

# THE BONDSTEEL BULLET

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Ethnic Albanians gather in the streets for a parade held to honor American Forces in the Kosovo village of Koretin. Kids climb on top of an M998 High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) with TOW missile. The Marines and sailors of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) are helping to enforce the implementation of the military technical agreement and to provide peace and stability to Kosovo during Operation JOINT GUARDIAN.

- On June 9, 1999 a Military Technical agreement was signed between NATO international security force ("KFOR") and the government of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that allowed KFOR forces to enter Kosovo.
- At its full strength, KFOR comprised nearly 50,000 personnel.

## 15 years of Camp Bondsteel and KFOR maintaining peace

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Carlos M. Burger II, 11<sup>th</sup> Public Affairs Detachment

It's another typical day on Camp Bondsteel. Besides the occasional officer rushing to attend a meeting or the roving military police patrolman, it's mostly quiet. It's a contrasting scene for those who were here when the Kosovo conflict first occurred back in 1999.

June 10 marked the 15th anniversary of the rapid deployment of Operation Joint Guardian, the security force mandated by the United Nations Security Council and a select few can still recall what life was like in Kosovo more than a decade ago.

Before the conflict, Kosovo was an autonomous province of Serbia and contained a mixed population with an ethnic Albanian majority. In 1989, Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic altered the status of the region, removing its autonomy and bringing it under Belgrade, Serbia's control.

In 1998, open conflict between Serbians and Kosovo Albanians resulted in the deaths of over 1,500 Albanians and forced 400,000 people from their homes. The international community became concerned about Milosevic's disregard for diplomatic efforts aimed at peacefully resolving the crisis.

On June 12, 1998 the North Atlantic Council assessed possible measures that NATO might take with regard to the developing Kosovo crisis. On 13 October 1998, the NATO Council authorized the use of air strikes however, at the last moment, Milosevic agreed to further

diplomatic initiatives and the air strikes were called off. UN Security Council created Resolution 1199, which called for a cease-fire by both parties to the conflict. In support of the resolution, limits were set on the number of Serbian forces in Kosovo and on the scope of their operations.

In addition, UNSCR 1203 endorsed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to establish a Kosovo Verification Mission that would observe compliance on the ground and that NATO would establish an aerial surveillance mission.

Despite these steps, in 1999, the situation in Kosovo flared up again.

Renewed international efforts were made to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. NATO supported and reinforced international efforts by agreeing on January 30, to use air strikes, if required, and by issuing a warning to both sides in the conflict.

On March 18, Serbian forces breached compliance with the October agreement by moving extra troops and tanks into the region. Tens of thousands of people began to flee their homes in the face of this systematic offensive. The KVM withdrew from the region, having faced obstruction from Serbian forces to the point that they could no longer fulfill their tasks.

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The Bondsteel Bullet is produced for civilians and military personnel on Camp Bondsteel.

Contents of this publication are not necessarily official views of Multinational Battle Group-East or Area Support Team Balkans.

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Pvt. 2 William Helton measures and marks wood for the construction of a SEAHUT at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, on Oct. 5, 1999. Pvt. 2 Helton is from Bravo Company, 94th Engineers Battalion out of Vilseck, Germany. The SEAHUTs are being constructed in replacement of the General Purpose Tents at Camp Bondsteel. They will be used for housing and work spaces. The soldiers are in Kosovo in support of the peace-keeping mission NATO Operation Joint Guardian. (U.S. Army photo by Spec. Christina Ann Horne)



U.S. service members, who work at the U.S. Embassy in Kosovo, attend the memorial dedication ceremony, May 26, to honor two U.S. pilots who died in 1999 in the Balkans region. The Kosovo government paid for and built an all-black monument to honor the pilots' memory. (Photo by Sgt. Cody Barber, 11th Public Affairs Detachment)

## Kosovo government dedicates memorial to fallen US pilots

Story by Capt. Kevin Sandell, 11th Public Affairs Detachment

PRIZREN, Kosovo -- As a tribute to Memorial Day, two fallen U.S. Army pilots who died at the start of the 1999 NATO operations were forever memorialized as the Kosovo government unveiled a new monument marking their sacrifice, May 26.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 David A. Gibbs, 38, and a native of Massillon, Ohio, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kevin L. Reichert, 28, and a native of Chetek, Wisconsin, were AH-64 Apache pilots who died when their helicopter crashed near Tirana, Albania, May 5, 1999. The two pilots were leading a nighttime mission when the aircraft suddenly experienced mechanical failure and plummeted to the ground.

