

South Dakota National Guard

Public Affairs Office

Phone: 605-737-6721 Email: ng.sd.sdarnng.list.pao@mail.mil Web: sd.ng.mil



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SD Guard, Suriname soldiers partner to renovate school

PARAMARIBO, Suriname – Soldiers from the South Dakota National Guard and members of Suriname’s Armed Forces partnered together to renovate some of the infrastructure at the O.S. 1 Santo Dorp School in Wanica, Suriname, Aug. 8-16.

The renovation project was conducted as part of the Suriname and South Dakota State Partnership Program to provide training for military construction personnel while simultaneously assisting in a worthy community need.

“Similar to other Armed Forces around the world, Suriname’s Armed Forces are engaged in humanitarian projects and is expanding its responsibilities concerning our national development,” said Lt. Col. Johnny Antonius, Suriname Ministry of Defense head of strategic planning and education. “In this respect, collaboration with the South Dakota National Guard on this particular project is of utmost importance. This form of collaboration is a win-win situation on many levels.”

A team of eight Soldiers from the SDNG’s 155th Engineer Company and 211th Engineer Company worked alongside about a dozen Suriname Defense Force engineers on the renovation. Renovations consisted of tiling, door construction and installation, painting, electrical and lighting installation, sink and toilet installation, waterline plumbing, septic tank venting, drainage installation and installing a boundary fence.

“The experience created a ton of training for all of us across the board,” said Warrant Officer Brandon Voss, project officer in charge of the SDNG team. “We not only had to deal with language barriers, we had to overcome different building techniques and building material. Working with the SDF helped us practice communication and compromising skills. It was a great opportunity in planning, organizing and working with the SDF and the Suriname people.”

The renovations will not only create a better learning and teaching environment, but the Surinamese soldiers and the members of the SDNG will know that their effort and hard work has made our children very happy and will set conditions for them to enjoy going to school, said Antonius.

“Furthermore, Surinamese soldiers and members of the SDNG learn from each other on how they both conduct certain work related tasks and more importantly they work together as a team,” Antonius said. “After all, that is what the partnership is all about ‘team work.’”

Santo Dorp’s principal, Sharmila Darsan, said the school is like a completely new environment and she is grateful to all who worked on the project.

“A pleasant learning environment is always good for the children,” said Darsan. “It helps with better attitudes, higher grades and it motivates.”

Darsan said the fence and gates also makes the children feel safe and will keep strangers from wandering into the school yard.

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The project first began in March, when SDNG and Suriname soldiers specializing in construction visited 14 public schools accompanied by representatives from the Suriname Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education chose the Santo Dorp School, which serves approximately 850 students from the local area.

Pvt. Dominic Paulson, of the 155th, said he was pleased to work on the project, which gave him a satisfied feeling knowing he can contribute to a better school and learning environment for the children.

“I was very happy to work on the bathrooms and complete the fence,” said Paulson. “It was a joy to see the young kids’ faces having new plumbing fixtures for washing their hands and a fence to help keep them safe.”

Funding for the project was provided by U.S. Southern Command and all materials and supplies were purchased in Suriname.

For the past 10 years, the SDNG and SDF have successfully partnered together to establish a security cooperation relationship in coordination with USSOUTHCOM under the National Guard Bureau’s State Partnership Program. The partnership has flourished during the past decade becoming a model for mutual security cooperation.

“The partnership between the Republic of Suriname and South Dakota has proven to be an example for all State Partnership Programs that the United States conducts with countries around the world,” Antonius said. “I am convinced that both Suriname and South Dakota will do their utmost to maintain this kind of partnership and bring it to an even higher level.”

Since 2006, Soldiers from both countries have conducted over 100 subject matter exchanges through the program, which have benefitted men and women from both organizations to gain knowledge and experience in both military operations and civilian culture.

“I have never been to Suriname before, or even outside of the U.S.,” said Pfc. Logan Foster, of the 155th. “I would definitely take the opportunity to come back to Suriname. It was a great experience!”

Suriname and the SDNG conduct about 10 subject matter expert exchanges a year on a variety of military related topics to include: field leadership and NCO development; logistics operations; military police procedures; medical and communications training; and women serving in the military, to name a few.

The renovation project at Santo Dorp is just one of several construction projects that the partner nations have completed at schools and clinics throughout Suriname in the past 10 years.

“It’s important to mention that the Republic of Suriname is not neglecting its duty of creating conditions for a good learning environment for our children,” Antonius said. “Although we are going through some difficult times, due to the current economic crisis, we are doing our utmost to commit to our responsibilities.

“Nevertheless, the SDNG has proven to be a good and trustworthy partner who is willing to assist Suriname in various humanitarian projects such as this one,” Antonius added. “We hope similar projects will be conducted throughout the next 10 years, since the schools, Surinamese soldiers and members of the SDNG look forward to these kind of activities.”



160811-Z-ZZ999-001: Suriname Defense Force engineers along with U.S. Army Pvt. Dominic Paulson, left, 155th Engineer Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, conduct renovation work at the O.S. 1 Santo Dorp School in Wanica, Suriname, Aug. 11, 2016. The renovation project was conducted as part of the Suriname and South Dakota State Partnership Program to provide training for military construction personnel while simultaneously assisting in a worthy community need. (Photo courtesy U.S. Embassy Paramaribo)



160811-Z-ZZ999-002: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Louis Du Randt, right, 211th Engineer Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, and a Suriname Army soldier conduct renovation work at the O.S. 1 Santo Dorp School in Wanica, Suriname, Aug. 11, 2016. The renovation project was conducted as part of the Suriname and South Dakota State Partnership Program to provide training for military construction personnel while simultaneously assisting in a worthy community need. (Photo courtesy U.S. Embassy Paramaribo)



160811-Z-ZZ999-003: Suriname Defense Force engineers paint exterior walls at the O.S. 1 Santo Dorp School in Wanica, Suriname, Aug. 11, 2016. The renovation project was conducted as part of the Suriname and South Dakota State Partnership Program to provide training for military construction personnel while simultaneously assisting in a worthy community need. (Photo courtesy U.S. Embassy Paramaribo)



160811-Z-ZZ999-004: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Chance Ragsdale, 211th Engineer Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, begins bathroom renovation work at the O.S. 1 Santo Dorp School in Wanica, Suriname, Aug. 11, 2016. The renovation project was conducted as part of the Suriname and South Dakota State Partnership Program to provide training for military construction personnel while simultaneously assisting in a worthy community need. (Photo courtesy U.S. Embassy Paramaribo)



160811-Z-ZZ999-005: U.S. Army Pvt. Dominic Paulson, left, and Pfc. Logan Foster, both with the 155th Engineer Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, install barrier fencing at the O.S. 1 Santo Dorp School in Wanica, Suriname, Aug. 11, 2016. The renovation project was conducted as part of the Suriname and South Dakota State Partnership Program to provide training for military construction personnel while simultaneously assisting in a worthy community need. (Photo courtesy U.S. Embassy Paramaribo)



160811-Z-ZZ999-006: A Suriname Defense Force engineer conducts electrical work at the O.S. 1 Santo Dorp School in Wanica, Suriname, Aug. 11, 2016. The renovation project was conducted as part of the Suriname and South Dakota National Guard State Partnership Program to provide training for military construction personnel while simultaneously assisting in a worthy community need. (Photo courtesy U.S. Embassy Paramaribo)

FOR MORE INFORMATION contact Maj. Anthony Deiss at (605) 737-6721 or cell (605) 431-8753, or e-mail ng.sd.sdarnng.list.pao@mail.mil