



THE GATOR SENTINEL

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VOL. 2

COMMAND CORNER

Team,

We are now more than 100 days boots on ground, and I continue to be proud of your professionalism, dedication, and the impact you have on this mission every single day.

Sometimes impact can be measured through metrics and quantifiable results; tasks completed, operations executed, and projects moving from red to amber to green. But some of the most important contributions made across this task force are not always reflected on a tracker, a slide, or a report. Much of what you do is qualitative. It happens quietly, consistently, and often behind the scenes. But I want to assure you: what you do matters, and your work does not go unnoticed.

Whether you are out on patrol engaging with local communities, behind the camera capturing our story, flying personnel and equipment from along the Administrative Boundary Line to ensure missions are accomplished, sorting mail and packages, processing pay and awards, maintaining communications systems, supporting operations from a desk late into the evening, or providing care to those who are sick, injured, or simply having a difficult day — every role contributes to the strength and resilience of this task force.

No matter the position, every effort adds to the collective whole.

For some of you, this may be your first deployment, your first time serving in a brigade-level position, or your first experience working in a role outside your comfort zone. That can be challenging. But everyone has a first time doing something. Being new does not mean you are incapable, and it does not mean you will not become confident and competent in your responsibilities.

Growth comes through repetition, practice, and the willingness to step outside your comfort zone — life is a series of first-time experiences.

As we continue building together as a team, remember to lift as you climb. As you continue growing in your position, gaining confidence in your responsibilities, and becoming more proficient in your craft, take the time to develop the people around you. Share your knowledge. Mentor your teammates. Help bring others forward with you.

Invest in your peers. Peer mentorship matters. The people beside you often become your accountability, your encouragement, and your support system during challenging moments. Continue building one another up and pushing each other toward excellence, both personally and professionally.

Invest in your families. The support we receive from home is part of what allows us to serve here successfully. Take the time to stay connected, show appreciation, and recognize the sacrifices being made alongside you throughout this deployment.

Finally, lead through influence. Professionalism, attitude, work ethic, and the way we treat others will always leave an impact. Take care of the people coming behind you and help create an environment where others can grow, succeed, and find confidence in themselves.

Continue using this deployment as an opportunity to become the best version of yourself — mentally, physically, professionally, as a leader, as a teammate, and as a peer.

From the Front.



COMMAND CORNER

Soldiers of TF Gator,

It only feels like a few months, but we have already completed 5 months of this deployment. We are at the halfway point. By October, we'll be scheduling flights to be back home with our families. We have accomplished so many things during our time here and will continue to do so. Your daily commitment to the cause has made a great impact on the mission.

KFOR has been functioning better than it ever has because of your effort. During the weekly update brief to the COMKFOR, he listens to the other subordinate commanders, but he focuses primarily on the RC-E Commander.

MG Ulutas spends a lot of time having dialogue with the boss during the briefs because he comes prepared with very complete and informative reports. Those reports have been completed by you.

I know the time away from your families and loved ones is difficult. I appreciate your dedication to the mission while you are out here with me. Your hard work does not go unnoticed. Stay strong, look out for each other, and know that you are deeply appreciated. You are the reason that Kosovo is a Safe and Secure Environment with Freedom of Movement for all who live here. Thank you for everything you do.

Miguel Hernandez
CSM, Task Force Gator



CSM MIGUEL HERNANDEZ
RC-E Brigade Command Sgt. Maj.

CHAPLAINS CORNER

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens” (Eccles. 3:1). This quote comes from the book of Ecclesiastes in Judeo/Christian Scripture. I appreciate how this passage reminds us that seasons of our lives change, but each season has a purpose. In each season, God is working for our good. Even difficult seasons can lead to our growth. This truth raises a question, “What kind of season is this for you?”

If this is a difficult time in your life, I encourage you to look for the purpose in it. Diligently seek out the ways in which your current circumstances are accomplishing something good in you.

This approach will not remove the difficulty of the moment. Finding the purpose may, however, provide the strength you need to thrive in the midst of the difficulty. If this season is filled with joy and adventure, take time to enjoy it. Don't forget to make memories and to savor the moments. These may be moments you take with you for the rest of your life and look back on fondly.

