Liberia were number one, traffic, and number two, malaria.”



Master Sgt. Leslie Blanks returned home to Michigan Jan. 6, 2012, after a 6-month deployment to Liberia. Blanks is a member of the 127th Logistics Readiness Squadron at Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Mich. The Michigan National Guard and the Armed Forces of Liberia recently paired under the U.S. State Partnership Program. Blanks worked as a mentor and adviser to a group of Liberian military personnel during his deployment. (Michigan National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Rachel Barton)

Blanks’ ordering of the top two deployment challenges was clearly intentional. Malaria, for the most part, can be prevented with a course of inoculations and medicine, but in a city like Monrovia, with more than a million people and no traffic lights, speed limits or even stop signs, which were all destroyed in the civil war, accidents happen often, presenting potentially serious safety and security issues. Under these conditions, supply deliveries (including malaria medications) are commonly delayed, rerouted, or even

destroyed before reaching their Liberian destination. The need for civil law enforcement emphasized the critical need for trained Liberian forces who have the ability and foresight, to step in quickly and offer effective support to local authorities, not just in law enforcement, but also with infrastructure and building construction, health and human services, education, general labor, border patrol and peacekeeping within the emerging democratic nation.



Michigan National Guard Gen. Burt Francisco, right with glasses, talks with Col. Pablo Estrada, Operation Onward Liberty brigade commander, after meeting with U.S. Airmen, Soldiers and Marines at Edward Binyah Kesselly Military Barracks, June 11, 2012. OOL is a group of approximately 50 U.S. military personnel who mentor and advise the Armed Forces of Liberia in order to develop a Liberian military that is responsible, operationally capable, and respectful of civilian authority and the rule of law. Francisco traveled to Liberia to visit Michigan National Guard Soldiers and Airmen during their deployment. (U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Lt. Mark Lazane)

As Blanks and the 127th LRS returned to Michigan in January 2012, Army Col. Pablo Estrada led a second detachment of Michigan Guardsmen to Liberia, this time for a full year mobilization. Estrada’s mission was

to engage and instruct Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers on a variety of military operations from a U.S. perspective. His team demonstrated military skills from basic infantry tactics to drill and ceremony procedures. It was a hands on, ‘in the weeds’ mission that made Estrada and his team thankful for the extensive survival training requirements and immunization protocols they endured prior to departure. Not that the challenges of the mission were unexpected, as Estrada indicated in a 2012 interview, “It’s exciting to be in a position where we can start from ground zero and train an ally army. It’s not going to be a cakewalk, we know it’s not a cakewalk, but the benefits will be great – for both of us.”

Still, in-the-field surprises are magnified when access to supplies and equipment is severely limited. Estrada and his seasoned crew made the best of each engagement opportunity and after 300,000 Liberians died in civil war battles, the battered fledgling country was in desperate need of ally instruction and assistance. Estrada recalls, “They were young and inexperienced in the ways of military strategy and ceremony, but they were eager to learn and willing to work hard. Without hesitation, Michigan National Guard Soldiers and Airmen stepped up to help.”



Master Sgt. Santos Feliciano, instructs Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers during advanced marksmanship training at Edward Binyah Kesselly rifle range Feb. 22, 2012. The week-long course engaged 44 soldiers from across the AFL's 23rd Infantry Brigade. The main focus of the course was reflexive fire, which is handling a weapon while conducting movement. Other skills taught included close quarter combat tactics, room clearing techniques and advanced marksmanship qualifying procedures. Feliciano is a member of the Fort Custer-based, 2nd Battalion, 177th Training Regiment, Regional Training Institute, Michigan Army National Guard where he is the chief instructor. (U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Lt. Mark Lazane)

In September 2014, after two OOL rotations had been completed in tandem with USMC Forces Europe and Africa, the first Michigan National Guard team to assume full leadership and manning responsibilities mobilized under the leadership of Col. Stephen Potter and Lt. Col Ravindra Wagh. In their capable hands, Marine Forces Europe Command, handed-off management and control of the mission with confidence, as the MING/AFL bond continued to grow in strength and depth stemming from the combined influences of multiple Michigan Guard-filled OOL rotations and the pairing of Michigan and Liberia in the National Guard State Partnership Program, along with the assignment of top-notch officers like Maj. Kevin Weise (2012) and Maj. David Huber (2014) as Liberian Bilateral Affairs Officers, to help coordinate, promote and garner support for Michigan National Guard efforts in Liberia.

U.S. Marine Corps Col. David Thompson, who served as the OOL 2013 officer-in-charge, said during the mission leadership change that, “He was proud of Michigan National Guardsmen and their contributions to the AFL and Liberia.” He felt that the Michigan Soldiers and Airmen had made a lasting impression on the AFL, and that their efforts would significantly increase the AFL’s ability to protect its borders and contribute to regional stability.”

