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“Excuse me while I go run” MNBG-E runners go the distance in Kosovo



Spc. Marcella Hoye, a member of the 30th Armored Brigade Combat Team, runs on Camp Bondsteel on July 19 during one of her first training runs in preparation for the Athens Marathon in Greece. Many NATO forces in Kosovo have used running as a way to pass the time and deal with the stress of being away from home.

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Mary Junell

Multinational Battle Group-East

Before deploying to Kosovo this past June, U.S. Army Spc. Marcella Hoye had never considered herself a runner. She ran the two miles required for her Army Physical Fitness Test and she participated in the occasional 5K race, but never more than that. Now, more than five months later, she has run more than 350 miles and is working her way through her third pair of running shoes.

While powering through yet another 10-mile race in mid-December, Hoye thought about how far she had come and joked about how awful she felt five months earlier on her first training run.

On July 19, 2015, at around 8 a.m., Hoye laced up for the first of many training runs—sparked by the prospect of joining several fellow Soldiers in that year’s Athens Marathon in Greece. The temperature would reach 90 degrees, and it was already warm when she started what was meant to be a 4-mile run.

Hoye, who was still adjusting to her new night shift in the Joint Operations Center for Multinational Battle Group-East, started the run full of optimism.

“Mile one passed and I was feeling alright,” said Hoye, who is in Kosovo with the N.C. National Guard’s 30th Armored Brigade Combat Team. “Mile two passed and I was like ‘wow, I’m still running.’”

Shortly after her second mile, Hoye’s attitude changed. As she started up a slight hill she had to stop. She was feeling nauseous.

And that is when Hoye laid on the ground—on the side of the road, in the gravel, on Camp Bondsteel. She eventually propped herself up and flagged down a passing driver for a ride back to her room.

The next day she got back out and ran again. This time without laying on the ground.

“At this point I was determined to prove to myself that I could complete the marathon,” said Hoye, who finished the Athens Marathon on Nov. 8. That determination is what keeps Hoye running today.

All runners have their reasons for hitting the pavement. At Camp Bondsteel, runners are everywhere.

MNBG-E’s Soldiers fill their days with an important mission—supporting safety and security for the people of Kosovo—but being away from their homes and Families gives them time to work on personal goals and make the most of their deployment.

In addition to the mapped running routes around the base, a small track and the gym’s treadmills, the MWR team hosts a 5K race for most major holidays.

It’s not just the U.S. Soldiers who participate in the race. The running events have given all the NATO forces serving in Kosovo a chance to connect through the sport. Camp Bondsteel is home to multinational forces also serving with Kosovo Force.

When the Polish held a 5K in honor of their Independence Day, many other MNBG-E members participated, and when the Hungarians held a 24-hour running challenge honoring their heritage, teams of mixed nationalities came together for the event.

The MWR team has also supported shadow runs like the Army 10-miler, Manchester Road Race and the Reindeer Dash for Cash 5K and 10-miler, giving service members who are serving with MNBG-E a chance to participate in their favorite state-side races.

“I had run the Manchester Road Race each of the past five years and I wanted to keep the tradition going,” said 1st Lt. Ben Sullivan, a Connecticut National Guard officer who helped bring the race’s shadow run to Camp Bondsteel. Sullivan, who is serving in Kosovo with 1st Battalion, 169th Aviation Regiment, first started running when he joined the military in 2009.

“I run to clear my head and admire what’s around,” Sullivan said. “I actually think about so many things while running, whether it be work or home related. I have run races where I do not recall most of the race due to the thoughts going through my head. It actually makes the time go by faster, at least for me.”

In addition to the Manchester Road Race and Army 10-Miler, Sullivan tries to run several 5K races a year and is working toward longer distance races.

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“Excuse me while I go run”

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While training for his deployment to Kosovo, Capt. P.J. Preddy, who is serving in Kosovo as the commander of the 30th ABCT's HHC, began hearing that there might be an opportunity to run the Athens Marathon in Greece. Unlike those who are using the deployment to start running, he had already discovered the sport.

“I am a runner. I've run several marathons,” said Preddy, who has been running since high school. “Athens is historically where the first marathon was run. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to run a unique race that not many marathoners have had the opportunity to run.”

In early November, Preddy and 18 other MNBG-E Soldiers loaded onto a bus heading to Greece to the Athens Marathon. With most MNBG-E U.S. Soldiers allowed only two 4-day passes during their deployment, the group had coordinated to take their time off at the same time and travel south together.

A natural coach and leader, Preddy not only trained for the race, but also helped and encouraged others through their training to meet their 26.2-mile goals.

“I realized there were other people like me who had a dream of being able to run a marathon,” Preddy said. “I thought it would be really great to facilitate that and give people a chance to try and do it.”

Preddy suggested a training plan with three weekday runs and progressively longer runs on Sundays.

“When I ran my first marathon I had no one to train with. All I had was a book,” Preddy said. “It really helps people embrace the sport when they've got others around them ... who have had that experience and can give advice and answers to problems.”

Preddy said training for the marathon was hard, with Camp Bondsteel's challenging hills and monotonous loops during long-distance runs.

“Running is a fantastic use of your time,” Preddy said. “It helps pass the time in a healthy way. It's difficult being away from home and a challenge having to deal with the separation. The marathon and running in general really provides a great outlet for excess emotional baggage that you may not know what to do with.”

Preddy said he has also seen other benefits of running, such as higher scores on the Army Physical Fitness Test, weight loss and boosted confidence.

Hoye is proud to say that she's experienced all of those benefits. The marathon in Athens is what propelled Hoye into her new running hobby, and she has come a long way since her first tragic training run that left her laying on the side of the road.

“I felt no nervousness, no pressure, and no hesitation,” Hoye said. “All of our training had led up to that moment and I was looking forward to all the preparation to finally be over.”

Hoye finished the marathon distance within her goal time, and she was hit with a wave of emotions when she crossed the finish line. She went from euphoric to tears in the less than two minutes, when she walked from the finish line and accepted her first marathon medal.

Throughout her training, even after running a 10-mile race and double-digit-mile training runs, Hoye is reluctant to call herself a runner and rarely uses the term.

But when asked, she shrugs her shoulders and says, “Eh, I guess so. I'm getting ready to go run in the slush roads of a Kosovo winter. Does that count? Now, excuse me while I go run.”



Army National Guard Command Sgt. Maj. Brunk W. Conley holds up his traditional military challenge coin while speaking with Soldiers deployed to Kosovo with Multinational Battle Group-East, Dec. 21, 2015, at Camp Bondsteel. Conley discussed the “Citizen-Soldier” role of National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers in the military and held a town hall forum with the deployed troops. (Photo by Sgt. Gina Russell)



Staff Sgt. Derek Beebe counts German Sgt. Maj. Christian Schroll's successful hits on a range target, Dec. 21, 2015, at Camp Bondsteel. The event was hosted by U.S. forces in order to give their German partners a chance to earn the U.S. Army Marksmanship Badge. (Photo by Sgt. Gina Russell)



Chief Warrant Officer 3 Tony Higgins coaches Spc. Regan Dion while conducting deadlifts during the Spartan 300 Fitness Challenge, held Dec. 19 at CMLT. The challenge had competitors push through 300 brutal repetitions of seven fitness challenges. (Photo by Sgt. Erick Yates)