Later on, in this passage from Ecclesiastes, the author says this, “I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man” (Eccles. 3:12-13). One of my prayers for the members of this Task Force is that everyone would take pleasure in their toil. Pleasure in a job-well-done is a gift from God. You are doing meaningful work. You each contribute to this mission in your own way and contribute to those with whom you work each day. We so often get caught up in things like drama, complaints about leadership, or frustrations with those we lead. I am not saying these issues are meaningless, but none of these difficulties change the meaningfulness of the work (toil) to which you are committing yourself. Take pleasure in the value of your work and do the very best you can. I think you will find that this approach, regardless of what kind of season this is, will greatly improve your quality of life for as long as you are here.

As always, if you need help with anything, you have Religious Support Teams that care about you. You have a fantastic Behavioral Health Officer. We are always here for you.

With love,
Chaplain Hornback



LTC MICHEAL HORNBACK
RC-E Chaplain

NCO of The Month



SGT LAUREN DARCY
RC-E TF Intelligence Analyst NCO

Sergeant Lauren Darcy has demonstrated exceptional professionalism, leadership, and dedication during her deployment within RC-East, Camp Bond Steel. Initially assigned as an Electromagnetic Warfare Specialist advisor, she also assumed the duties of Administrative NCOIC providing continuity during a critical transition period within the S2 section.

She effectively balanced administrative and technical responsibilities, contributing significantly to mission effectiveness. She developed drone defense procedures, which were adopted as Standard Operating Procedures for Camp Bondsteel, with immediate impact on base security. She has demonstrated strong leadership by mentoring Soldiers, fostering team cohesion, and building professional relationships across the chain of command, enhancing operational effectiveness and morale.

Her actions reflect great credit upon herself and her unit, embodying the image of efficiency and commitment expected within the international environment of KFOR. Her professionalism has contributed invaluable support to the KFOR Mission, and her service and dedication are greatly appreciated. For these reasons she is awarded NCO of the Month for April 2026.

Soldier of The Month

Specialist Tianna Moses comes from Niceville, Florida, where she lives with her family: two sisters, her mom and her dad. Her father is a retired master sergeant and Green Beret. She is deeply family-oriented; she values the bonds of home and has a natural love for pets, reflecting her caring and loyal nature.

SPC Moses distinguished herself as the standout performer this month through exceptional leadership, initiative, and technical expertise. As the primary coordinator and leader for the Kosovo Police Life Saving Medical Training program, she expertly planned and executed comprehensive medical training for 15 Kosovo Police Officers. She demonstrated maturity well-beyond her rank by taking full charge of the training, to include planning and executing, while serving as the lead training facilitator. She ensured all objectives were met with professionalism and precision.

SPC Moses is a high-speed, reliable, and mission-focused Soldier who consistently performs at a level above her peers. Her actions this month directly contributed to strengthened partnerships with Kosovo authorities and enhanced the overall readiness of our section. She is highly deserving of recognition as Soldier of the Month.



SPC TIANNA MOSES
RC-E TF Ambulance Aide



5K RESPECT RUN: Creative run held in honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month

Capt. Balinda O'Neal

134th PAD

Soldiers and civilians assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, including U.S. and multinational personnel, participated in a 5K Respect Run at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, April 25, 2026, in observance of Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month.

Each participant carried a randomly assigned item, from books and footballs to traffic cones and relay batons, highlighting how burdens can vary in size, weight, and difficulty. The items symbolized the varied and often unseen challenges survivors of sexual harassment and sexual assault may carry. “Burdens come in all shapes and sizes. Some of them are heavier than others,”

said Florida Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Heather Sullivan, a victim advocate with the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team assigned to RC-E. “It is meant to show that even if you complete the mission, the burden can affect how well you perform.”

Participants encountered two resilience stations along the route, completing 10 burpees at the first checkpoint and 20 pushups at the second, reinforcing the cumulative impact of stress on performance and readiness.



Florida National Guard's Staff Sgt. Heather Sullivan, a Sexual Assault Prevention and Response noncommissioned officer assigned to Kosovo Force, Regional Command East, explains the meaning of the Respect Run 5k to runners prior to the start of the race at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, April 25, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Spencer Rhodes)



Florida Army National Guard 2nd Lt. Areille Zsido, a human resources officer for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, receives a book to carry during a 5K Respect Run at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, April 25, 2026, in observance of Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Balinda O'Neal)

“When you are a victim, you are triggered by random things in your environment,” Sullivan said. “It is our responsibility to make sure that we are looking out for one another.”