The Michigan National Guard couldn’t have asked for a better compliment than that as they assumed the helm.



(Left Photo) Michigan National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Robert Gutman (left), a field medic deployed with Operation Onward Liberty, and Staff Sgt. Derek Smith, OOL personnel mentor, consult with an Armed Forces of Liberia medic while examining a patient during a medical outreach visit to Keita Town, Liberia, July 3, 2013. During the mission, the OOL-AFL team treated more than 750 patients in three remote jungle villages with very limited access to medical care. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Brian Bahret)

(Right Photo) Michigan National Guard Maj. Allen Smith, Operation Onward Liberty brigade adviser and officer-in-charge, observes as an Armed Forces of Liberia soldier completes a land navigation exercise near Edward Binyah Kesselly Military Barracks, Liberia, Aug. 23, 2013. U.S. service members, including Smith, a Plainwell, Mich., resident, deployed in support of OOL to provide mentorship to AFL soldiers in their effort to become a capable, independent force able to protect Liberian interests in West Africa. In addition, OOL is developing the leadership capabilities of the officers and noncommissioned officers to maintain a professional and credible military force with a reputation as a "force for good" among the Liberian people. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Brian Bahret)



(Left Photo) Michigan National Guard Staff Sgt. Daniel Bowen, Operation Onward Liberty enlisted engineering adviser, assists Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers with medical techniques during a Combat Lifesaver Course at Camp Tubman, Liberia, Aug. 12, 2013. Bowen, a Muskegon, Mich., native is on a joint team of U.S. service members, including Michigan National Guardsmen, who deployed with OOL, a U.S. Marine Corps Forces Europe and Africa-led operation comprised of joint U.S. service members, to mentor and advise the Armed Forces of Liberia in order to develop a national military that is responsible, operationally capable, and respectful of civilian authority and the rule of law. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Brian Bahret)

(Left Photo) Michigan Army National Guard Soldier Maj. Michael Cochenour from Canton, Mich. and Armed Forces of Liberia Soldiers evaluate an AFL first lieutenant on military tactics during a training session in Monrovia, Liberia, Sept. 28, 2015. Cochenour has been deployed since December 2014 to support Operation Onward Liberty, a United States Africa Command defense sector reform initiative developed to facilitate implementation of the Liberian National Defense Act by creating a responsible, operationally capable military. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo)

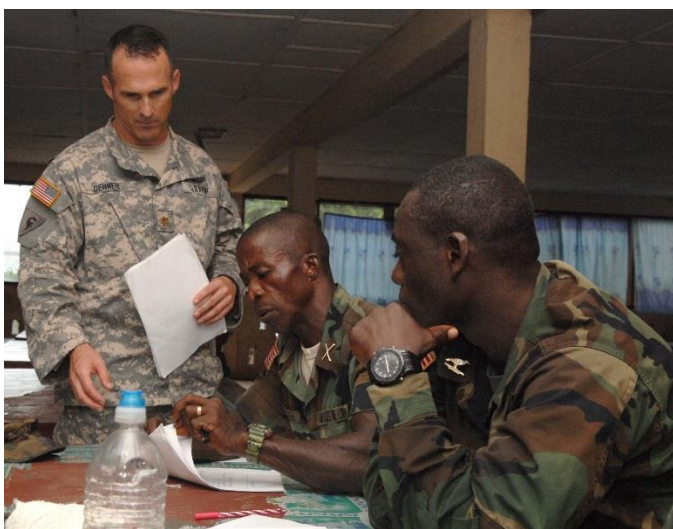
OOL, under Thompson's command in 2013 and a portion of 2014, was more project-driven than other groups had been. Previous OOL groups generally stood together as a mentoring body. In contrast, the men of Thompson's team dispersed to perform mentor missions that most aligned with their individual skill sets. For example, MIARNG field medic, Sgt. 1st Class Robert Gutman teamed with personnel specialist, Staff Sgt. Derek Smith, to mentor AFL medical teams setting up mobile care clinics in remote jungle villages. Staff Sgt. Daniel Bowen, serving as the OOL enlisted engineering adviser, assisted AFL soldiers with medical techniques during a Combat Lifesaver Course at Camp Tubman, and Master Sgt. Craig Pulver and others, worked with AFL peacekeepers at Camp Ware on vehicle inspection procedures, crowd control,

questioning tactics, and other instruction. At the EBK barracks, OOL mentor teams and SPP-supported specialty instructors like Maj. John Wojcik, staff judge advocate at MING headquarters helped AFL officers and administrative staff with ceremonial routines such as promotions, changes of command, review-of-troops procedures and marching standards. During this time, Thompson and U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, Deborah Malac, organized the distribution of \$40,000 in medical equipment to AFL medical directors for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.



