Guardian Magazine welcomes commentaries, articles and photos from readers. Submissions should be sent to the editor at mnbgeast@gmail.com by the 20th of each month and include details such as the who, what, when, where and why of the photos. Please include the person’s name, rank and contingent of who took the photos for photo credit. MNBG-E reserves the right to edit any submissions.

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Twenty-three soldiers from Multinational Battle Group-East visited Rilindja School located outside of Camp Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny (CMLT), Kosovo, to teach dental hygiene to first-grade students, Feb. 5, 2015. Rilindja School has a total 631 students across three different locations in Kosovo. This is the first time soldiers from MNBG-E have partnered with the school for an event like this. (Photo by Ardian Nrecaj)

Paratroopers with the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, assigned to Multinational Battle Group-East, conducted the first ever U.S. Army parachute jump in Northern Kosovo outside of Camp Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny (CMLT) Feb. 26. Paratroopers jumped out of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters using the T-11 parachute. (Photo by Ardian Nrecaj)
Just like that, the shortest month of the year has passed us by! Although only 28 days, February has proven to be no less busy than all previous months since our arrival last October, and the Soldiers of Multinational Battle Group-East have much to be proud of.

During February, we've continued steady progress in developing our relationships with key players throughout our area of responsibility. From engagements with the Kosovo Border Police by our Southern and Forward Command Posts, to engagements with our partners in the Serbian Armed Forces, spearheaded by our ever capable Joint Implementation Commission, our troops continue to do those things that will have a lasting, positive impact here in Kosovo.

Our Southern Command Post (SCP) continues to log a tremendous number of flight hours with their workhorse fleet of UH-60 Black Hawks. Of note, the SCP and elements from our battle group headquarters have executed a number of sling load training events. Toward the end of February, the SCP conducted our first-ever nighttime sling load operation, which expanded our capabilities in terms of transporting supplies over long distances and, at times, over difficult terrain.

At Camp Marechal de Lattre de Tassigny, the Forward Command Post (FCP), in conjunction with the SCP, recently conducted a daylight air movement in mountainous northern Kosovo to train on reconnaissance and small unit tactics. If you're a follower of our MNBG-E Facebook page, no doubt you've seen photos of this mission taken against the backdrop of some seriously breathtaking terrain. The FCP’s home at CMLT also served in February as the location for our latest parachute jump, which was also the first time any U.S. Army airborne unit has jumped in the northern half of Kosovo.

Task Force Medical (TF Med) continues to hold the line in keeping the battle group healthy. This month, TF Med was successful in making sure the battle group remained current on all required immunizations, especially in light of increased concerns back home regarding a return of the measles. Additionally, TF Med planned and executed a highly successful training scenario in February that saw its health professionals summoned in the early morning hours to react to an artificial mass casualty situation. I'm happy to report, and as you'll see in this month's edition, the training was a success and highly beneficial for all.

Before wrapping up this month’s command team letter, Command Sgt. Maj. Rucker and I would like to publicly wish ‘good luck’ to all the Soldiers currently negotiating the ongoing Warrior Lead Course. From now till mid-March, these young Sergeants, and soon-to-be Sergeants, will receive some of the finest junior leader development they will receive during their careers. How are we able to pull this off here in Kosovo, you might ask? Non-Commissioned Officer cadre from the 7th Army’s Joint Maneuver Training Center in Germany are here with us for the next few weeks to provide this invaluable training and we thank them for taking the time to travel here and help us see these Soldiers off on the right foot as they move on to become team leaders in their career fields.

As always, Command Sgt. Maj. Rucker and I are ever thankful for the continued support that our various Family support networks show us from back home... and the sheer volume of mail that our post office receives on a weekly basis is a reassuring sign that your efforts and love back at home station will not waver anytime soon.

Respectfully yours,

Mitchell L. Rucker
Command Sergeant Major

Clint J. Baker
Colonel, U.S. Army
Commanding
Paratroopers Jump in Northern Kosovo

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo - The sun was bright and the sky was crystal blue as Spartan paratroopers packed the skies in Kosovo.