Leaders encouraged participants to reflect on the purpose of the event while reinforcing a culture of accountability and support across the formation.

“Think about the burden you are carrying and think about those that might be struggling,” said FLARNG Col. Sam Sargeant, commander of the 53rd IBCT and RC-E. “Take care of each other. Look out for each other, always.”

Support resources were also highlighted throughout the event, emphasizing confidentiality and accessibility for those seeking help.

“We are here for you regardless of what your job is or what your nationality is,” said FLARNG Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Michael Hornback, a chaplain with the 53rd IBCT and assigned to RC-E. “We are happy to help you carry your burden.”



Soldiers representing the multinational makeup of Kosovo Force, Regional Command East’s Camp Bondsteel begin a 5k run supporting sexual assault awareness month, April 25, 2026. Participants carried randomly assigned items to symbolize the varied and often unseen challenges survivors of sexual harassment and sexual assault may face. The event promoted awareness, resilience, and a culture of support across the formation. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Spencer Rhodes)

A Flag's Journey

Continues with KFOR in Kosovo

Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto

134th PAD

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo — More than two decades after first hanging in a Colorado high school classroom, an American flag that has traveled across combat zones and military missions around the world now resides in Kosovo alongside Soldiers assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East.

The flag is currently in the care of Colorado Army National Guard 1st Lt. Kellen Jansen, an assistant operations officer with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment (General Support Aviation Battalion), assigned to KFOR Regional Command-East. For Jansen, the flag represents more than patriotism, it represents legacy, sacrifice and a connection to home.

The flag's story began in 2006 inside a classroom in Rangely, Colorado, where economics teacher, Mark Jansen, displayed the American flag for his students. That same year, one of his former students requested the flag be sent overseas while deployed to Afghanistan. On Dec. 27, 2006, the flag flew aboard an A-10 Thunderbolt II, during a combat mission in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, beginning what would become a decades-long journey across multiple deployments and continents.

Since then, the flag has traveled through Iraq, Qatar, Poland and now Kosovo, where it currently remains

with KFOR Soldiers supporting NATO's peacekeeping mission in the region. Despite its years of travel, the flag remains in pristine condition, carefully preserved by the service members entrusted with carrying it forward.

For Jansen, the connection is deeply personal. Growing up, he saw the flag every day hanging inside his father's classroom, surrounded by handwritten names of former students who had gone on to serve their country. Now, during his first deployment, he has become part of that history himself.

"Growing up, I looked up to the names inscribed on the margins of that flag hanging in his room," Jansen said. "It had a daily presence in my life, and now it's my turn to care for it. To me, the flag connects me to home and serves as a daily reminder of the cost of freedom."

Now stationed at Camp Bondsteel with KFOR, the flag continues its journey alongside Soldiers committed to maintaining a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement for all people of Kosovo. Its presence serves as a reminder that service stretches far beyond a single deployment or generation.

What once began as a classroom symbol has evolved into a living piece of military history carried by Soldiers, preserved through deployments and passed from one generation to the next. Today, with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment in Kosovo, the flag continues to embody the enduring connection between those who serve abroad and the communities they represent back home.



Colorado Army National Guard 1st Lt. Kellen Jansen, assistant operations officer with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment (General Support Aviation Battalion), assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, folds a U.S. flag at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, April 9, 2026. The flag, given to him by his father, has been carried by members of his family during their deployments and serves as a symbol of their shared commitment to military service. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)



A SCOUT'S FIRST DEPLOYMENT AND A LASTING PURPOSE



Spc. Azavyon McFarland **134th PAD**

CAMP NOTHING HILL, Kosovo — The base gates open before the sun has a chance to rise as fog can be seen with every breath.

Soldiers with the Florida National Guard start their early mornings ready to move: with night vision on, rifles ready and gear packed; traveling by vehicle or by getting of a UH-60 Black Hawk and setting up observations posts as they pull out maps. All towards another day's worth of patrols along the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL).

For Sgt. David Denkler, a cavalry scout squad leader with Troop A, 1st Squadron, 153rd Cavalry Regiment, these are moments that will stay with him as he serves on his first deployment.

"There's these small stings in your military career where you will be sitting there for 30 seconds and you're like, this is a movie movement," Denkler said.

Assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Re-

gional Command-East, Denkler leads Soldiers during reconnaissance patrol in Kosovo where they are responsible for monitoring their area of operations, and reporting suspicious activity along the ABL, contributing to KFOR's mission of maintaining a safe, secure environment and freedom of movement for all people of Kosovo.

