

Illinois National Soldier Learns Culinary Skills in Botswana

Written by Staff Sgt. Jaime L. Witt, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment
Tuesday, 14 August 2012 15:11

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THEBEPHATSHWA AIR BASE (08/14/2012)(readMedia)-- The stir-fry sizzled on the grill, filling the room with the aroma of warm beef, vegetables and spices, as Spc. Lenette Tidwell of Chicago, flipped the meat with a large metal spatula.

"You're my best friend for life!" she said excitedly to the Botswana Defense Force (BDF) Head Chef Sgt. Gabobotswe Segosebe.

Tidwell, an administrative specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment (HHD), 405th Brigade Support Battalion, Illinois Army National Guard out of North Riverside, Ill., was selected to participate in a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to cook local African cuisine with the BDF chefs Aug. 12 during Southern Accord 2012 (SA12).

SA12 is a joint exercise in which U.S. military forces come together with the BDF to enhance military capabilities and interoperability through humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping operations and aeromedical evacuation.

The cooks from the 405th worked with the BDF for the last week and a half, providing warm meals to the 1,400 troops on the ground by way of military mobile kitchens. However, Tidwell was able to work with BDF chefs in their kitchen, cooking a recipe of beef stew and fried chicken with rice and maize meal.

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Staff Sgt. Martin Fruchtl of Springfield, Ill., mess section sergeant with HHD, 405th, said the leadership chose Tidwell to give her an opportunity to hone her civilian skills. Tidwell is pursuing a certificate in culinary arts from Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Chicago, which she should complete in the spring of next year. She is also planning to transition to the mess section at HHD, 405th.

"When the sergeant told me I'd be over here working with the BDF and seeing how they cook, it made me very excited," she said.

Tidwell helped clean the kitchen, prepare ingredients for the soup and help fry the chicken. She said placing the chicken in the oil was her favorite part.

Tidwell said she learned how the BDF work well with only basic ingredients. She said she enjoys how light and healthy the food is. Tidwell also said she especially likes the type of seasoning they use and the white rice.

BDF Chef, Staff Sgt. Moses Ramathape, said the goal of having Tidwell experience the food preparation was to exchange knowledge on equipment and learn how the BDF prepare a meal.

Tidwell said she appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the way the BDF cook, and she learned a lot about the culture of the BDF Soldiers. She said she will take back some of the skills the BDF chefs taught her including cutting techniques and some of the recipes.

"This was a good experience and a tasty one too," she said.