Fifty paratroopers from Multinational Battle Group-East conducted the first ever U.S. Army parachute jump in Northern Kosovo outside of Camp Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny (CMLT) Feb. 26. Previous parachute jumps by Army airborne units in Kosovo have either been conducted on or near Camp Bondsteel, which is in the southern half of Kosovo south of Pristina. Paratroopers jumped out of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters using the T-11 parachute. (Photo by Ardian Nrecaj)

Story by U.S. Army Sgt Melissa Parish

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U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Adam Toland, a native of Batesburg-Leesville, South Carolina, the theatre spectrum manager, and a jumpmaster for MNBG-E, said the paratroopers had a successful jump on the new drop zone. “We have been jumping on Camp Bondsteel on the circular drop zone and it isn’t a very big area to drop jumpers,” said Toland. “The team here decided to look for other places to jump and put our pathfinders to use to survey drop zones and do what they went to school to do.”

Pathfinders with the 4th IBCT (ABN) established a drop zone on a farm field right outside of CMLT.

“This is a larger drop zone [than on Camp Bondsteel] which is always a good thing; it means more green light and more jumpers out of the aircraft at one time,” said Toland. “It was just a great location and a great day to jump.”

“No one got hurt, and all of the jumpmaster teams were certified today so it was a great day for us and a great day for airborne oper-
Greetings to the Soldiers and Families of 1st Squadron (Airborne), 40th Cavalry Regiment! CSM Araneta and I hope this letter finds you all well, whether you are in Anchorage, staying with Family or Friends in the lower 48 or parts in between.

Here in Kosovo the CAV has remained busy through the month of February. The Squadron is now half way through the deployment and we continued to conduct patrols in Northern Kosovo focusing on our mission of maintaining stability in the region. When not conducting patrols, Apache and Chaos Troop have stayed busy conducting training focused on our reconnaissance skills.

In addition to our operational mission the Squadron has developed a training path that will allow us to stay sharp on individual Soldier skills and airborne proficiency. This month Soldiers from the Squadron participated in an airborne operation from a UH-60 Blackhawk on a newly approved Denali Drop Zone, outside of Camp Marchel de Lattre de Tassigny. Also in February, the CAV sent two teams of Jumpmasters to Greece for a training event with the Hellenic Army. This training renewed several Jumpmaster currency and allowed for a US and Greek Jump Wing exchange. The Squadron also held a fundraiser breakfast where our own personal chef’s, SFC Pollock and SFC Lindquist, cooked a delicious array of fried eggs, Spanish Beef BBQ, rice and beans. They will continue these fundraiser breakfasts throughout the rest of the deployment in order to raise money for the Squadron Ball. Many soldiers in the Squadron also enjoyed the Super Bowl game, eating wings, cake, and snacks, and staying up until 0500 to make it through the entire game!

This month, HHT conducted several training events, a promotion, and two reenlistments. The medical platoon coordinated with the Brigade Dental Team to visit a local school near our camp. The team worked with children ages 7-9 to teach them proper brushing and flossing techniques. They also brought coloring books and crayons to play with the children. HHT also participated in Call for Fire Training, Combat Life Saver (CLS) Training, a Troop Army Physical Fitness Test, and a Combatives Level 1 course. A special congratulation goes out to Peter Sanders on his promotion to Specialist, and SSG Pemberton and SGT Sanchez on their Reenlistment. During the month of February, Chaos Troop conducted 19 Area Reconnaissance patrols focusing on maintaining freedom of movement and preserving a safe and secure environment. The troop also conducted multiple screen missions and Puma UAS missions to provide situational awareness of smuggling routes throughout Northern Kosovo. Each of Chaos’ two Platoons separately conducted advance marksmanship training with the M9 Pistol. The instructional blocks focused on close proximity engagements and how to move through multiple targets. Chaos Troop also participated in Call for Fire Training and LPDs to increase leaders’ abilities to analyze their environment.

Apache Troop kept busy conducting daily patrols and rehearsals for their assigned duty of Combat Riot Control Quick Reaction Force. They conducted Platoon Level Squad Tactical Exercise Lanes (STX Lanes) focusing on dismounted reconnaissance and surveillance. Apache Troop also joined Chaos troop in Call for Fire Training, and LPDs.

Over the past month the Soldiers of the LMT have been building upon previously established relationships throughout the community. These relationships are consistently yielding critical information which is shaping how our forces operate across Kosovo. LMT Soldiers continue to shine at all they do and have been recognized repeatedly by Squadron level leadership and Battle Group leadership. The local populace that they interact with continue to express their support and appreciation for the mission that the LMT is conducting.

The FCP would also like to recognize SPC Demetris of Chaos Troop for earning Soldier of the Month.

