

# ALUMNI NEWSLETTER



## OHIO NATIONAL GUARD

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### Ohio's top NCO plays America's favorite pastime... part-time

Story by Bill Pierce  
Ohio National Guard Public Affairs

COLUMBUS, Ohio — As one of America's favorite pastimes, baseball has kept our attention from when we were young enough to understand what a bat and ball were, to whenever it was when we got older and decided to hang it up. But some people choose to never hang it up. For Command Sgt. Maj. Rodger Jones, the Ohio Army National Guard state command sergeant major, hanging it up was never really an option.

Jones has played baseball since the third grade but took a break when his son began to play. "I told myself I would retire from playing when my son was old enough so I ended up coaching him from T-ball through pony league." After his son broke his wrist in a skateboard accident his first year of pony league, Jones began thinking about getting back behind the plate at catcher. His son was out for just one season, but by that time, Jones found himself embedded back into the sport.

Jones began looking for adult baseball leagues so he could continue to play the sport he loved. After a lot of investigation, he joined the National Adult Baseball Association (NABA) and the Men's Senior Baseball League (MSBL) in 2011, and never looked back.

In the NABA, Jones plays in the 35-and-over league for a local team called the Columbus Padres. They play at different high school fields all over Central Ohio — from Briggs High School on the south side, to Dublin Coffman and Dublin Jerome on the northwest side, to Olentangy Orange High School on the north side. The Padres have even played a couple games at The Ohio State University's Bill Davis Stadium.

Jones said even though he belongs to the 35-and-over league, his team likes to play as much as possible, so they often play against teams in the 35-and-under leagues.



Command Sgt. Major Rodger Jones waits for the next pitch while in his catcher's crouch during a game against the Mariners at Westerville North High School's Bernowski Field in Westerville, Ohio. Jones has been a member of a Columbus-area 35-and-over league since joining the National Adult Baseball Association in 2011. (Photo courtesy of Candy Jones)

"To watch some of those 21-year-olds who played in college and to see how quickly they react...it's amazing to watch," Jones said. "I had one game where I absolutely crushed the ball to left field. No one in my league would have gotten to it and here this kid runs all the way back and catches it. Then, my second at bat, I smoked a line drive down the third base line and this kid stretches out and dives for it, making the catch while robbing me of my second hit. If I were to hit those in my regular league, I would have easily had two doubles."

In the MSBL, Jones, 51, takes part in the league's World Series tournament play, in the 50-and-over division as a San Francisco Giant. This past summer, he played with them in Las Vegas, where during his first at bat, he hit a home run on the first pitch. They also played in Phoenix, where he played six games in four days and caught all six games. Unfortunately, during both tournaments, his Giants did not fare as well as Major League Baseball's San Francisco Giants, who won the 2014 World Series in October.

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

COVER STORY (CONT.)	2
DATES TO REMEMBER ----- CHRISTMAS IN SERBIA	3
JANUARY RISFAC DATES ----- CHRISTMAS IN HUNGARY ----- 1191ST RETURNS HOME	4

## Ohio's top NCO...

(cont. from pg. 1)

The MSBL World Series tournaments take place every year in cities across the country. Often, teams get to play in major league facilities — Jones' team played two of their games in two different major league stadiums, and their other four games were played on major league practice fields. "Being able to play in major league stadiums was very cool," Jones said. "We played in both the Reds-Indians' spring training stadium and the Los Angeles Angels' stadium."

While catching and pitching are at a premium because those are the two most difficult positions to play, Jones said what he has learned in the Army has helped him "bull through" when playing. "It's very hot playing in Phoenix. Every game during the day, we are playing in 95 degrees with 90 percent humidity," Jones said. "That takes a toll on your body at any age."

Often when he would play in a tournament, his coach would ask if he can play any other positions. "I told them I'm just a catcher,"

Jones said. "However, if we get in a bind, I can play first base. But my favorite position is catcher. I like leading the team."

Asked how he became a catcher, Jones sat back and rattled off the names of famous catchers from his younger years. "There were so many great catchers," Jones said. "There was Johnny Bench, the greatest catcher that ever lived, Carlton Fisk, Thurman Munson, Bill Freehan and Bob Boone." Jones said he used to watch them on television as much as he could. When he did, he would always see them on the field talking to the team, adjusting their positions where they stood, letting them know how many outs there were and putting the signs on, much like a senior noncommissioned officer might do with his Soldiers.

His wife Candy is his No. 1 supporter. "I like to attend all the Columbus games and I even travel with him when he plays tournaments out west," Candy said. "Our goal is that once he retires from the military, we will move out to Phoenix and he will play in the 35-and-over, 40-and-over, 45-and-over, 50- and 55-and-over leagues. He really loves the game, and I love to watch him play."