When Denkler found out about his deployment he was awakened. During his first drill to the unit, Soldiers were coming back from a deployment, leaving him unsure of when his opportunity would arise.

"I have a long military history to live up to, so when they finally said I was going to deploy, I got super excited," Denkler said.

He grew up with several family members serving in the military, including his mother who is currently a field grade officer. The family history brought out pride and pressure, but nothing that Denkler can't handle.

"There is a bit of pressure, but honestly, I just think it makes me a better Soldier," Denkler said. I go out of my way to work

harder, do better and always be at the top of my game.”

Denkler’s excitement and pride continue to grow as he finds out he’ll apply his training and hone his skills as a cavalry scout during real world missions.

“You can train and train back home, but here I’m actually getting to do missions and do the real job that I signed up for, Denkler said.”

Upon deployment Denkler quickly learned that his leadership ability would develop as well.

Denkler was promoted from specialist to sergeant at the beginning of the year, quickly placing him in the role of a squad leader. The transitions helped him learn how to trust his Soldiers, delegate tasks and give Soldiers space to develop.

“Delegation is one of the most important things that I think any form of leadership should learn as fast as humanly possible,” Denkler said. “One of the most important things I had to learn as a squad leader.”

At first, he said he wanted to handle everything himself until he realized leadership means trusting your team and helping Soldiers prepare for greater responsibility.

“You have to be able to trust your team,” Denkler said.

Denkler believes Leadership is more than just giving orders, it’s important to teach Soldiers the “why.”

“If you have time to explain: ‘Hey, we need to do this because of this,’ Soldiers

will take.” Denkler said. “They see that. They notice that and appreciate it.”

In the past, Denkler has taken notes from strong leaders who have helped shape the non commissioned officer he is today.

“I saw what I liked,” Denkler said. “And I cherry picked what I thought would make a great leader.”

Now, one of the most meaningful parts while being on deployment is helping his Soldiers grow because of his contribution.

“It is by far my favorite part of the job: watching my Soldiers develop.” Denkler said.

Reflecting on deployment, Denkler said he’s found his purpose and hopes to continue his career in the Florida Army National Guard.

“I think I’ve found the place where I belong and this is the Florida Guard,” Denkler said. “I want to make a name for myself within the Florida Guard.”

While in Kosovo, away from home, Denkler has spent hours on patrol, and dwelling on his lessons learned; however, it has also brought purpose, growth and experiences that will last a lifetime.

“You’ll be the saddest you’ve ever been, you will be the angriest you’ve ever been, you will be the happiest you’ve ever been,” Denkler said. “And somehow, at the end of the day, you will always feel like, ‘That was worth it.’”

This is Denkler’s movie moment.

Florida Army National Guard's Sgt. David Denkler, a cavalry scout with Alpha Troop, 1st Squadron, 153rd Cavalry Regiment, currently assigned to Kosovo Force, Regional Command East, talks with his squad while on patrol, April 30th, 2026. Soldiers during reconnaissance patrol in Kosovo where they are responsible for monitoring their area of operations, and reporting suspicious activity along the ABL, contributing to KFOR's mission of maintaining a safe, secure environment and freedom of movement for all people of Kosovo. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Azavyon McFarland)





Task Force Med enhances KFOR emergency readiness

Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount

134th PAD

Florida Army National Guardsmen assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East Task Force Medical have become some of the first in Florida National Guard history certified by the state surgeon general to teach and validate Soldiers through the Defense Health Agency's Deployed Medicine Combat Lifesaver curriculum.

The certification allows Task Force Medical instructors to conduct Combat Lifesaver training and award official course credit through the Deployed Medicine platform, expanding KFOR's ability to train personnel in lifesaving skills at the point of injury.

Sgt. Benford Rosenfeldt and Sgt. Khaleel Germain, with Charlie Company, 53rd Brigade Support Battalion, and Sgt. James Klauer, with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, all with the 53rd Infantry

Brigade Combat Team, have led the initiative in support of the brigade's effort to expand the number of qualified Combat Lifesaver providers across the force.

"The brigade's intent is really to expand the number of CLS providers to increase our mission capability and readiness," Rosenfeldt said. "The importance of CLS is the ability to make change at point of injury so instead of being a bystander, you're given the opportunity and knowledge to actually make a significant difference in your battle buddy's outcome and we're giving them the tools that empower our brothers and sisters we fight alongside."