By Force and Valor!
Jan C. Araneta
Command Sergeant Major

Commanding
Mark D. Federovich
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army

FORWARD COMMAND POST

Become a Paratrooper
JUMP INTO THE FIGHT

Soldiers between the ages of 18 and 32, inclusive who believe they have the qualifications for this thrilling service, may apply for parachute training. Ask your Commanding Officer for application form.
CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo - Cavalry scouts loaded helicopters and headed towards the mountains for an air assault and call-for-fire training mission near Camp Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny (CMLT), Kosovo, Feb. 21.

Cavalry scouts are responsible for being the eyes and ears of the commander during combat and keeping their skills sharp is essential for their mission.

Sgt. Robert Adarna, a cavalry scout with 1st Squadron (Airborne), 40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, and a native of Kailua-Kona, Hawaii, participated in the training.

“The objective of today's mission was to secure a helicopter-landing zone,” said Adarna. “We were hoping it would melt before the mission but we adapted. It is all a part of the training.”

Spc. Kevin Smith, a signal support system specialist with the 1-40th Cavalry and a native of Dallas, Texas, was in charge of communications for the mission.

“Communication was great today,” said Smith. “All of the radios were good today and nothing went down, which is nice.”

For this mission Smith stayed in constant contact with the troop back at base and transmitted information from the commander to the troop.

“I think my job is vital for the scouts,” said Smith. “They have to be able to communicate with each other in order to accomplish their mission. Communication is important in the Army period. I am there to ensure the commander has constant lines of communication.”

The scouts completed their training and loaded back into the birds to head home to CMLT.

“I think overall this training went well,” said Adarna. “A lot of the training we did today was perishable skills. Land navigation is a vital skill that we all need to rehearse constantly so it was good that we were able to do that today.”
Spartan Jumpmasters Train in Greece

Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo - Jumpmasters from Multinational Battle Group-East, participated in Exercise Stolen Cerberus II, a two-week training exercise to maintain proficiencies during deployed operations and increase interoperability with the Hellenic Armed Forces Feb. 5.

This is the second year of the training exercise, but the first year for these U.S. Army jumpmasters that participated in the event.

U.S. Army Sgt. Michael Moore, a cavalry scout and non-commissioned officer of air operations for 1st Squadron (Airborne), 40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division said this wasn’t just a typical airborne operation.

“We came down from Kosovo to [execute a] partnership airborne mission,” said Moore. “We learned their tactics and techniques and they learned ours. We are building relations and actually participating in airborne operations together adds a personal touch.”

The first day of the training Moore and the team of jumpmasters toured the airfield, the rigger facility (where parachutes are packed) and performed jumpmaster rehearsals.

“The first day we were getting a feel of how they run their airborne operations,” said Moore. “There were similarities and differences and we had to tailor our way of how we do things. There are always learning opportunities from multinational partners and there is always a way to find a common ground from the differences.”

Although there were some differences in how the Greek paratroopers operated, the similarities of their initial airborne training stood out to Moore.

“We stayed at their airborne school here, and it was awesome to see their airborne students going through the exact same training that we have to go through,” said Moore. “There were soldiers running around the base calling cadence, they were going through the mock door training, and it was all of the same things I did in airborne school so it was nice to see that.”

The language barrier was not an issue between the U.S. and Greek forces, and both services taught each other key words used in airborne operations.

“I was nervous at first because we don’t speak Greek, and I didn’t expect them to speak English, but I think it went really well,” added Moore. “Regardless of the language barrier every paratrooper understands the airborne way.”

Greek Army Maj. Aris Gazarian, Greek training officer in charge and a Greek jumpmaster, jumped out of the C-130J aircraft with the U.S. Army jumpmasters.

“It was a great opportunity to do an airborne operation with U.S. soldiers, that we don’t get often,” said Gazarian. “Anytime we can see how other countries operate it is a great learning event for all.”

Gazarian has over 80 static line jumps, but this was his first time jumping with U.S. Soldiers performing jumpmasters duties.

“The U.S. jumpmasters are extremely professional and good at what they do,” said Gazarian. “I had complete trust in the airborne operation today and I knew I was in good hands.”

The U.S. jump masters performed jumpmaster personnel inspections (JMPI) on the Greek paratroopers to ensure their parachutes were safe to jump and also safety duties inside of the aircraft.

“Trust is vital when you are jumping out of an airplane,” said Gazarian. “If you don’t trust the jumpmasters then there is no security. You will be listening to their commands and they are responsible for our safety. I trusted them completely.”