(Left Photo) Sgt. 1st Class Tim Tramel, of Climax, Mich., instructs Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers on qualification during advanced marksmanship training at Edward Binyah Kesselly rifle range Feb. 22, 2012. The week-long course taught 44 soldiers from the AFL's 23rd Infantry Brigade. The main focus of the course was reflexive fire, which is handling a weapon while conducting movement. Other skills taught included close quarter combat tactics, room clearing techniques and advanced marksmanship qualifying procedures. The Michigan National Guard conducts periodic specialized training to AFL units through its State Partnership Program. The day to day mentorship of the AFL is performed by Operation Onward Liberty, a group of approximately 50 U.S. military personnel who mentor and advise the AFL in order to develop a national military that is responsible, operationally capable, respectful of civilian authority and the rule of law, and is a force for good among the Liberian people. (U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Lt. Mark Lazane)

(Right Photo) Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers 'apprehend' Michigan National Guard Master Sgt. Craig Pulver, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Battalion senior enlisted adviser, during a scenario training exercise provided by Operation Onward Liberty mentors and AFL trainers at Camp Ware's Armed Forces Training Command March 27, 2013. Service members deployed with OOL helped train a platoon of AFL soldiers for a peacekeeping mission in Mali with the United Nations. (U.S. Air Force photo by Capt. Bryon McGarry)



(Photo Left) Michigan National Guard Maj. Michael Dehner, Operation Onward Liberty training adviser, discusses leadership principles with Armed Forces of Liberia officers during a leadership conference at Edward Binyah Kesselly Military Barracks, Oct. 25, 2013. Dehner, a Tawas, Mich., native, is among 14 Michigan National Guard soldiers deployed in support of OOL. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Brian Bahret)

(Photo Right) Michigan National Guard Maj. John Wojcik, staff judge advocate, talks to an Armed Forces of Liberia soldier during a legal training course at Edward Binyah Kesselly Military Barracks, Liberia, Jan. 23, 2012. Approximately 50 AFL service members, including military police officers, investigators and paralegals, completed the three-week course that taught basics in detainee operations and military law procedures, among other topics. The legal training was one in a series of capability building courses designed to promote the developing AFL, which was reestablished and is now being retrained and reequipped following several years of internal national strife. (U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Lt. Mark Lazane)

Michigan National Guard Assistant Adjutant General, Brig. Gen. Burton Francisco, visited Michigan troops during their 2013 rotation and in part, credits the strong MING/AFL bond to the Guard's 'Citizen Soldier' heritage.



(U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Lt. Mark Lazane)

"National Guard Soldiers and Airmen know what it's like to transition from farmer, construction worker, bus driver, or teacher one day to military member the next. They understand how difficult it can be on families, on employers, on educational progress, but they do it because they also understand the importance protecting their country and their freedom and they are willing to make intense sacrifices in order to keep that freedom," Francisco said. "Being a member of the military is so much more than a job to Michigan Guardsmen. Guard pride in community

protection, humanitarian freedom, and national strength-building is demonstrated in the way they interact with AFL soldiers, their families, and the Liberian people. I believe it's what makes the MING/AFL bond so strong."

Managing all facets of the OOL mission wasn't easy for Potter and Wagh, the first independent OOL leadership team. Marine Forces Europe Command had been the lead OOL agency from its inception in 2010 and the young Michigan leaders found themselves challenged in a number of ways. First, they were challenged to prove that National Guard Soldiers and Airmen were equally qualified mentors of military strategy and equipment as their full time Marine predecessors. Second, they were challenged to balance skill-based instruction with strategic preparations for the next OOL team to take forward and third, they were challenged by funding reductions that often limited access to supplies and equipment. Far and away however, the biggest challenge they faced was the burgeoning outbreak of Ebola.



(Left Photo) Michigan National Guard Operation Onward Liberty 15 Officer-In-Charge, Col. Stephen Potter and OOL 16 OIC, Col. Shawn Harris talk with Brig. Gen. Daniel Ziankahn, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of Liberia, Sept. 4, 2015, regarding needs of the AFL as they assume full responsibility for Liberian security and border protection. (Michigan National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Helen Miller)



(Right Photo) Lt. Col. Ravindra Wagh, plans and operations officer for the Michigan Army National Guard, places the Ranger tab on the left shoulder of Armed Forces of Liberia Sgt. Robert Lincoln, at his graduation from U.S. Army Ranger School, Sept. 23, 2016. Lincoln was the top merit list qualifier for the Ranger course held at Fort Benning, Ga., after participating in a three-week preparation program conducted by members of the Liberian Security Assistance Training Management Office (SATMO) in Liberia. Lincoln's training expenses were covered by the International Military Education Training (IMET) program managed by the Office of Security Cooperation (OSC) at the U.S. Embassy in Liberia. (Michigan National Guard photo by Capt. Tyler Piper)

A report from the World Health Organization ranked the 2014 Sudan strain of Ebola, at 71% lethal, second in viral deadliness only to Marburg, found in Congo and Angola in 2005, at 80%. In contrast to Marburg however, the prolific spread of Ebola led to considerably higher global fatalities. In fact, as of Jan. 2016, of the 11,315 WHO documented deaths, 4,800 were in Liberia alone. The disease put an immediate halt to virtually all military troop movement forcing the Michigan Soldiers teamed with Potter and Wagh to conduct training in a smaller, highly secured, environment.