The Deployed Medicine platform provides standardized training resources and allows instructors to validate training completion while ensuring Soldiers receive official credit for the course.

"The Florida general surgeon signed off as me being a deployed medicine instructor, able to certify Soldiers in CLS and have them receive credit for it," Rosenfeldt said. "Since February, we've taught two 40-hour CLS courses and multi-level trainings designed to reach learners with differing medical backgrounds."

Combat Lifesaver training equips non-medical personnel with the skills to provide immediate care before advanced medical support arrives. The curriculum includes hemorrhage control, airway management, casualty

assessment and other lifesaving interventions designed to improve survivability at the point of injury.

"The Deployed Medicine curriculum allows us to set a pace for students of all knowledge levels, whether they've had exposure to medicine or not," said Germain, medical operations noncommissioned officer for Task Force Medical. "You can take the class at your own pace. It gives a lot of dynamic resources to the instructors as well."

Task Force Medical's efforts extend beyond training U.S. Soldiers. Instructors have also trained contracted



Florida Army National Guard Liaison Monitoring Team members Spc. Chandler Padgett and Spc. Jaden Ross, both with Troop C, 1st Squadron, 153rd Cavalry Regiment and assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, perform care under fire during Combat Lifesaver training at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, May 11, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount)

security personnel at Camp Bondsteel and are working with multinational partners interested in expanding

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Deployed Medicine certification opportunities within their own formations.

By increasing the number of certified instructors and Combat Lifesaver-qualified personnel, the program strengthens interoperability across KFOR and enhances the force's ability to respond to medical emergencies while supporting the mission to maintain a safe and secure environment and ensure freedom of movement for all people in Kosovo.

For Rosenfeldt, the opportunity to teach the course is a chance to share a program that influenced his own career path.

A flight paramedic with nearly 20 years of medical experience, Rosenfeldt said a Combat Lifesaver course he attended in 2009 inspired him to pursue medicine and helped shape the career he has today.

Germain said the deployment has also broadened his professional

perspective as he balances operational responsibilities with medical training.

"I'm currently working in an operations role here at the Bondsteel clinic, and working on the operations side has opened my eyes to anticipating problem sets and finding solutions so there aren't any big hiccups," Germain said. "This deployment is definitely going to help the knowledge base I want to build, especially with my end goal in medicine to get into a physician assistant program."

"Many hands make light work," Rosenfeldt said. "We're very passionate about medicine, so getting the opportunity to make a difference here and possibly put a new thought process in some of these Soldiers who want to pursue medicine in either the military or civilian sector is quite rewarding."

[Below] Florida Army National Guard Liaison Monitoring Team members Spc. Chandler Padgett and Spc. Jaden Ross, with Troop C, 1-153rd Cavalry Regiment and both assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, perform care under fire during Combat Lifesaver training at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, May 11, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount)





[Above] Florida Army National Guard Spc. Arthur Hendry, with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team and Spc. Giovanni Tirado, with C Troop, 1-153rd Cavalry Regiment, 53rd IBCT, both assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, move a simulated casualty during Combat Lifesaver training at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, May 11, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount)



U.S. Army Sgt. Brian Edwards, right, an explosive ordnance disposal technician with the 702nd Ordnance Company (EOD), currently assigned to Kosovo Force, Regional Command East, pulls security while Sgt. Anthony Kamahu, also from the 702nd, applies a hasty tourniquet to a simulated casualty during Combat Lifesaver training at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, May 11, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount)

University of Pristina Hosts KFOR

Variety of specialists speak with national security students



Service members with Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East and Area Support Group Balkans pose for a group photo with students and faculty from the University of Business and Technology in Pristina, Kosovo, May 12, 2026, following a security and law presentation. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)

Capt. Balinda O'Neal 134th PAD

Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East Soldiers met with undergraduate students studying national security at the University of Business and Technology in Pristina, Kosovo, May 12, 2026.

The engagement

connected KFOR personnel with students pursuing careers in the security field and provided an opportunity to discuss how multinational military organizations contribute to regional stability and security cooperation in Kosovo. The event marked the fifth iteration of the partnership between KFOR personnel and students enrolled in the university's national security program,

one of the only such programs in Kosovo.