“I postponed my leave to be here for this operation and I am glad I was able to jump out of a perfectly good U.S. airplane,” added Gazarian as he smiled. “I couldn’t miss being apart of this.”

The training mission brought U.S. and Greek military forces together to build and strengthen the bonds shared between the two countries.

“The more experience we receive, the more ability we have to overcome difficulties and become better as a whole,” said Gazarian. “That’s what this training was all about.”

The jumpmasters and Greek paratroopers performed a day and night jump. This training allowed Greek paratroopers to earn U.S. airborne wings and helped the U.S jumpmasters remain current.

“It’s always good when we can train with other forces,” said Moore. “Any time you perform airborne operations with someone new, you learn things. Some are good some are bad, but you take away what is most important.”

The airborne operation ended with the U.S. Soldiers pinning the Greek soldiers with the U.S. Army airborne wings and both services exchanged unit patches.

Moore is coming back next week with a different group of jumpmasters to do the training again.

“I am ready to come back to do this again,” said Moore. “I will take what I learned here and expand on it. This was an awesome experience.”
February marked a period of transition for Task Force – Medical, but that did not mean that the mission gave the Mercury Warriors a chance to catch our breath as we prepared. Having already said goodbye to our rotation’s first Emergency Medicine physician Major Shane Summers, from Fort Sam Houston, Texas, and welcomed his successor Captain Joe Williams from Fort Riley, Kansas, more departures and arrivals have transpired as the month went on. At Surgeon, Lieutenant Colonel Rich Smith has returned to his home station, Lieutenant Colonel John Oh has stepped in. Our Nurse Anesthetist, Captain Matt Buckles has moved on and Captain Thomas Franzen has assumed CRNA duties. Captain Andrew Steidley has turned over the Task Force Dental OIC role to Captain Natalie Campbell. Captain Elizabeth Guinto recently arrived to assume Combat Operational Stress Control OIC duties from Colonel Migdalma Machado. Sergeant Sandra Batson, one of our 68C (Practical Nurse) has returned home, and Sergeant Al McClain is here to finish out the rotation with us. Last but certainly not least, Sergeant First Class Carlos Alvelo has relinquished his TF First Sergeant duties to head back to Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, to get ready for his retirement and life after the Army after twenty-two years of distinguished service as a combat medic. We wish him, as well as all of those who served with us during this deployment, best wishes in the hope that our paths cross again soon.

Before his departure, Captain Steidley and his dental technician, Specialist Jerry Iloreta, led a handful of volunteers on a community outreach trip to a local grade school and gave a class on dental hygiene. The children received dedicated time and attention while learning proper brushing and flossing techniques. The class was very informative for the children, and the Soldiers who participated had a very rewarding time spending the afternoon learning about the population they are here to support. We hope to continue this program in the future as Captain Campbell takes over the reins in the dental clinic.

Internally, TF MED conducted Medic Sustainment Training in order to validate and maintain proficient combat medics (68W) within the unit. The medics were required to demonstrate their skills by completing medical tasks and drills. The culminating training event was a mock force protection event that produced casualties that required immediate life-saving interventions.

Externally, TF MED continues to help around Kosovo with Combat Lifesaver (CLS) training. Our CLS instructors assisted in teaching an international CLS class to German, Swiss, and Austrian Soldiers at Camp Prizren. The instructors will earn the highly coveted German Medic Badge upon completion.

Next month TF MED will send candidates to Germany to attain their Expert Field Medical Badge but will undergo a rigorous training regimen before departing.

TF MED Soldiers continue to achieve great milestones in their careers. This month, Specialist Gary Reed was promoted to the rank of Sergeant, and Staff Sergeant Jason Sansom reenlisted for an “indefinite” term, assuring him over twenty years of service. Congratulations to these fine Mercury Warriors!

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Critt Petersen
First Sergeant
Mick Drulis
Major, U.S. Army
Commanding

Soldiers with Task Force Medical, Multinational Battle Group-East, check a mock patient for injuries during a simulated mass casualty event at the clinic on Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, Feb. 10.

Story and photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Shawn T. Casey

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo – “Train as we fight,” is a common saying in the military, and that’s exactly what this group of medical Soldiers found out as they woke to the sounds of their phones and knocks on their doors in the cold, early morning hours on Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo.

Soldiers of Task Force Medical, Multinational Battle Group- East, reacted to a simulated mass casualty event at the Camp Bondsteel clinic Feb. 10.