To recognize these first military casualties of Operation Allied Force, the Kosovo government formulated a plan to pay homage to the pilots who died fighting for peace in the Balkans region. Last February, Kosovo's Prime Minister, Hashim Thaci, directed the building of a memorial in the closest Kosovo city to where the helicopter crash occurred.

The memorial would be a symbol from the people of Kosovo to express their thanks for the cooperation of NATO and the United States over the past 15 years.

"In respect of our close cooperation with NATO and with the United States of America, I have today ordered the (Kosovo) Ministry of Culture to take the appropriate steps to build a memorial to honor two American pilots, fallen in duty during the NATO intervention in Kosovo," Thaci said during a government meeting, Feb. 5.

"I suggested that as a sign of gratitude, we must honor these American military, the NATO forces, on the 15th anniversary of Kosovo's freedom by building an obelisk in the closest town of Kosovo, in the place where they have fallen, in Prizren," he continued.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports designed and built the all-black monument, which was placed near the center of downtown Prizren, and included an engraved marble plaque at the bottom showing Gibbs' and Reichert's names. A lone triangular-shaped attachment hangs from the memorial symbolizing a helicopter in flight.

Memli Krasniqi, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, said the Kosovo people will always treasure the Americans' assistance, while the monument can serve as inspiration throughout Kosovo.

"[The] Kosovo population will forever be grateful to the American nation for their support in our most difficult times, support that is ongoing to this day in all areas. [Americans] are our greatest friend," Krasniqi said. "We would like to forever remember the men and women of America that came to bring peace and stop the genocide in Kosovo, and the building of this memorial is a symbolic action for the great contribution of the American Soldiers. It will be an inspiration to us, and a lifetime reminder of the love between us."

During the unveiling ceremony in Prizren, Prime Minister Thaci and the U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo, Tracey Ann Jacobson, laid a wreath at the monument's base. U.S. service members who work at the embassy also attended the ceremony wearing their dress uniforms.

For Jacobson, dedicating the monument on Memorial Day was a tangible way to remember the lives of David Gibbs and Kevin Reichert and their families left behind.

"Memorial Day is an opportunity to honor the sacrifices of our service members and their families," Jacobson said. "And it's fitting that today we are honoring these two heroic U.S. pilots who made the ultimate sacrifice to help bring peace and stability to Kosovo."

The ambassador noted the project was led and initiated entirely by the Kosovo government.

"This monument and ceremony was organized solely by the Government of Kosovo at their initiative. The monument itself is a design by a Kosovo artist, and we're honored to represent the U.S. Embassy at today's opening ceremony," Jacobson said.

Minister Krasniqi said the pilots' families, albeit feeling sorrow for the loss of their loved ones, should be proud of the assistance the pilots provided to bring peace to Kosovo.

"We are aware that they feel a lot of sorrow. They must be proud of the sons, the sons that brought freedom to the people of Kosovo," Krasniqi said. "For us, these pilots will always be flying 'peace-bound,' and will always be an inspiration for our new horizons."



A newly-built monument to honor two fallen U.S. helicopter pilots stands in downtown Prizren, May 26. The Kosovo government initiated and funded the monument's construction as a symbol of gratitude for American sacrifice in the Balkans region. (Photo by Sgt. Cody Barber, 11th Public Affairs Detachment)



The office of Joint Contracting Center 15 years ago, before the construction of South East Asia (SEA) Huts. Camp Bondsteel was constructed by the 94th Engineer Construction Battalion, 568 Combat Support Engineer Company under the direction of the Army Corps of Engineers (Courtesy photo).

## 15 years of Camp Bondsteel and KFOR maintaining peace

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US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke flew to Belgrade, in a final attempt to persuade Milosevic to stop attacks on the Kosovar Albanians or face imminent NATO air strikes. Milosevic refused to comply and on the 23rd, the order was given to commence air strikes.

Besim Hyseni, a U.S. Army translator for the Forward Command Post, was a civilian who was in the capital city when NATO intervened.

"Before [Kosovo Forces] came, the situation was very difficult. I was in Pristina when the airstrikes started. I was hiding in the city for a month. After a month, my family and I left on a refugee train to Macedonia. There, I worked in the camp as a driver and interpreter for CARE international," Hyseni said.

On the evening of June 9th, NATO and Yugoslav Army commanders signed a Military-Technical Agreement that began the full withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from Kosovo. As agreed in the MTA, the deployment of the security force – KFOR – was synchronized with the departure of Serb security forces from Kosovo.

After an air campaign lasting seventy-seven days, On June 10, 1999, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana announced that he had instructed U.S. Army Gen. Wesley Clark, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, temporarily to suspend NATO's air operations against Yugoslavia.