Presenters discussed national security career fields, including military police, cyber security, drone employment and legal services, providing students insight into professional fields that support NATO-led KFOR's mission and regional security efforts. Adrian Kadriu, Ph.D., head of security studies



Florida Army National Guard 1st Lt. Luke Squire, officer in charge of the 715th Military Police Company and provost marshal for Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, speaks with students during a security and law presentation at the University of Business and Technology in Pristina, Kosovo, May 12, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)



Florida Army National Guard Maj. Song Hong, cyberspace and electromagnetic activities officer with the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, speaks with students during a security and law presentation at the University of Business and Technology in Pristina, Kosovo, May 12, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)



Florida Army National Guard 1st Lt. Luke Squire, officer in charge of the 715th Military Police Company and provost marshal for Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, speaks with students during a security and law presentation at the University of Business and Technology in Pristina, Kosovo, May 12, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)

Florida Army National Guard 1st Lt. David Santana, a military police officer with the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team and Kosovo Police liaison assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, speaks with students during a security and law presentation at the University of Business and Technology in Pristina, Kosovo, May 12, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)

and professor at the UBT, said the continued partnership with KFOR has helped students better understand how security concepts learned in classrooms apply to real-world operational environments.

“These briefings, exchanges and academic events with the American KFOR personnel are not just regular lectures, but they add important layers of academic and professional value that national security students can hardly find only in literature,” Kadriu said.

Kadriu said the engagements help students connect academic theory with practical experience while exposing them to multinational cooperation, leadership and modern security challenges, including cyber security and hybrid warfare. He added that many students leave the events with a clearer understanding of future career opportunities in Kosovo’s

growing security and cyber sectors.

Florida Army National Guard Maj. Song Hong, the Cyberspace and Electromagnetic Activities officer for RC-East, discussed the growing importance of cyber security in modern operational environments and the role multinational cooperation plays in addressing emerging threats.

“Cyber security is a critical component of mission assurance, we must employ cyber capabilities expertly at all levels, from basic users observing good cyber hygiene to utilization of non-kinetic effects to achieve mission success and protect critical national infrastructure,” Hong said.

“Also, the cyber domain is not bound by physical geography, national cyber strategies need to have a strong multinational cooperation component to effectively counter and

prosecute threats that may exist beyond one’s borders,” Hong said.

Hong also encouraged students interested in cyber security careers to seek out low-cost training opportunities, certifications and practical experiences that can help build professional skills and strengthen local communities.

“I would place high worth in an individual’s resume that said they created a neighborhood program to educate and assist victims of cyber scams,” Hong said.

The engagement highlighted KFOR’s continued efforts to build relationships with educational institutions and support the development of future security professionals in Kosovo.

KFOR continues to support a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement for all people in Kosovo in accordance with its United Nations mandate.

Battle Desk: more than just a tracker



Staff Sgt. Spencer Rhodes 53rd IBCT

Most soldiers interact with the battle desk only when reporting departures, arrivals or mission updates. Behind the scenes, however, the battle desk serves as the brigade's hub for monitoring operations, personnel movements and emerging issues across the area of operations.

"The battle desk is the military's version of NASA's Mission Control Center. All military ops [operations] and personnel are tracked here in real time in order to update the commander and give all staff sections an accurate depiction of the AO," said Staff Sgt. Kenwon Simeon, a battle desk day-shift NCO. Simeon, who traditionally works in the S2 [Intel] shop, serves as a battle desk team lead for the day shift, said the exposure to operations has increased his understanding of just

how essential his primary occupation is in the military decision making process, and seeing it from a different lens shapes how he looks at missions.

A sentiment echoed by Sgt. James Klauder, also a dayshift team lead at the battle desk, who sees it as an opportunity to enhance his understanding and individual decision making capability at the company or squad level.

"The battle desk is the military's version of NASA's Mission Control Center."

"The process of decision making is a little more clear and you can see how the ball rolling gets started. At the maneuver element

your situational awareness may only go as far as your own exposure to decision making, usually at the company level. It gives you more buy-in at the lower echelon when you have knowledge of where your higher-ups are coming from," said Klauder. "In the absence of orders you're going to take the initiative, and it's certainly easier when you have a broader scope of understanding about the operations process."

The brigade battle desk isn't alone in

the effort, they also rely on subordinate units, like the Kosovo Force, Regional Command East's maneuver battalion at Novo Selo. The ability to report new information to the relevant personnel, especially if there is request for information, or request for assistance from someone on a mission, heavily relies on the maneuver battalion's battle desk's own operations.