Staff Sgt. Marcos Cruz, the non-commissioned officer in charge of the clinic, a member of TF Med, MNBG-E, and a native of Waco, Texas, planned the event. Cruz stood at the front desk and assigned Soldiers to different sections of the hospital.

“Our Soldiers and providers in the clinic had no clue what was about to happen,” said Cruz. “In a real medical emergency, we would be flying blind in here, so what we wanted to do was keep everybody on their toes and not let them know what to expect.”

The simulation included four Soldiers in a vehicle accident. All four were brought into the hospital with injuries.

“Our medical evacuation crew brought them into the clinic,” said Cruz. “Our triage officer evaluated them and told us exactly what their injuries were so we could move them to the right sections to continue care.”

Spc. William Reilly, an evacuation specialist with TF Med, MNBG-E and native of Detroit, brought the patients to the hospital in a field litter ambulance and assisted in the emergency room with one of the severely injured patients.

“Some of these Soldiers aren’t necessarily medics or direct care providers,” said Reilly. “This training helps make sure we are all on the same page in case a real medical emergency happens.”

A mass casualty exercise allows Soldiers who are not a part of the medical staff to gain experience and knowledge on proper procedures. Cruz makes sure everyone does their part.

“We do internal basic lifesaving training with the Soldiers that aren’t in a medical profession,” said Cruz. “We can use them in different sections and we are connecting like pieces of a puzzle.”

While working together, the Soldiers of TF Med treated and evacuated the mock patients to the next level of care.

“I think we were a success,” said Cruz. “We will continue to work on certain areas and do more events like...”
Soldiers Teach Dental Hygiene in Kosovo

AMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo — Twenty-three soldiers from Multinational Battle Group-East visited Rilindja School located outside of Camp Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny (CMLT) Kosovo, to teach dental hygiene to first-grade students, Feb. 5, 2015.

Rilindja School has a total of 631 students across three different locations in Kosovo. This is the first time soldiers from MNBG-E have partnered with the school for an event like this.

Lindquist has organized teams on past deployments to teach and provide medical care to local communities.

"This is something I used to do a few years ago, but instead of teaching dental hygiene, I gave vaccinations in Iraq," added Lindquist. "Me and my team linked up with the medics from Bondsteel at Task Force Med to bring something to the area."

After Steidley demonstrated how to properly brush and floss their teeth to the students, Soldiers sat down with the students and let them practice on a custom dental mold.

"There was quite a bit of preparation," said Steidley. "I had to figure out how I was going to teach the kids. I had to make individual casts for each kid so they had a cast to brush on and floss on. I also had to get the donations of the toothbrushes and floss, create the oral hygiene pamphlet, which went into each different package, and have that translated into Albanian for the kids."

Steidley's favorite part of today's event was the one-on-one interaction with the children and showing the kids individually how to floss and brush their teeth.

Four hundred packets of dental hygiene items were donated by Steidley's parents from their home in the state of Montana.

"My dad is a dentist as well, and he was a dentist in the Army," said Steidley. "So when they heard I was here, they were more than happy to donate. We also got some donated items from the care packages that were sent and whatever wasn't used by the Soldiers, we collected those and used those as well."

Steidley left 200 dental hygiene packets with the school so they could distribute it to the other school locations. The medical team would like to visit the other school campuses in the future.

"Without question I would love to do this again," said Steidley as he looked around the room filled with Soldiers interacting with children.

Ruzhdi Grishta, principal of Rilindja School, said it was a great pleasure to have the Soldiers come, and the students were very excited.

"I would like to thank the Americans for this cooperation and their willingness to come here today to teach the students about dental hygiene, and we hope we will continue this cooperation," said Ruzhdi Grishta, principal of the Rilindja School.

Soldiers of MNBG-E plan on conducting events such as this one at least once a month in other schools all across Kosovo.

U.S. Army Spc. Temujin Benton, a veterinarian technician for Task Force Medical, Multinational Battle Group-East, demonstrates the proper way to brush teeth to two students who attend Rilindja School located outside of Camp Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny Feb. 5, 2015. Soldiers from Multinational Battle Group-East visited the school to teach dental hygiene to first grade students. (Photo by Ardian Nrecaj)
It has been a busy deployment for the “Hooligans”. Alpha Company 1-150th Assault Helicopter Battalion has been hard at work since arriving in September flying over 1000 accident free flight hours. Alpha Company is at a constant state of readiness for their Mission, which is a 4 hour notice to move quick reaction force. On top of their QRF Mission the “Hooligans” have been participating in several mixed Multinational Missions during their time in Kosovo.