Serving more than 33 years with the U.S. Army in a variety of leadership positions from scout to command sergeant major, one would think that Jones' Army experience helped him excel in his role as leader of the team. "To tell you the truth, it was probably the other way around because I was a catcher long before I was a Soldier, and my dad and coach taught me that as the catcher, you set the infield, talk to the pitcher and you have to run the team on the field. That's why I think Soldiering came so natural to me," Jones said.

### *Editor's Note:*

*Jones serves as the principal enlisted advisor to the Ohio assistant adjutant general for Army. He oversees training and all matters concerning the more than 11,000 enlisted Soldiers of the Ohio Army National Guard and their Families.*



Command Sgt. Major Rodger Jones attempts to throw a runner out trying to steal third base during a game against the Reds at the Reynoldsburg Varsity Baseball Field in Reynoldsburg, Ohio. Jones has been a member of a Columbus-area 35-and-over league since joining the National Adult Baseball Association in 2011. (Photo courtesy of Candy Jones)



**DID YOU KNOW?**

The National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP) links U.S. states with a partner country for the purpose of improving bilateral relations with the United States. The program's goals reflect an evolving international affairs mission for the National Guard, to promote regional stability and civil-military relationships in support of U.S. policy objectives.

The state partners actively participate in a host of security cooperation activities ranging from bilateral familiarization and training-like events, to exercises, fellowship-style internships and civic leader visits. All activities are coordinated through the Theater Combatant Commanders, the U.S. Ambassadors' country teams and other agencies as appropriate, to ensure that National Guard support is tailored to meet both U.S. and country objectives.

The Ohio National Guard has two state partners. Since 1993, the Ohio National Guard has partnered with Hungary, and in September of 2006, the Ohio National Guard entered into a new partnership with the Republic of Serbia.

**JANUARY 10****Change of Command**

371st Special Troops Battalion  
1257 Hollar Lane  
Newark, Ohio 43055  
Time: 10:00 a.m.  
Outgoing: Lt. Col. Mark Raaker  
Incoming: Lt. Col. Mark Hatfield

**JANUARY 10****Change of Command**

HHC Camp Ravenna JMTC  
1438 SR 534 SW  
Newton Falls, Ohio 44444  
Time: 3:00 p.m.  
Outgoing: Maj. Mark Stepuk  
Incoming: Maj. Eric Kaiser

**JANUARY 11****Change of Command**

Co B, 237th Brigade Support Battalion  
475 Victoria Road  
Austintown, Ohio 44515  
Time: 8:00 a.m.  
Outgoing: Capt. Lyndsey Williams  
Incoming: Capt. James Borchers

**JANUARY 11****Change of Command**

112th Motor Transportation Battalion  
1257 Hollar Lane  
Newark, Ohio 43055  
Time: 10:00 a.m.  
Outgoing: Lt. Col. Patrick Hinton  
Incoming: Lt. Col. Mark Raaker

**JANUARY 11****Change of Command**

Camp Sherman Joint Training Center  
2154 Narrows Road  
Chillicothe, Ohio 45505  
Time: 1:00 p.m.  
Outgoing: Maj. Richard Saphore  
Incoming: Maj. Marshall Jackson

**JANUARY 11****Change of Command**

Co A, 237th Brigade Support Battalion  
4303 Green Road  
Cleveland, Ohio 44122  
Time: 3:00 p.m.  
Outgoing: Capt. Joel McMichael  
Incoming: Capt. Joseph Carter

**JANUARY 13****Call to Duty Ceremony**

1-174th Air Defense Artillery Regiment  
7350 Dixie Highway  
Fairfield, Ohio 45014  
Time: 11:00 a.m.

**MARCH 31****Registration Deadline**

For the ONGA/ONGEA Spring Events Weekend, April 23-25, Columbus  
Online registration and secure payment are available at:  
<https://eventngd.com/Events/14576/>

## Christmas through the eyes of our State Partners

### SERBIA

Every Orthodox family in Serbia has one patron saint. Each family celebrates the feast day of their saint with a unique Serbian Orthodox religious tradition, Krsna Slava or Thanksgiving, on the day when their ancestors were baptized (Serbians accepted Christianity by families and whole tribes). This same saint is the family's saint from generation to generation through the centuries. *Sveti Nikola* (St. Nicholas) is the most common patron saint for so many families that there is a Serbian saying for St. Nicholas Day, 6 or 19 December, "Half of Serbia is celebrating their Slava today, and the other half is going to a Slava." It is a very important day for Serbian Orthodox.