As if those challenges weren't enough, Potter and Wagh established internal mission goals like officer–enlisted and military–community relationship building, during their time in Liberia. “It was important to demonstrate to the AFL the positive correlation between a strong, well-organized enlisted military body and a strategic, officer-ranked leadership; and then, to show how the groups work together to support civilian government authorities,” Potter said in a 2015 interview with Michigan Air National Guard Master Sgt. Denice Rankin. [Michigan National Guard Continues Mentor-Mission to Liberian Armed Forces, DVIDShub.net]. “We wanted to provide emerging Liberian military leaders at all levels with a holistic view of national security and strength, and then to emphasize the AFL’s role in achieving that goal.”



(Photo Left) Michigan Army National Guard Soldier Maj. Michael Cochenour from Canton, Mich. and Armed Forces of Liberia Soldiers evaluate an AFL first lieutenant on military tactics during a training session in Monrovia, Liberia, Sept. 28, 2015. Cochenour has been deployed since December 2014 to support Operation Onward Liberty, a United States Africa Command defense sector reform initiative developed to facilitate implementation of the Liberian National Defense Act by creating a responsible, operationally capable military. (U.S. Army National Guard photo)

(Photo Right) Members of the Operation Onward Liberty 15 rotation pose with hand-crafted gifts at the Armed Forces of Liberia headquarters building in Monrovia, Liberia, Oct. 12, 2015. Col. Stephen Potter (second row center) of South Lyon, Michigan, served as the OOL 15 Officer in Charge. Lt. Col. Ravindra Wagh (third row, second right) of Waterford, Michigan, served as the deputy OIC during the deployment. (Courtesy photo)

Amid the myriad challenges and lofty OIC goals however, the OOL 15 team not only rose to the challenge but succeeded in earning the very rare Army Superior Unit Award; a recognition conferred to less than one-half of one percent of OCONUS (Outside the Continental United States) deployments.

AUSA ribbon image by Ipankonin - http://quicksearch.dla.mil/qsDocDetails.aspx?ident_number=9206, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3478942>



Perhaps the most moving comment in reference to the OOL 15 deployment was from a supplemental soldier, medical doctor Lt. Col. William LeCates from the New York National Guard who said, “Each mission presents a set of challenges, physical dangers, biological, psychological, social dangers, there’s certainly some bad stuff in the world today, but here in Liberia, it’s like all of those challenges came together, every difficulty you could imagine can be found here.” And yet, to their credit, LeCates and other OOL 15 members offered sincere smiles for a group photo taken just before their time in Liberia expired.



(Photo Left) Lt. Col. William LeCates, a New York Army National Guard doctor, stands with Capt. Joseph Kowo, deputy commander of the Armed Forces of Liberia Medical Command, during his 2015 deployment to Liberia as part of Operation Onward Liberty, a mission conducted by the Michigan Army National Guard. LeCates, who works as a civilian doctor in Cooperstown, N.Y., was deployed in Liberia for six months as part of the training and mentoring mission. (Courtesy photo from Lt. Col. William LeCates)

(Photo Right) Michigan National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Bruce Lyon, Operation Onward Liberty armory adviser, briefs Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers on the status of an incinerator near the Edward Binyah Kesselly Barracks Medical Center Sept. 9, 2013. Since 2009, a joint team of U.S. service members, including Michigan National Guardsmen, have deployed with OOL, a U.S. Marine Corps Forces Europe and Africa-led operation comprised of joint U.S. service members, to mentor and advise the Armed Forces of Liberia. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Brian Bahret)

By the time Potter and Wagh completed their rotation the stage had been set for the last Michigan OOL group, led by Col. Shawn Harris and Command Sgt. Maj. Jerome Wren, to complete the transition of security operations and training responsibilities, to the government of Liberia and designated AFL leaders. The eight Michigan National Guard members of OOL 16 would provide the final vote of confidence the AFL needed to operate independently despite a UNMIL discontinuance in Liberian financial and personnel support.