Since arriving in September, Alpha Company has participated in four mixed Multinational Multi-aircraft missions with the Swiss, Croatians, and the Slovenians. These Missions are vital to enhance MNBG-E crowd riot control capabilities while building relationships with maneuver forces in Kosovo. The Hooligans have also demonstrated their precision flying and tactical abilities by participating in sling load missions with soldiers from the Turkish, Armenian, and German Coy, and American Soldiers from the Forward Command Post.

The Alpha Company “Hooligans” received the opportunity for a new training mission not native to their home State of New Jersey, Para-drops. Working with the Soldiers and Command from 4/25th AIBCT the Hooligans were able to successfully execute 3 Para-drop missions. Kosovo’s natural landscape has given Alpha Company the chance to perfect their mountain operations including single and multi-ship missions. The Soldiers of Alpha Company continue to perfect their abilities in and outside of the aircraft. The “Hooligans” have been managing their free time by participating in the numerous activities offered during their time in Kosovo. These activities range from strenuous events such as the Dancon Truck March, German Armed Forces Proficiency badge qualifications, Schützenschnur badge, to team building activities such as volleyball, softball, soccer, and bowling. Alpha Company has had the privilege to continue working with the TOEFL program. This gives Alpha Company Soldiers the opportunity to teach English to high school students in Kosovo to prepare them to take the test of English as a foreign language exam. The exam provides an opportunity for the children of Kosovo to attend Colleges around the world. Every Sunday in The Hooligan flight hanger, Alpha Company Soldiers volunteer and prepare delicious waffles for Camp Bondsteel. The Waffle House helps raise money for Alpha Company’s MWR and a portion of the funds are donated to the TOEFL program.

During their short time in Kosovo the Alpha Company “Hooligans” have seen several career milestones. Captain Andre Stevenson and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Karl Kelly have shown their exceptional knowledge and tactical abilities and been named Pilots in Command. Pilots in Command are responsible for the overall completion and safety of their flight and mission. During this deployment Chief Warrant Officer 2 Mike McHugh reached 1000 flight hours, Staff Sergeant Jose Miranda reached 2000 flight hours, and Sergeant Tommy Vickers reached 1000 flight hours. These milestones are a testament to each Soldier’s dedication perseverance to Alpha Company and to Aviation. The “Hooligans” are eager to continue to hone their Aviation skills and anticipate completing this deployment on a very high and positive note.

John Hicks
Command Sergeant Major

Leon M. LaPoint
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army
Commanding
Good Waffles for a Great Cause

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo - As you walk into the lift hangar on Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo on an early Sunday morning, you will be captivated by the sweet aroma of syrup and waffles, but it's more than just a delicious breakfast, it is an opportunity to contribute to a bright future for Kosovo high school students.

The Waffle House serves waffles, coffee, and juice in order to raise and donate funds high school students in Kosovo so they can take the TOEFL test of English as a foreign language. TOEFL is a standardized test of English language proficiency for non-native English language speakers who want to enroll in U.S. universities.

The Waffle House is the primary source of funding for the TOEFL exams and all of the students' study material. There are also many local organizations and support from different organizations in New Jersey that donate money and essential ingredients for the popular waffles such as chocolate chips, Oreo cookies, and Nutella.

There are about 10 volunteers who meet every Sunday before Waffle House opens to prepare for the average of 130 waffles they will make. Multinational soldiers from various camps in Kosovo gather in the hangar to enjoy their waffles, coffee, and conversation.

"It's a different change of pace from the DFAC [dining facility]," said Spc. Samuel Hunter, a mechanic with the 1st Squadron (Airborne), 40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, and a regular at the waffle house.

"It's good food and a good cause."

The TOEFL exam consists of four sections: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Each section is worth 30 points so the highest score a student can receive is 120. The test takes about two and a half hours depending on what type of questions they are asked.

"We have 34 students in our class, and they are broken up into two classes," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Oscar Martinez, a pilot with the Southern Command Post, Multinational Battle Group-East, and a primary TOEFL instructor. "We are not teaching them English, but we are fine tuning their grammar and helping with their English."

This class has been taught by the Lift Company in each KFOR rotation since KFOR 12, and they meet every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday in a cultural center downtown Ferizaj/Urosevac. During this KFOR 19 rotation, Soldiers from a New Jersey National Guard unit are the ones who are teaching the students and making waffles to support their education.

