

CPAS BALANCE CAREERS

TOP GUNS

WITH MILITARY SERVICE

By Cynthia M. Hodnett

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN NIENHUIS



WICPA member Justin Schneider wears two hats: one as a CPA and another as a traditional guardsman in the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

During the week, Schneider works as a senior accountant at Schenck Business Solutions in Sheboygan. But one weekend a month and two weeks every summer, he travels from his home in Sheboygan Falls to Milwaukee to train with the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

As a traditional guardsman with the Wisconsin Air National Guard, at the 128th Air Refueling Wing, Schneider is responsible for maintaining and tracking small arms for security forces.

"I take a lot of pride in serving for the Air National Guard," he said. "I probably have a different take on my service since I was active duty Air Force and participated in several campaigns. If I were to be called up to serve in Middle East or Afghanistan, I wouldn't hesitate to serve honorably. I know it would be tough on my family, friends and employer, but I would have a sense of duty to my fellow service members and country."

PROTECT AND SERVE

After graduating from high school in 1995, Schneider joined the Air Force. For him, joining the military was a way to pay for college, see the world and serve the country.

After serving in the Air Force for five years, Schneider enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh where he majored in accounting and finance. During the summer between his fourth and fifth year of college, he interned at Schenck's offices in Oshkosh where he worked in several areas including personal tax, auditing and corporate tax. After graduating from college, he began working at the firm's Sheboygan office. He also continued his military service as a traditional guardsman in the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

Schneider said he sees a lot of similarity between being a CPA and serving in the military.

"I have to do inventory observation," he said. "Every month for the Guard, you do the same things: count bullets,



Dale Kooyenga, CPA (on the right) and a fellow soldier meet with an Iraqi businessman.

grenades and other small arms. You have to reconcile the records, just as you do as a CPA. You also have to have the management skills, communication skills and the attention to detail."

RANK AND FILE

WICPA member Dale Kooyenga, CPA, an audit manager at KPMG LLP in Milwaukee, also has several years of military experience under his belt.

Kooyenga, a 2001 graduate of Lakeland College, and a 2007 MBA graduate of Marquette University, began his accounting career at KPMG shortly before Sept. 11, 2001. Inspired by the tragic events of that day, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserve in 2005, joining his two brothers who were already serving in the Army.

Kooyenga said the firm was supportive of his decision to enlist and accommodated his schedule during basic training and deployment. He is one of several other KPMG employees in Milwaukee who have served in the military, including Eric Hochkammer, CPA, an audit senior associate, who is in the Army Reserve and served in Iraq, said Greg Ryan, CPA, office managing partner at KPMG's Milwaukee office.

"As a firm, we were very supportive of Dale's desire to serve our country," Ryan said. "We worked out a schedule that enabled him to complete his required military training prior to being deployed."

After one year of basic training, officer candidate school and military intelligence school, Kooyenga was commissioned as a military intelligence officer. He returned to Milwaukee in 2007.

In January 2008, he and other members of the 432nd Civil Affairs Battalion from Green Bay were deployed to Baghdad, the focal point of the war in Iraq. Kooyenga said the Battalion's main effort was to conduct missions that would assist the Iraqis in rebuilding their society that was destroyed by war. In turn, the population would recognize the country's rebuilding efforts, which would weed out insurgents, he said.

Kooyenga's responsibilities as a military intelligence officer included assisting in the transformation of Iraq's state-owned enterprises and assisting Iraq's government in executing budget. Being an MBA graduate and a CPA made him a valuable asset in the Army's effort to help Iraq rebuild its economy.

"I will take many things with me from my experience in Iraq," he said. "One of

the key takeaways is the realization that our profession is critical to the economic, social and political health of all our communities.”

Kooyenga stayed in touch with his family and colleagues at the firm during his deployment. Many sent him letters and care packages to keep his spirits high. During that time, he and his wife, Jennifer, had their first child. The couple is expecting their second child this month.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE BATTLE

Both men agree that balancing military service, a career and family can be challenging.

Schneider, a married father of two, is the Sheboygan office representative for Schenck's firm-wide Employer of Choice committee. The committee addresses work-life balance issues affecting employees.

“(Time management) is very important,” he said. “Once a month and two weeks in the summer I'm with the Guard. Plus I work full-time and I have to spend time with family and make special events. It isn't perfect, but you have to make sacrifices.”

“He works with the office manager to let her know ahead of time when he's going to need time to fulfill his military requirements,” said Jeff Oonk, CPA, shareholder at Schenck. Oonk has managed several of Schneider's auditing engagements.

“We make sure (Schneider) is not scheduled for any jobs during (his military service),” he said. “He's also flexible on his end in that he's willing to put in a couple of extra hours before he leaves or when he gets back.”

Kooyenga, who returned from deployment in November 2008, said he will decide if he will remain in the military when his current commitment is com-

plete in two years. Although transitioning from soldier to civilian presented some challenges, his military service has made a positive influence on his life.

“When I joined the Army in 2005, I thought it was going to slow down my professional career,” he said. “Now all of these doors are opening up. The things I did over there translate well to providing services to private businesses and firms over here. My civilian career served my military career well and now my military career is assisting me in my civilian career.”



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