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Coming Home



Their journey home would fly them from Pristina, Kosovo to Stuttgart, Germany for a short hop to Shannon, Ireland. From there the soldiers of KFOR 20 would fly on multiple jets to Biggs Field, Fort Bliss in Texas for demobilization, the very place where they began their journey on 6 April 2015.





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Everyone was thankful and very moved to be home safe and sound.





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23 March 2016 – Finally Home

Following demobilization procedures in Texas they had a direct 'military' flight to Raleigh, North Carolina and landed in the in the Morrisville National Guard Flight Facility in Raleigh.



Their bags were loaded on the trucks - the Soldiers took busses from the plane to the family meet-up point in Building 2051 National Guard Drive, Morrisville.



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Next stop – Cary, North Carolina. Home of Lubrano’s Pizza. However, this time it was another favorite, Ginza Japanese Steakhouse and Sushi Restaurant for a small celebration with nearby family and friends.



Major Neil E. Edgar was home again.



POST SCRIPT: A Retrospective View of KFOR 20 and the 30th Armored Brigade Combat Team

In many complex ways, 2015 and 2016 has been a busy and memorable year for North Carolina's 30th Armored Brigade Combat Team. With units and Soldiers serving their state and nation across the globe, 'Old Hickory' leaders said they're proud of the professionalism, resilience and partnership these forces have displayed.

The 30th ABCT, an Army National Guard unit headquartered out of Clinton, North Carolina, has elements supporting unique missions in Europe and the Middle East. Additionally, approximately 2,800 30th ABCT citizen-Soldiers remain back in their home-state, ready to support their communities and neighbors in the event of a domestic emergency.

"The 30th ABCT is globally engaged and universally relevant, and I think that still holds true," said Col. Vernon Simpson, the 30th ABCT Commander who led the brigade headquarters in Kosovo.

"In the last twelve months, the brigade has been working around the globe." Joining the brigade's headquarters in Kosovo is the Fayetteville-based 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 252nd Armor Regiment, serving as the Forward Command Post to Simpson's Multinational Battle Group-East. Additionally, 30th units who have spent most of the year in the U.S. Central Command's part of the globe include elements of the 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 120th Infantry Regiment; 1st Battalion, 113th Field Artillery Regiment; and a 30th ABCT Military Engagement Team.

Simpson, who has spent his entire 27-year military career as a member of the 30th ABCT, said the National Guard's dual mission to its state and nation is one of his favorite things about serving in the NCNG. "The Guard was formed out of the first militias, it was literally for people to take up arms and defend their friends and relatives back home," Simpson said. "We've not strayed from that over time. Our citizen-Soldiers have jobs in the community—teachers, lawyers, police officers— but when our interests are threatened or when our nation calls, they are there to defend our state and nation."

"Not only do we serve the commander in chief of the United States and the governor in North Carolina, but we also serve the people of the United States and the people of our own states back home," he said. "It gives us the opportunity to be relevant in the global context but also be relevant at home."

The homeland missions cover "full suite" of threats, Simpson said, from foreign enemies to natural disasters. "Those are the things that make the National Guard unique, because we have Soldiers with those specific skills who help us prepare for those types of emergencies," Simpson said.

The 30th ABCT and MNBG-E mission in Kosovo follows a similar model, where the U.S. and NATO forces serving within Kosovo Force are available to support Kosovo's institutions and civil authorities.

"The mission in Kosovo is much like a civil support mission," Simpson said. "We're here to provide a safe and secure environment, and freedom of movement, but the overall purpose is to allow Kosovo's political processes to flourish." "It's not unlike what we do at home—we're not in charge of the situation, we are in support of other agencies, and it really is pretty seamless," he said.

KFOR, which began in 1999 as NATO's response to conflict in the Balkans, serves now as a second- or third-response agency behind the Kosovo Police and European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo. In the event of multiple or exceptionally large riots in Kosovo, KFOR's multinational forces are available to support local law enforcement.

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In addition—much like the National Guard’s mission at home—the current KFOR rotation has sent aviators to fight fires in Kosovo’s mountains, and participated in community and youth education programs in order to build relationships with the people they serve.

The 30th ABCT and its fellow KFOR Army National Guard units from Alabama, Connecticut, Texas and West Virginia, have brought a National Guard flavor to their partnerships with Kosovo institutions and multinational partners. Just as the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, highlighted their airborne training in the previous KFOR rotation, the 30th ABCT has been emphasizing partnership and civil response operations during its training events.

The brigade headquarters’ deployment to Kosovo has helped underscore its Soldiers’ ability to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with NATO partners and integrate with them throughout an operation, Simpson said. The brigade’s headquarters includes liaisons from Armenia, Germany, Poland and Turkey, and the 1-252nd headquarters oversees company-level forces from Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, as well as its own Williamston-based Alpha Company. KFOR’s multinational flavor has allowed the NCNG Soldiers to learn from their partner nations’ strengths.

“This deployment has also helped the 30th ABCT for when we go back home,” Simpson said. “If we’re required to respond to a domestic threat, we now have a whole new box of tools in our toolkit on how to deal with complex civil support issues.”

The National Guard’s State Partnership Program has also played a prominent role in the 30th ABCT’s ability to nurture multinational relationships. Moldova, which is one of North Carolina’s two state partners, also contributes forces to the KFOR mission. While the two forces have enjoyed a habitual training relationship for more than a decade, 2015 marks the first time NCNG and Moldovan forces have served together in an operational environment.

“It’s nice to see some of the fruits of our relationship—which we’ve developed over a decade—working together on the ground in Kosovo,” Simpson said.

State-side 30th ABCT elements will continue the NCNG’s relationship with Moldova in 2016, planning to follow up 2015’s mortar platoon exchange training with a Bradley Fighting Vehicle event in Moldova in the spring. Morrison said the upcoming event will incorporate 30th ABCT cavalry scouts from the 1-120th and 1-252nd, as well as West Virginia’s 1st Squadron, 150th Cavalry Regiment, and South Carolina’s 4th Battalion, 118th Infantry Regiment.

“Almost 80 percent of the brigade’s combat power is still in North Carolina, and there’s a real effective training program being run for them,” said Lt. Col. Wes Morrison, the 30th ABCT’s executive officer, emphasizing that the 30th ABCT’s state-side Soldiers aren’t taking a backseat to its forward-deployed elements.

Morrison, a 22-year NCNG veteran, deployed on the 30th ABCT’s previous two Iraq deployments since 9/11, in 2004 as a company commander and in 2009 as the 1-120th executive officer. In both of those deployments, the brigade deployed with its subordinate units to focus on one mission together.

“[This round of deployments] was a culture change for us,” Morrison said. “We’ve deployed the brigade twice before, but we had not deployed elements of the brigade separately. It’s been challenging, but a great learning experience, to develop parallel training plans—one for mobilization, and one to maintain the readiness of those who didn’t deploy.”

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These training plans and the various 30th ABCT operations around the world have been successful, Morrison said. Old Hickory's deployed elements will return to North Carolina throughout 2016, ready to tackle a new set of challenges while always ready to support its state and nation—at home, and abroad.