"I knew this program existed prior to me deploying," explained Martinez. "It would be something worth doing. When I got here I was reluctant to do it, because my main focus would be flying. Once I got comfortable with the flow of things, and I understood our mission here, I realized I have the time so I went to observe one class."

Martinez along with two other JAG officers and a handful of aviation Soldiers teach the classes.

"It takes about 8 hours to plan a lesson," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jake Benkovski, a pilot with SCP, MNBG-E, and a TOEFL instructor. The hard work the soldiers put into the lesson plan pays off in the classroom.

"The TOEFL class has helped us learn and improve our English skills and improve our pronunciation, writing skills and speaking skills," said Geta Ukaj, 19, a student who attends University of Pristina. "The instruction helps us to communicate better with native English speakers. It has been very helpful so far, and we met really nice people and have a great time here."

The current class that began in October will be complete in May, which is when the 34 students will be tested on everything they learned through their TOEFL classes. The instructors are planning on having a ceremony for the students and their families prior to their redeployment.

"We want their parents to see all of the progress they have made," said Martinez.

"It has been a great experience," said Laura Ukaj, 17, a student who attends the TOEFL class and Geta's younger sister. "I have met great people, and made new friends. It has helped us a lot in the speaking portion. The teachers are really nice, and they teach us really good."

According to the instructors, the students have improved in every area they are being taught. They feel more confident speaking English than they did on the first day of class. Even though the students are learning and growing, they are not the only ones who are benefiting from this class.

"Imagine one of these guys becomes someone who cures cancer or does something important and they say I couldn't have done it without the TOEFL class," said Benkovski. "Just to be able to give someone an opportunity to use their intelligence and their capacity for learning in a greater setting, that's an honor all in its own. The kids in our class are really talented, very smart, ambitious, and motivated. They are destined for greatness and being a part of their lives and enabling them to accomplish their dreams is quite awesome."
Retired U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Myra Austin, guest speaker of the Black History Month luncheon, receives a certificate of appreciation from Capt. Ross Low, commander of the Liaison Monitoring Team (LMT), 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, Multinational Battle Group-East at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, Feb. 17

I am an American of African descent. I am truly honored for the opportunity to speak on the many contributions of Black Americans in history," said Austin as she began her speech.

"I stand here today in front of you because of the courageous actions of abolitionists like Frederick Douglas and Sojourner Truth," said Austin. "I also stand here today as a product of innovative geniuses like George Washington Carver and Madam C. J. Walker."

As Austin told history through stories, everyone in the room was silent and attentive.

"Everyday people just like you and I helped to make changes throughout the past century," said Austin. "By simply refusing to be confined within the perimeters of what others thought they should be. It was their relentless pursuit of equality, their ingenuity, their philosophical views and their willingness to sacrifice their lives not just for black people, but for the betterment of mankind."

Austin asked the Soldiers to leave the luncheon with a renewed resolve to embrace programs like the one they were attending.

"I have personally participated in conversations with people from all walks of life discussing if ethnic observances should exist," said Austin. "The only way we will continue to grow is to embrace our past, the good and the bad. We have to discuss it, not hide it, but then move on and leave it in the past. We get to discuss it through events like this one."

The room erupted with applause as Austin ended her speech.

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The Nation’s highest military award is The Medal of Honor. This award goes to Soldiers who make honor a matter of daily living – Soldiers who develop the habit of being honorable, and solidify that habit with every value choice they make. Honor is a matter of carrying out, acting, and living the values of respect, duty, loyalty, selfless service, integrity and personal courage in everything you do.
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Photos of the Month

20 U.S. Army jumpmasters with the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, assigned to Multinational Battle Group-East, enter a C-130 aircraft with Greek paratroopers during Exercise Stolen Cerberus II, a two-week joint training exercise, in order to maintain proficiencies during deployed operations and increase interoperability with Hellenic Armed Forces, Feb. 4 at Elefsina, Greece. The mission provided U.S. and the Hellenic Armed Forces an opportunity to learn how each service performs airborne operations. (Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Melissa Parish)

Photos of the Month

Twenty-three soldiers from Multinational Battle Group-East visited Rilindja School located outside of Camp Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny (CMLT), Kosovo, to teach dental hygiene to first-grade students, Feb. 5, 2015. Rilindja School has a total 631 students across three different locations in Kosovo. This is the first time soldiers from MNBG-E have partnered with the school for an event like this. (Photo by Ardian Nrecaj)