Two iterations of Michigan National Guard soldiers supporting Operation Onward Liberty gather for a photo in Monrovia, Liberia, Sept. 4, 2015. The 13 soldiers who have already served for a year in Liberia will exchange information with eight incoming Michigan Guardsmen before departing. The incoming rotation will be the last iteration of MING soldiers to support the United States Africa Command defense sector reform initiative. (Courtesy photo)

Following the leadership practices of the first OOL command team, OOL 16 was specifically charged with advising the Joint Staff of the AFL headquarters. Their key objectives included:

- Utilizing AFL leader/mentorship practices, improve understanding and use of the Mission Command system.
- Improving the Joint Staff capacity to man, equip, and train the AFL force.
- Establish a functional noncommissioned officer support channel.
- Assist with the AFL Engineer Battalion and Explosive Ordnance Detection activation plans and,
- Improve AFL medical readiness and health care system development.

While working toward these objectives the OOL 16 team focused on “advisor unity of effort” to ensure that all advisors (OOL, SDO, OSC, BAO and ECOWAS) were speaking with one voice to the AFL.





The Michigan National Guard Operation Onward Liberty 2016 team at the Armed Forces of Liberia headquarters building in Monrovia, Liberia, Jan. 28, 2016: Maj. Tiffaney Laurin, Lt. Col. James Flowers, Maj. Cordell Gibson, Col. Shawn Harris, Capt. Mark Grant, Command Sgt. Maj. Jerome Wren, Maj. Andrew Morton and Maj. Shannon Ruby. (DoD photo by Cpl. Boye Mussah, Armed Forces of Liberia) *Note: In early 2016 Maj. Todd Rumbles replaced Maj. Andrew Morton who accepted the Liberian bilateral affairs officer position.

The OOL 16 team mentored the AFL as they worked with Liberian National Policy advisors and other security partners in developing a joint command post and a field training exercise that would confirm the readiness of the AFL to provide support to civilian authorities during the 2017 elections and other national security situations and to increase interagency understanding and cooperation through the combination of military and civilian partner resources. Despite the conclusion of OOL, Michigan National Guard ties to Liberia and the AFL will continue. Exchanges of traveling contact teams and other support missions through the State Partnership Program and other AFRICOM Military-to-Military engagement programs are already being discussed. Infrastructure development, education and health care workshops, human resource and other missions will serve to strengthen bonds and cultural understanding.



Michigan Army National Guard soldiers sample local cuisine during a staff assistance visit to Monrovia, Liberia, Sept. 25, 2015. The Michigan soldiers will be part of the final rotation supporting Operation Onward Liberty, a United States Africa Command defense sector reform initiative developed to facilitate implementation of the Liberian National Defense Act by creating a responsible, operationally capable military. (Courtesy photo)

----- OOL Timeline -----

1989, Charles Taylor launches 14-year civil war in Liberia. The war left 300,000 dead and more than a million Liberians displaced from their homes and lands.

2003, Liberian Civil War ends and a Comprehensive Peace Agreement is formed and signed in Accra, Ghana. United Nations Security Council launches peacekeeping mission sending thousands of troops to Liberia. Nigerian peacekeepers protect interim Liberian government.

2004, Riots in Monrovia. United Nations Mission in Liberia finds former civil war combatants behind the violence and bans all weapons sales to/within Liberia. By March 2005 UNMIL disarms and demobilizes more than 100,000 individuals who do not meet Armed Forces of Liberia reform criteria.

2005, U.S. provides funding to military contractors, DynCorp International and Pacific Architects and Engineers, to screen and train the new AFL.

2005, Liberia holds first free election, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, as leader of the Unity Party, defeats Charles Taylor, promising Liberian economic development and an end to corruption and civil war. She is inaugurated as Liberia's first female president in 2006. Financial constraints prevent mayoral elections, the Supreme Court allows Sirleaf to appoint local leaders on interim basis, UNMIL forces provide security during the process.

2006, Sirleaf appoints Liberian native, Brownie Samukai as Minister of National Defense. Conflicts occur between Samukai and DynCorp/PAE regarding AFL training and operations.

2006, UN eases ban on weapons sales as more native Liberians grow the ranks of the reformed AFL. Generator-powered lights are turned on in the Monrovia capital, which has been without electricity for 15 years.

2008, Marine Corps Forces Europe delivers more than \$58,000 worth of American donations in humanitarian assistance supplies to clinics and schools in Monrovia.

2009, DynCorp/PAE contract ends, U.S. military mentors continue AFL training, Operation Onward Liberty established through U.S. Marine Corps Forces Africa.

2010, Michigan National Guard State Partnership with Liberia established to encourage and protect Liberia's emerging democracy and economic structure, to exchange ideas, promote stability, and enhance understanding and ally trust.

2009-2011, UN Security Council votes to extend mandate of UN forces (UNMIL) in Liberia to provide security during 2011 elections. Sirleaf wins re-election.

