

Service Members Spend Special Time With Orphans

By Air Force Staff Sgt. Jennifer Redente
CJTF-HOA Public Affairs



Air Force Maj. Lanny B. Greenbaum feeds a baby during a visit to a Djibouti baby orphanage to help French nuns who run the facility for more than 60 babies and toddlers. Greenbaum, a Plain City, Ohio, native, is the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa information management officer. Service members supporting the CJTF-HOA mission donate their time three times a week to help French nuns who run the facility feed the babies at dinner time. More than 60 babies and toddlers are cared for at the facility. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Jennifer Redente.

Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa is one of the forces supporting Operation Enduring Freedom, but the difference between the Airmen assigned to embedded training teams to teach Afghans how to defend their land is much more diverse than the Airmen supporting the mission in the eastern region of Africa.



Airmen, along with fellow service members and coalition forces are winning hearts and minds through projects that include military-to-military training, civil military operations and senior leader engagements.

Personnel supporting the mission to protect coalition interests, promote regional stability, prevent conflict and protect coalition interests in order to prevail against extremism, also differ through a large number of community outreach and volunteer opportunities.

These opportunities include English discussion groups and visiting orphanages in Djibouti. Three days a week, service members are given the opportunity to assist French nuns at the Djibouti baby orphanage to help care for more than 60 babies and toddlers.

The visits to the orphanage are the highlight of the week for one communications and information officer who deployed in September

from the Air Force Global Cyberspace Integration Center at Langley Air Force Base, Va., to Camp Lemonier, Djibouti.

“For a period of time, I am allowed the luxury of forgetting about myself, about being deployed to Africa, about being 7,000 long miles away from my family, my home, my wife and my daughter,” said Air Force Maj. Lanny B. Greenbaum, CJTF-HOA information management officer. “In the simple act of feeding a bottle to a baby, my heart fills with love for the children and reminds me of my family waiting for me in America.”

The nuns who care for more than 60 children at the orphanage have volunteers feed the children during their visits, which can last up to three hours.

“We usually feed the boys and girls bottles of formula or soft, solid food,” said Major

Greenbaum, a 36-year-old from Plain City, Ohio.

“With the remaining time, we play with the children.”

With each volunteer, there is a special reason for donating their off-duty time. Some miss their children and are looking to connect in some little way, while others may have wives expecting and looking for a way to prepare for fatherhood. For Major Greenbaum, it’s not only a way to connect with his daughter, but it is also a way to give back after going through the adoption process.

“My wife, of 11 years, and I have a precious daughter who will turn three next month, while I am still deployed,” he said. “Together my wife and I had the joy of traveling to China to make her part of our family. She is an absolute joy, and even though I am not home with my daughter, going to the orphanage helps fill the void. Personally, the trip is the highlight of my week.

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"It is a chance for me to give back to those truly in need, to impact the life of a child who doesn't have a mommy and daddy," he said. "Our part, however limited, does make a difference."

Going through the experience of adopting a child gave the major a unique perspective of orphanages and what is involved with caring for children who don't have families of their own.

"The caretakers at my daughter's orphanage took exceptional care of her, and I see my efforts as a small way to make a difference for deserving children here in Djibouti," said Major Greenbaum. "It gives the sisters a break and also brings a fresh face and another human touch into the children's lives. For that short timeframe, the kids have someone to connect with, and it tugs at your heart when they latch on to you and don't want to let go. The hardest part is putting them down for the night and having to walk away."

Major Greenbaum is one of many dedicated volunteers who are seen at the orphanage every week.

"I see the same dedicated Camp volunteers boarding the bus each week," he said. "Some



DJIBOUTI – Air Force Staff Sgt. Francisco J. Hernandez uses both hands wisely to hold one baby and feed another during a visit to the Djibouti baby orphanage near Camp Lemonier, Djibouti. Hernandez, a Merkel, Texas, native, is the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa Information Management Office Data Systems noncommissioned officer-in-charge. Service members supporting the CJTF-HOA mission donate their time three times a week to help French nuns who run the facility feed the babies. More than 60 babies and toddlers are cared for at the orphanage. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Jennifer Redente.

volunteers have been going to the baby orphanage the better part of their year tour."

The major, who has served in the Air Force for 12 years, makes it a point to attend the orphanage at least once a week, but to assist in his absence, when the mission allows, the Information Management Office is represented with the attendance of other Airmen.

"Three other people from my section also go to the baby orphanage," said Major Greenbaum. "We try to have someone represent our section each time a baby orphanage trip is offered."

The Camp Lemonier Ministry Support Team coordinates the trips to the baby orphanage each week.

"The major introduced me to the orphanage visits," said Air Force Staff Sgt. Francisco J. Hernandez, IMO Data Systems noncommissioned officer-in-charge. "He is always busy during the week attending meetings, and dealing with management-level tasks, but he puts his busy schedule on pause when it is time to go to the orphanage. It is one day out of the week where the major's professional life stands still, so he can give his time to the kids. The orphanage workers jokingly treat him as the father to Bethlehem, a little girl that he practically pushes all the other volunteers aside for, so he can have her all to himself."

A member of the camp's ministry support team knows Major Greenbaum through his frequent visits to the orphanage.

"The major does very well with the children and seems to have a lot of fun with them," said Navy Religious Programs Specialist Petty Officer 2nd Class Gary A. Wood, Camp Lemonier Ministry Support



DJIBOUTI – Service members deployed to Camp Lemonier, Djibouti, spend time with children at the Djibouti baby orphanage after feeding them dinner Jan. 26. Camp Lemonier is home to more than 1,800 service members supporting Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa. The mission of CJTF-HOA is to prevent conflict, promote regional stability, protect coalition interests to prevail against extremism. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Jennifer Redente.

Team leading chaplain's assistant.

"He shows a dedication that is mostly only seen by those who have a family. Sometimes the sadness of seeing those children is just too much for people, yet for the major, he simply shows the children there is someone that cares for them. I am both honored and grateful that I have had the privilege to have worked with so many volunteers like Major Greenbaum."

While visiting the orphanage is a volunteer opportunity, it's still helping to support in the CJTF-HOA mission.

"We are providing much needed assistance to the women who work at the orphanage and also providing attention and comfort to the children, which helps them to grow accustomed to new people, in turn, helping to make them more desirable to prospective adoptive parents," said Petty Officer 2nd Class Wood, a Cassville, Mo., native.

"The orphanages along with the English discussion groups are the primary sources of our outreach to the community of Djibouti, where the majority of the population lives. We strive to win the hearts and minds of the young who will eventually grow to be the leaders of tomorrow. Through the actions of service members like Major Greenbaum, we are striving to make a better and brighter future for the children of Djibouti. The country of Djibouti is growing so fast that these children can easily be forgotten, but our many caring and generous volunteers are ensuring that will never happen."

The dedication of volunteers runs deeper than coordinated trips through the chapel.

"I personally have witnessed people going out on days the chapel does not have a trip planned just so they can help that much more," said Petty Officer 2nd Class Wood, who is deployed from Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, Texas. "There are a lot of highly dedicated people on camp."

Based on the services and types of deployments each service member is on, deployments can range up to one-year tours. When it is time to redeploy, service members like Major Greenbaum will be excited to return to their own families, and children at the orphanage, like Bethlehem, will always have a special place in their hearts. ●