Photos of the Month

A jumpmaster with the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, assigned to Multinational Battle Group-East, conducts jumpmaster personnel inspection (JMPI) on a paratrooper before the first ever U.S. Army parachute jump in Northern Kosovo outside of Camp Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny (CMLT) Feb. 26. Previous parachute jumps by Army airborne units in Kosovo have either been conducted on or near Camp Bondsteel, which is in the southern half of Kosovo south of Pristina. Paratroopers jumped out of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters using the T-11 parachutes. (Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Judith Marlowe)
Lent is a 40 day period of prayer, fasting and almsgiving or doing acts of charity for Christians to enter more deeply into the spiritual life as they meditate on the sufferings of Jesus Christ in preparation for the great Solemnity of Easter. Lent always begins with Ash Wednesday in which Christians are marked with ashes on the forehead in the form of a cross as a sign of penance for one’s sins. The priest or deacon administer the ashes saying the words “Remember man that you are dust and unto dust shall you return” or “Repent and Believe in the Gospel” The penitent accepts the ashes and wears them with a sense of contrition to enter into this great time of spiritual renewal. The ashes are derived from burnt leaves of palm branches, grounded and sifted until it is dust. Signifying that all mortal flesh will return to the earth from where it came, thus the old Latin root word “humus” from which come the english words “humanity”, “humility” and “humble”.

Primarily, Lent commemorates the 40 days that Jesus fasted in the desert overcoming the temptations of the Devil and preparing Himself for His active ministry in which He proclaimed the Kingdom of God is at hand calling His disciples to repent and to believe in the Gospel. In Scripture, we read how Jesus overcomes the Devil’s wily tricks that tempt man to mistakenly believe in the need to depend upon materiality for strength and power. Whereas Jesus says “man does not live on bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mathew 4:4-5).

The word Lent comes from the Old English word “lencten”, which refers to the lengthening of days of “spring-time” it is appropriately placed on the Roman Church, the Gregorian calendar sometime after the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord which is always February 2, which is 40 days after Christmas and between the full moons. Lent can occur early February, or March. For Orthodox christians or Serbian christians, Lent it is also based on the lunar Julian calendar which may or may be a week or several days later than the Roman Gregorian Calendar. February 23 marks the beginning of the Orthodox period Lent to begin. Here at Camp Bondsteel, we began the Lenten activities with a Prayer Breakfast for Soldiers to reflect on opportunities to heighten awareness for spiritual renewal. Two short poignant video clips challenged the viewer to reflect on life events that make a difference for not only us but for others to see the good in our lives. Afterwards, Ashes were distributed for those who wished to receive them and to carry the sign of the cross on their foreheads. I pray that this Lenten season will be a graced opportunity for those who wish to walk the journey of the forty days of spiritual renewal and to see a harvest of blessings in their lives.

Morale Welfare and Recreation
MWR
March MWR Trips

Trip Dates, Locations and Times

Sunday Mar. 1
ALBI MALL PRISTINA - Leave at 0900 from South MWR Community Center and 0905 from Medal of Honor Hall

Saturday Mar. 7
BREZOVIĆA SKI TRIP - Leave at 0800 from South MWR Community Center and 0905 from Medal of Honor Hall

Sunday Mar. 8
ALBI MALL PRISTINA - Leave at 0900 from South MWR Community Center and 0905 from Medal of Honor Hall

Saturday Mar. 21
BREZOVIĆA SKI TRIP - Leave at 0800 from South MWR Community Center and 0905 from Medal of Honor Hall

Sunday Mar. 22
PRISTINA FILMCITY/MINI MAX SHOPPING- Leave at 0900 from South MWR

Saturday Mar. 28
GADIME CAVES-Leave at 0900 from South MWR Community Center and 0905 from Medal of Honor Hall

Sunday Mar. 29
GRAND STORE/MINI MAX STORE - Leave at 0900 from South MWR Community Center and 0905 from Medal of Honor Hall
Spc. Kevin Smith, a signal support system specialist with 1st Squadron (Airborne), 40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, talks with Capt. Karl Kuechenmeister, commander of Apache troop 1–40th Cavalry, sets up the tactical satellite antenna for the air assault training mission near Camp Marechal de Lattre de Tassigny (CMLT) Kosovo, Feb. 21, 2015. (Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Melissa Parrish)