March 2010, Michigan National Guardsman Capt. Ross Bettis appointed as the first Bilateral Affairs Officer for the Office of Security Cooperation at the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia.

July 2011 - January 2012, Selfridge-based 127th Logistical Readiness Squadron travels to Monrovia as first Michigan fielding of Operation Onward Liberty training and support teams.

January 2012 – January 2013, Col. Pablo Estrada and 21 Michigan National Guard Soldiers serve Operation Onward Liberty throughout Liberia to assist the newly formed Armed Forces of Liberia with conducting basic movement and infantry skills, learning drill and ceremony practices, and a variety of routine operating procedures.

June 2012, Michigan National Guard Assistant Adjutant General Brig. Gen. Burton Francisco meets with OOL Airmen, Soldiers, Marines and OOL 13 Officer in Charge, USMC Col. Vernon Graham, at Edward Binyah Kesselly military barracks in Liberia, Africa.

June 2012 – June 2014, Michigan Army National Guard JAG officer, Maj. Kevin Weise serves as bilateral affairs officer to Liberia.

January 2013, USMC Col. David Thompson is named OOL 14 Officer in Charge. Fifteen Michigan National Guard Soldiers volunteer for OOL 14's one-year deployment. Some of the missions included:

January 2013, OOL mentors and a combined Michigan National Guard, Latvian National Armed Forces traveling contact team provide AFL non-commissioned officers in a senior NCO development course at Camp Ware Armed Forces Training Command in Monrovia, Liberia.

March 2013, OOL mentors conduct peacekeeping scenario training for AFL soldiers at Camp Ware Armed Forces Training Command. MING Master Sgt. Craig Pulver, senior enlisted advisor role-plays as a civilian dissident during the concluding exercise.

July 2013, OOL member and MING field medic, Sgt. 1st Class Robert Gutman and personnel mentor, Staff Sgt. Derek Smith work with AFL medical teams treating more than 750 patients in three remote villages with limited access to medical care.

October 2013, Michigan OOL member, Capt. Michael Dehner presents important officer information and materials during a leadership conference with AFL officers at EBK barracks.

November 2013, OOL 13 Officer in Charge, USMC Col. David Thompson and U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, Deborah Malac dedicate \$40,000 of medical equipment to AFL for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

2014, Liberia hit hard by outbreak of the Ebola virus. Emergency measures to combat spread of the virus are implemented, all Liberian borders closed. In July, President Sirleaf meets with President Obama to request U.S. aid. President Obama commits 3,000 troops and emergency funding to West Africa to build, staff and stock medical facilities to combat the disease. More than 4,800 Liberian deaths are Ebola-attributed before management of the virus is contained.

February 2014, President Sirleaf appoints Brig. Gen. Daniel D. Ziankahn as the first Liberian Chief of Staff since the end of Liberia's 14-year civil war. Nigerian military officer, Maj. Gen. Suraj A. Abdurrahman, relinquishes command after holding the position for seven years. Col. Eric Dennis serves as Ziankahn's deputy and Col. Prince Johnson III becomes the 23rd Brigade Infantry Commander as the AFL assumes border protection and other responsibilities from Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) security forces.

March 2014, Michigan Guardsman Maj. David Huber appointed as Bilateral Affairs Officer for the Office of Security Cooperation at the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia. Despite travel and supply delivery difficulties due to Ebola, Huber manages to secure and direct funds for the largest Liberian construction project under U.S. Army Africa purview; two, 3,600 sq. ft. multi-purpose training buildings equipped with electricity and running water, constructed almost entirely by the 1430th and 1434th Michigan National Guard Engineer Companies in conjunction with AFL engineers, advisors and troops.

February 2015, Sirleaf reopens Liberian borders and lifts curfew restraints. She reopens schools, many of which had been closed for five months or more due to Ebola dangers.

December 2014 – October 2015, OOL 15, led by Col. Stephen Potter and Lt. Col. Ravindra Wagh, mission focus is to demonstrate to the AFL the connection between a strong, well organized enlisted military body and strategic, officer-ranked military leadership, then, to show how the two groups work together to support civilian authorities. Military travel remains difficult due to Ebola restrictions.

August 2015, AFL military officers travel to Camp Grayling Joint Maneuver Training Center in northern Michigan to learn and share strategic military information.