"The brigade level battle desk information is supported by our reports to them. Just like we track movements and who is patrolling where, the brigade does as well, and their updates come from us in real time as it happens," said

Spc. Laquann Adams, a battle desk radio operator with the 1st Squadron, 153rd Cavalry Regiment at Camp Novo Selo. "For example, if someone finds an obstacle in their route, we report it and tell them how it was resolved or what's needed."

The Battle Desk has many moving parts and there is certainly a learning curve, but Klauder believes the experience is valuable.

"I think exposure to any operational echelon beyond your own is good for younger less experienced enlisted to have as their career progresses," said Klauder."

THE DON OF THE E4 MAFIA

Staff Sgt. Spencer Rhodes
53rd IBCT

After 15 years in uniform, Spc. Bruce Stricker remains an uncommon figure in today's Army: a Soldier who has repeatedly declined promotion in pursuit of a personal promise and a different definition of leadership. Stricker works in cyber for the Kosovo Force, Regional Command East's S2 [intel] shop, and he's been in the army for 15 years. A longtime member of the E4 mafia, his peers affectionately call him "The Don," due to his unconventional time as a specialist. However, it's not his tenure that's most noteworthy, it's his ability to motivate and offer a wealth of wisdom to those around him that sets him apart. If asked, Stricker does not shy away from explaining why he remains a specialist by choice. In basic training and AIT, he developed a close friendship with someone who went active duty while he went into the Florida National Guard. Keeping in touch Stricker said they made a pact that was initially half-joking, half-



Spc. Bruce Stricker, a cyber security soldier in the Kosovo Force, Regional Command-East (RC-E) S2 [Intel] shop, updates information for the RC-E battle desk, at Camp Bondsteel, May 5th, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Spencer Rhodes)

serious.

"In 2012 he died while deployed with the 82nd Airborne, and we promised each other that neither of us would be promoted to E5 without a Ranger or SF [Special Forces] Tab. But when he died I kind of took it to heart and I've refused my promotion since, and here I am." Although he has declined promotion, Stricker has never stopped pursuing personal and professional growth. He has attended FLARNG Special Forces

Readiness Evaluation and continues to train in hopes of earning a Ranger School slot should the opportunity arise.

Shortly after arriving in Kosovo, Stricker established a Sunday ruck club designed to accommodate Soldiers with varying schedules and fitness levels. The group meets three times each Sunday, allowing participants to choose a session that fits their availability.

“Normally we do it in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one in the evening to accommodate different schedules for people who want to do it but are unavailable at one of the other times.” Leading each session often results in Stricker doing almost 12 miles every Sunday. Participants say the club has helped them prepare for events such as the German 16-kilometer ruck march and the Norwegian Foot March while building confidence and endurance.

“He makes it manageable for everyone on all levels but also isn't afraid to challenge you. He showed a lot of us that rucks can be a great way to exercise but also a way to enjoy quality time with one another,” said Jonathan Nolf, a Radio Telephone Operator at the RC-E Battle Desk.

Nolf has served alongside Stricker for a little over two years and says creating the ruck club wasn't a surprise. He says The Don is always making the environment around him better. Many junior enlisted Soldiers routinely seek Stricker's advice on military and professional development. According to Nolf, his humility and transparency is what makes him so approachable, regardless of rank or experience level. “Working with SPC Stricker over the last two years has been a genuine privilege. He possesses a wealth of knowledge—often more than he gives himself credit for—and he is constantly proactively setting up lower-enlisted soldiers with routines and programs to advance their careers,” said Nolf.

Outside of work Stricker maintains a demanding personal schedule. He's currently pursuing a masters degree



Florida Army National Guard Spc. Daniel Bruno and Sgt. Nicholas Jewel, both assigned to Kosovo Force, Regional Command-East, start the first mile of the Norwegian Ruck March held at Camp Bondsteel, May 17, 2026. Jewel is a regular at the Sunday ruck marches run by Spc. Stricker at Camp Bondsteel for those wanting to add variety to their fitness routine or simply improve their rucking ability. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Spencer Rhodes)

in Offensive Cyber Security, a field he has worked in at a defense contracting company for the last ten years. He says he keeps himself very regimented so he can be efficient with his time and still do the things he wants to do.

“85% of my time is spent studying, the remaining 15% I split between rest and going to the gym,” said Stricker.