The UN Security Council passed UNSCR 1244, welcoming the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's acceptance on a political solution to the Kosovo crisis, including an immediate end to violence and a rapid withdrawal of its military, police and paramilitary forces.

The first elements of KFOR entered Kosovo June 12th and by June 20th, the Serbian withdrawal was complete and KFOR was well established in Kosovo. Following confirmation that Serb security forces had vacated Kosovo, the NATO Secretary General announced he had formally terminated the air campaign.

While this was going on, Hyseni was offered a chance to come back home and make a difference.

"Contractors from KFOR came to the camp to recruit translators for them so I volunteered and got the job. We came back here from Camp Able Sentry in Macedonia to Camp Bondsteel," Hyseni said. "I was very proud to help my people and to help the U.S. Army and was happy to come back to come to our homeland and work with KFOR."

At its full strength, KFOR comprised nearly 50,000 personnel. It was a multinational force under unified command and control with substantial NATO participation.

Dan O'Brien, Interim Director of Security, Plans and Operations for Area Support Team Balkans was a squad leader for 92nd Military Police Company during rotation 1B. Stationed at nearby Camp Montieth, his role was far different than the role of the MPs here today.

"When we arrived, we were initially the law enforcement for Kosovo. They were still introducing the Kosovo Police into the system. We actually went out and did law enforcement for the entire country," O'Brien said.

"In those days, KFOR was the only institution. We used to work 15 to hours a day. It was hard work, but we were joyful to help our people," Hyseni added.

Maj. Aaron Francis, Kansas National Guard and deputy chief of Multinational Battle Group-East's Joint Implementation Commission, said combat units here had different tasks as well during his time here during rotation 2B as an assistant operations officer for 4th battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment.

"Our posture was a lot different then. There was still a significant amount of violence going on in Kosovo and in the ABL valley. We did a lot of illumination missions, called peace enforcement back then," Francis said.

Life on the bases was of a higher tempo, Francis added, with constant 12-hour shifts, and over crowded living facilities.

"From my understanding, Bondsteel was the biggest deployed base at the time. We had a north, mid and south towns. We lived six captains to a room," Francis continued.

Although KFOR's peacekeeping mission is now widely viewed as positive, back then many Soldiers were apprehensive about how to interact with the people.



The construction of South East Asia (SEA) Huts. Camp Bondsteel was constructed by the 94th Engineer Construction Battalion, 568 Combat Support Engineer Company under the direction of the Army Corps of Engineers (Courtesy photo).



# MWR Corner

If you have free time, or you are spending the night at Camp Bondsteel, there are many activities that MWR organizes during the month.

You can reserve the indoor or outdoor basketball court at South Town Fitness Center. Send an email to Mr. Anthony Mullings and Mr. Jay Debose to make your reservation at the emails below:

[anthony.c.mullings.naf@mail.mil](mailto:anthony.c.mullings.naf@mail.mil)  
[jay.m.debose.naf@mail.mil](mailto:jay.m.debose.naf@mail.mil)

If you like working out, Medal of Honor Hall gym and South Town Fitness Center are open 24 hrs.



*Karaoke Night every Thursday starting at 1900 hrs, at Cool Beans Coffee shop*

There are different tournaments and regular daily activities such as:

- *Doubles Table Tennis Tournament on July 16, from 1800 hrs at South Town Community Center.*
- *Volleyball League Play every Tuesday and Thursday, from 1800 hrs at South Town Fitness Center.*
- *8 Ball Pool Tournament on July 22, from 1800 hrs at South Town Community Center.*
- *Insanity Class every evening except Sunday's from 1900 hrs at South Town Fitness Center.*
- *Step Interval and Toning Class every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from 0630 hrs at South Town Fitness Center.*
- *Softball League Games every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at Softball Field.*



Sgt. First Class Steven Smith from Multinational Battle Group East TF HHC received the Camp Bondsteel Fire Department T-Shirt as the winner of the monthly Fire Safety Quiz which can be obtained in the dining facility main entrance and South Town Gym. Presenting Keller with his T-Shirt is Jon Stanescu Firefighter Chief at Camp Bondsteel. (Photo the courtesy of Camp Bondsteel fire department).



Civilians and Soldiers celebrated America's birthday at Camp Bondsteel, July 4th. There were multiple events throughout the day. Access to Camp Bondsteel was open to all employees and their families. BBQ and the cake were prepared by the dining facility. (Photo Sgt. Cody Barber, 11th Public Affairs Detachment)

Kosovo Security Force and Iowa National Guard band performed at Camp Bondsteel, July 4th. They started their performance with U.S. national anthem. There were multiple events throughout the day which included a formal ceremony, 5k run, a commanders cup sports tournament and a BBQ which was open to all employees and their families.