Michigan National Guard Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Gregory Vadnais and State Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel Lincoln, host Brig. Gen. Daniel D. Ziankahn Jr., Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of Liberia and Sgt. Maj. Cooper Manqueh, Command Sergeant Major of the Armed Forces of Liberia, in the C-IED range briefing room at the Camp Grayling Joint Maneuver Training Center in Grayling, Mich., Aug. 2, 2015. Michigan and Liberia have been partners under the U.S. National Guard's State Partnership Program since 2009. The visit to Michigan by the Liberian Armed Forces has helped to strengthen the ongoing partnership between the Michigan National Guard and the Armed Forces of Liberia. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Ryan Zeski)



Three military officers from the African nation of Liberia toured the Michigan State Emergency Operations Center in Lansing, Aug. 20, 2015, with members of the Michigan National Guard Operation Onward Liberty 16 team and SEOC Michigan State Police commander, 1st Lt. Gabe Covey. Covey and MING OOL 16 commander, Col. Shawn Harris, emphasized the importance of following an established chain of command when supporting and distributing emergency services and information. (Michigan National Guard photo by Angela Simpson)

August 2015, AFL military officers travel to Michigan, meet MING leadership and spend time with the OOL 16 Soldiers who are scheduled to depart for the final OOL rotation in October. While in Michigan, AFL soldiers toured the state emergency operations center and several Michigan National Guard training locations.

September 2015 - September 2016, Final OOL rotation. Michigan National Guard team members include: Col. Shawn Harris, Command Sgt. Maj. Jerome Wren, Lt. Col. James Flowers, Maj. Tiffaney Laurin, Maj. Cordell Gibson, Maj. Shannon Ruby, Capt. Mark Grant, and Maj. Andrew Morton. Maj. Todd Rumbles joins the team in February 2016 to back-fill Morton when he is selected as Bilateral Affairs Officer for the embassy of the United States in Liberia.

November 2015, Michigan Air National Guard KC-135 Stratotankers flown by Airmen from the 127th Security Force Squadron, land in Monrovia, Liberia, delivering Michigan Army National Guard engineers supporting EBK military barracks' building efforts. <http://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/630219/all-michigan-all-the-time-for-this-operation-in-liberia/>



January 2016, President Sirleaf recognizes the Michigan-Liberia partnership and the Michigan National Guard specifically, during her Affiliation Day speech to the country. Sirleaf compliments the significant progress that has been made, both in strengthening the AFL and strengthening the country as a whole.

January 2016, OOL team member, Maj. Andrew Morton selected as Bilateral Affairs Officer for the embassy of the United States in Liberia. Maj. Todd Rumbles is selected to back-fill Morton as the Training Advisor to the AFL.



The Michigan National Guard Operation Onward Liberty 2016 team at the Armed Forces of Liberia headquarters building in Monrovia, Liberia: Maj. Tiffaney Laurin, Lt. Col. James Flowers, Maj. Cordell Gibson, Col. Shawn Harris, Capt. Mark Grant, Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Jerome Wren, Maj. Andrew Morton, and Maj. Shannon Ruby. Maj. Andrew Morton, the new bilateral affairs officer to Liberia stands with Economic Community of West African States advising partner, Nigerian Army, Lt. Col. Wosiu Bakare while members of the Armed Forces of Liberia (background) scout a location for a proposed joint training exercise. As OOL 16 Training Adviser, Morton speaks to all members of the AFL training staff. (Michigan National Guard photos merged for banner by Master Sgt. Ronald Raflik)

January 2016, Former 23rd Infantry Brigade Senior Enlisted Advisor, Cooper Manqueh is promoted to Liberian Forces Command Sergeant Major. The 23rd INF BDE conducts its first formal Change of Responsibility ceremony.



February 2016, Michigan National Guard Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Gregory Vadnais, Liberian Minister of Defense Brownie Samukai Jr. and U.S. Charge d'Affaires Mark Boulware, join Michigan Guardsmen, Armed Forces of Liberia Soldiers and others at Edward Binyah Barracks, Margibi County, Liberia, for the dedication ceremony of the multipurpose buildings Michigan Guardsmen and Armed Forces of Liberia Soldiers built together.



Armed Forces of Liberia Soldiers apply a cement-like mud to the interior walls of two new multipurpose buildings, Feb. 3, 2016, at the Edward Binyah Kesselly military training facility in Monrovia, Liberia. The buildings were constructed in partnership with Michigan Army National engineers during four Security Cooperation Opportunity Unit Training rotations. Maj. Gen. Gregory Vadnais, adjutant general of the Michigan National Guard, traveled to Liberia to cut the ribbon on the buildings and celebrate Liberian Armed Forces Day, Feb. 10, 2016, with the last SCOUT rotation, the MIARNG 1434th Engineer Company, AFL leaders and Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. (Michigan Army National Guard photo by Maj. David Huber)

February 2016, Maj. Gen. Gregory Vadnais, adjutant general of the Michigan National Guard and Brig. Gen. Leonard Isabelle, commander of the Michigan Air National Guard meet with AFL leadership and OOL troops during Armed Forces Week in Liberia. During the visit, AFL forces conducted civil military operations to include medical outreach, Tumbanburg city clean up and restoration projects and hosted a symposium to plan operations following the departure of UNMIL personnel and funding.