Nolf, said Stricker's discipline has made a lasting impact on those around him.

“Watching his work ethic firsthand has made me a much more productive individual and it has shown me just how impactful one person can be on a team's success,” said Nolf.

Fifteen years into his Army career, Stricker remains a specialist by choice. Yet for many of the soldiers he mentors, rank has never been the reason they follow his example.

Deployment Highlights

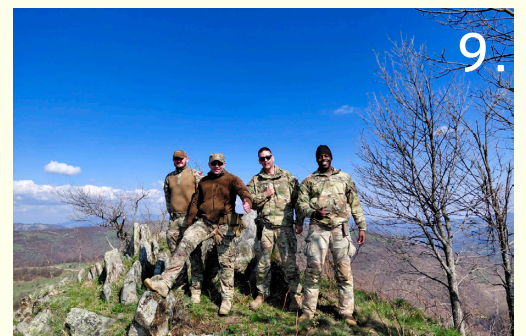


Photo Captions

- 1.** Florida Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Brian Fenske, an electromagnetic warfare specialist assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East's Joint Implementation Commission, kneels next to Spc. Andrea Centeno, a human resources specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, assigned to KFOR RC-E, during medevac hoist training along the Administrative Boundary Line in Kosovo, Apr. 9, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Seth LaCount)
- 2.** Colorado Army National Guard Sgt. Jackson Porterfield, a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter repairer with Company D, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment (General Support Aviation Battalion), assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, conducts routine maintenance on a Black Hawk rotor system at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, May 5, 2026.
- 3.** Florida Army National Guard Soldiers with Troop A, 1st Squadron, 153rd Cavalry Regiment, assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, pose for a group photo before the Norwegian Foot March at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, May 17, 2026. The Norwegian Foot March challenges participants to complete an 18.6-mile foot march within a prescribed time standard while carrying a rucksack, strengthening camaraderie and reinforcing partnerships among multinational forces serving in support of KFOR's mission. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)
- 4.** Florida Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Rey Perez, a preventive medicine specialist with C Company, 53rd Brigade Support Battalion, assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East Task Force Medical, demonstrates proper handwashing procedures during a medical day event at Ismail Qemali Primary School in Pristina, Kosovo, April 24, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Azavyon McFarland)
- 5.** Colorado Army National Guard Lt. Col. Joe Bryant, left, Task Force Aviation commander for Kosovo Force, Regional Command-East, grapples with mixed martial artist Devin Moultrie during an Armed Forces Entertainment MMA event at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, Apr. 17, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount)
- 6.** Florida Army National Guard Soldiers, 1st Lt. Lauren Sokolowski, left, and 2nd Lt. Arielle Zsito, both assigned to Kosovo Force, Regional Command East, participate in the 16k Memory March hosted by the Germany Bundeswehr on Camp Bondsteel, April 4th, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Azavyon McFarland)
- 7.** Soldiers assigned to the Task Force Gator Liaison Monitoring Team assigned to Kosovo Force, Regional Command East, participated in Earth Day festivities with Mayor Aliu of Ferizaj/Urosave, Kosovo, April 22, 2026. During the event, greenery was planted and soldiers participated in a park clean up project. (Photo courtesy of 1st Lt. Jonathan Tolmich)
- 8.** Florida Army National Guard 1st Lt. Andrea Calderon, a military intelligence officer assigned to Kosovo Force Regional Command East, drags a training mannequin during a Special Reaction Team assessment at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, April 18, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Azavyon McFarland)
- 9.** Florida Army National Guard Soldiers, Spc. Laquann Adams and Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Quevedo from the 1-153 Cavalry Squadron, and currently assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR), Regional Command-East, pause to take a photo with their polish counterparts while accompanying a patrol along the Administrative Boundary Line, April 18, 2026. (Photo courtesy of Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Quevedo)
- 10.** Florida Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR), Regional Command-East, conduct a field training exercise for the K9 Tactical Combat Casualty Care course taught by the KFOR RC-E Veterinarian Services Team, May 15, 2026, at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. The course teaches army medics how to administer point-of-injury and prolonged resuscitative care to Military Working Dogs under combat conditions (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Azavyon McFarland)
- 11.** Florida Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to Kosovo Force, Regional Command-East, pose for a group photo after completing the German company-hosted 16k Memory at Camp Bondsteel, April 4, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)



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