The Slava celebration includes:

- Icon of the family's patron saint, in this case, St. Nicholas
- A lighted candle, for Christ the Light of the World
- Slavsko zhito/koljivo, a boiled wheat dish, representing Christ's death and resurrection
- Slava bread (*Slavski kolach*), decorated with cross and seal, for Jesus Christ the Bread of Life
- Red wine, for Christ's precious blood that washes away sin
- A priest, who blesses the home and all present, offering prayers and the Thanksgiving Prayer (*molieben*) before the icon
- Awareness that Krsna Slava is a great treasure given by one's ancestors

Slava is feasting, singing and festival, but also, and more importantly, a time of spiritual renewal and rededication to the Orthodox faith and church. Celebrating Krsna Slava creates confidence, strength, freshness, stability, spiritual and physical peace, and the ability and incentive to do good and to lend help to others. The Slava is a family reunion usually held in the home of the family's oldest living member to commemorate the patron saint, glorify God, and pray for all members of the family, including those who have died. Friends need not be invited. They simply present themselves for the celebration. The priest blesses the bread, then turns and cuts it as a sign of the cross. It is then passed to everyone. The meal is fish, as meat and dairy are forbidden on that day (as it is during the Nativity fast). The Slava candle is not blown out, rather extinguished with wine, then the glass is passed for each family member to take a sip, symbolizing the perpetuity of the Slava and the unity of the family in faith. Serbian Orthodox observes Krsna Slava wherever they live, not just in Serbia.

There is more to Saint Nicholas in Serbia than Slava, though. On St. Nicholas Eve children place a shoe on the windowsill. By morning they find dried fruit, nuts, small toys or new school supplies left by St. Nicholas. It is said that naughty children find an onion.

Families also soak some wheat kernels on St. Nicholas Day, putting them in a small plate or saucer with a candle in the center. The wheat sprouts and is full and green by Christmas—new, young and green in midwinter—as a symbol of Christ's birth.

St. Nicholas was also the protector of Serbian kings, so many of the oldest Serbian Orthodox churches were dedicated to him.



A traditional Slava celebration including the Slava icon, candle, zhito, kolach, incense and a wine glass.

Source: <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/serbia/>

(Cont. on pg. 4)

## Christmas through the eyes...

(Cont. from pg. 3)

### HUNGARY

On December 5th children in Hungary carefully polish their best boot and put it on the windowsill or in front of the door to be filled by St. Nicholas, *Szent Mikulás* or *Miklós*, sometime during the night. The good bishop comes with a big sack full of presents and a large record book with children's good and bad deeds. He used to come with two helpers: a good angel who helps give out presents and a bad Krampus devil who makes mischief. Now it seems mostly to be the Krampusz.



In the night Szent Mikulás secretly leaves little bags filled with candies, tangerines, oranges, walnuts, apples, chocolate Mikulás figures, peanuts, and small presents for children to find in the morning. Naughty children find twigs painted gold or a wooden spoon. Most children get some of each as no one is all good or all bad.

Even adults may participate, though they no longer seem to polish their shoes.

Mikulás-day is also celebrated in schools and day care centers. Children sing Mikulás songs and individual children may say poems and sing songs, as well. St. Nicholas calls them by name and has a personal message for each child. He may stay to play or watch a movie with the children.

Source: <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/hungary/>

### **2015 Regional Inter-Service Family Assistance Committee Meetings:**

*Region 1 - 22 Jan; Region 2 - 21 Jan; Region 3 - 13 Jan  
Region 4 - 27 Jan; Region 5 - 13 Jan; Region 6 - 14 Jan*

For questions regarding the time or place of RISFAC meetings, contact  
Lt Col Kathy Lowrey at (614) 336-7002.

As of Dec. 31, 2014, Retirees and Family Members will no longer have access to AKO and email accounts.

Any email forwarding will be shut off, to include commercial email accounts. Retirees and Family Members will no longer have access to the AKO Portal. The replacement for AKO for retirees is "Soldier For Life" Portal located at: <http://soldierforlife.army.mil>. Forwarding will still be performed for all other categories of AKO users until sometime in 4th Qtr FY15.

POC: AKO 866-335-2769

## 1191st Engineer Company returns home from Afghanistan



The Ohio National Guard welcomes home 157 Soldiers from the 1191st Engineer Company during a ceremony Dec. 8, 2014, at Christ's Community Church in Portsmouth, Ohio. While in Afghanistan, the unit conducted retro-grade engineer operations, which included the tear down of many of the coalition forces' smaller operating posts.

Staff Sgt. Nicholas Pavlik, ONG