April 2016, Ebola causes another Liberian death. Prevention emphasis is restated throughout the country. OOL Officer in Charge, Col. Shawn Harris travels to Italy with AFL army commander, Brig. Gen. Daniel Ziankahn to thank outgoing U.S. Army Africa commander Maj. Gen. Darryl Williams for his assistance during the Ebola crisis. Brig. Gen. Joseph Harrington will replace Williams.



Col. Shawn Harris (center) and the Michigan National Guard OOL 16 team partnered with United Nations Mission in Liberia representatives, though not the specific UNMIL representatives pictured, to mentor Armed Forces of Liberia engineers and planners on the UNMIL Quick Impact Project funding process for securing resources for facility repairs and improvements. Using UNMIL QIP funds, AFL engineers renovated Camp Whisner in Zwedru. On May 3, 2016, complete operational management of the camp transferred from UNMIL to the AFL establishing a strong AFL presence along Liberia's southeastern border. (Michigan National Guard photo by Maj. Shannon Ruby)

January 2016 – May 2016, Michigan National Guard OOL 16 team members mentor Armed Forces of Liberia engineers and planners on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), Quick Impact Funding (QIP) process for securing funds for facility repairs and improvements. Using UNMIL QIP funds, AFL engineers renovate Camp Whisner in Zwedru, and on May 3, 2016 complete operational control of the facility changes hands from UNMIL to the AFL establishing a strong AFL presence along Liberia's southeastern border.

March 2016 – June 2016, AFL Chief of Staff, Brig. Gen. Daniel Ziankahn showcases AFL capabilities when briefing the Liberian Senate Standing Committee on Defense, Security, Intelligence and Veterans Affairs and smoothly conducts a UNMIL Donation and Turn-Over ceremony of Explosive Ordnance Disposal. The AFL EOD team, consisting of 29 EOD specialists, assumes responsibility for all unexploded ordnance disposals throughout Liberia. AFL Command Sgt. Maj. Cooper Manqueh and OOL 16 Command Sgt. Maj. Jerome Wren, conduct the first centralized AFL promotion board and issue Order of Merit lists for enlisted AFL Soldiers. Manqueh and Wren travel to Fort Bliss, Texas to attend the International Training and Leader Development Symposium hosted by Sgt. Maj. of the Army, Daniel A. Dailey.

June 2016, OOL 16 team members mentor AFL leaders as they work with Liberian National Policy officials and other security partners to develop a joint command post and field training exercise to confirm the readiness of the AFL to provide support to civil authorities during the Liberian 2017 election and other national security emergencies and to increase interagency understanding and cooperation through incorporation of military and civilian partners.

June 30, 2016, Final day of United Nations Mission in Liberia security mandate. All security operations, including border protection and civilian safety, will be assumed by the Liberian government via the Liberian National Police, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, and the Armed Forces of Liberia.

July 2016, Michigan OOL mentors including Maj. Shannon Ruby, photo right, observe rural medical support station operations run almost entirely by AFL Medical Command staff.



July 2016, Michigan OOL mentors observe real-time AFL security and emergency operations as troops assist their countrymen during major flooding in and around Monrovia.



August 2016, OOL 16 Command Sgt. Maj. Jerome Wren (photo left) recites the oath of reenlistment administered by OOL 16 rotation commander Col. Shawn Harris and witnessed by members of the Armed Forces of Liberia leadership team with which he has spent much of the previous year.



Michigan National Guard Col. Shawn Harris administers the oath of reenlistment to Sgt. Maj. Jerome Wren, Aug. 8, 2016, in front of the Armed Forces of Liberia headquarters building near Monrovia, Liberia, while AFL Command Sgt. Maj. Cooper Manqueh and another AFL soldier hold the American flag in the background. Harris and Wren served together in Liberia during Operation Onward Liberty, 2015-2016. (Michigan National Guard photo by Maj. Shannon Ruby)

July 2016 – August 2016, Michigan OOL mentors stand by for support but are no longer part of daily AFL operations.

Operation Onward Liberty members attend OOL closing ceremony Aug. 11, 2016 and depart Liberia Aug. 12, 2016.

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Senior non-commissioned officers from the United States Army, the Latvian Army and the Army Forces of Liberia pose for a photo during a break from a senior enlisted seminar at Edward Binyah Kesselly Military Barracks, Liberia May 15, 2012. For the first time, two Latvian senior NCOs accompanied U.S.-based trainers from the Michigan National Guard and U.S. Africa Command, respectively, to provide instruction to the Armed Forces of Liberia. The bilateral training team marked the first formal Latvian government involvement on the African continent in over one hundred years. (U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Lt. Mark Lazane)