



THE GATOR SENTINEL

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COMMAND CORNER

Our Purpose

As we move through another month of our deployment, one thing has become increasingly clear: purpose drives everything we do.

Every patrol, engagement, training event, and partnership reflects the professionalism that Task Force Gator Soldiers bring to this mission each day. Our success is not measured solely by the events we support or the miles we travel, but by the consistent standards we uphold and the trust we continue to build with our multinational partners and the communities we serve.

As we enter the latter stages of this deployment, discipline and routine will carry us through the months ahead. The habits we've built, the standards we've established, and the commitment we demonstrate every day are what keep this team focused and mission-ready. Just as importantly, we cannot allow mediocrity to set in. Maintaining momentum requires the same level of professionalism and attention to detail today that it did on day one.

Professionalism is demonstrated in the decisions made when no one is watching, in the discipline required to accomplish routine tasks to standard, and in the commitment each Soldier has for taking care of one another. Every action, whether seen by others or not, reflects on our organization and reinforces the trust placed in us by our teammates, our leaders, and our multinational partners.

I continue to be impressed by the initiative, adaptability, and teamwork displayed across the task force. Every section contributes to our collective success, and every Soldier plays an important role in accomplishing this mission.

Thank you for your continued dedication, your commitment to excellence, and the pride you take in representing Task Force Gator. Together, we will continue building on the momentum we've established while remaining focused on our purpose, maintaining our professionalism, and finishing this deployment as strongly as we began it.

From the Front,

Col. Sam Sargeant

Commander, Task Force Gator



COMMAND CORNER

Team,

As we enter the final phase of our deployment, I want to remind each of you that our discipline and standards matter now more than ever. We've experienced changes, uncertainty, and transitions throughout this deployment, and through every challenge, you have remained adaptable, resilient, and mission focused. I couldn't be prouder to serve alongside a confident, organized, disciplined, and motivated team.

As we move closer to the end of our mission, it becomes even more important to guard against complacency. This is often the point in a deployment when our minds naturally begin thinking about home, our families, and what comes next. While that excitement is understandable, we still have a mission to accomplish. Don't mentally leave Kosovo before it's time. Continue taking care of one another, making the right decisions, and holding yourselves and your teammates to the standards that have made Task Force Gator successful.

There is still time to make this deployment count in ways that extend beyond the mission. If there is something you've wanted to accomplish; start college, improve your physical fitness, earn a certification, or begin learning a new language; commit to it now. When you return home, life will quickly become busy again. Right now, you have an opportunity that many people never get, the chance to intentionally invest in yourself. Don't let that opportunity pass. Small, consistent efforts today become lasting accomplishments long after this deployment ends.

Set the standard for yourself now. Build habits you'll carry home with you. Control what you can control, let go of what you cannot, and continue moving forward with purpose.

Let's finish this deployment the same way we started it, with professionalism, discipline, and pride. Use your time wisely. Stay disciplined. Stay focused. Keep taking care of one another. Together, we'll finish this deployment strong and leave this mission—and each other—better than we found it.

From the Front,

Command Sgt. Maj. Miguel Hernandez

Command Sergeant Major, Task Force Gator



CHAPLAINS CORNER

Time

“Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” – Psalm 90:12

I am increasingly struck by how quickly time passes. I commissioned 18 years ago, but it feels like yesterday. I look at my oldest son who will be taller than me soon, and I have no idea where the time went. The reality is that we do not have very many days in a life. Understanding this truth leads to a certain kind of wisdom, and this is what the Psalmist in Psalm 90 is trying to help us learn.

Number your days. Understanding how few days we have in a life should lead us to make every day count. If we are not careful, we will blink, years will pass, and we will look back and ask, “What have I really accomplished?” On the other hand, when we seek to make every day count, we use each day to its fullest. This perspective causes us to completely reshape our priorities so that we are investing time in the things that matter most, seeking to make a difference every day, and more motivated to accomplish our goals.

As I am writing this, we have 73 days left till transfer of authority, though we will have fewer by the time you read it. How are you going to make those last few months count? What are you going to accomplish with the time you have left? If you ask these questions every day, you might find that this approach leads to a couple of results. First, it will make your days better. A sense of purpose is vital for our joy. Second, this outlook will make you much more effective so that you return home with no, or fewer, regrets.

Don't waste the time you have left. As always, if you need help thinking through how to make the most of your time, I am here for you. Give me a call or shoot me a message on Signal.

With love,
Chaplain Hornback
863-444-0345



LTC MICHEAL HORNBACK
RC-E Chaplain

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Reintegration After Deployment

Reintegration refers to the period when a service member returns from deployment and begins re-establishing roles, routines, and relationships within the family, workplace, and civilian community. It is a normal but complex adjustment process that can involve emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal challenges.

Psychological Adjustment

- Operational-to-home shift — Soldiers must transition from a high-alert, mission-focused mindset to a more flexible, emotionally-open home environment.
- Emotional recalibration — Common experiences include irritability, hypervigilance, sleep disruption, anxiety, or difficulty relaxing
- Identity— Soldiers may struggle with redefining purpose outside the deployment role.

Community & Civilian Life Adjustment

- Routine — Returning to daily life (errands, social interactions, downtime) can feel unfamiliar or overwhelming.
- The Workplace — Soldiers may need to adapt to new policies or expectations.
- Transition planning — Reintegration overlaps with preparing for civilian employment, education, and housing.

Common Challenges

- Relaxing or “turning off” mission mindset
- Feeling disconnected from family or friends
- Changes in intimacy or communication
- Emotional numbing or irritability
- Anxiety in crowds or public spaces
- Adjusting to slower pace and less structure
- Navigating expectations from others

Reintegration following deployment involves the Soldier’s adjustment back into family systems, community roles, and civilian routines. This transition commonly includes psychological recalibration, renegotiation of family roles, re-establishment of daily structure, and adaptation to non-operational environments. Soldiers may experience emotional, relational, and behavioral changes as they shift from deployment demands to home-based expectations. Supportive relationships, coping strategies, and structured transition planning serve as protective factors during this period.



Family Reintegration

- Roles — Family members have adapted during the soldier’s absence; returning soldiers must enter established routines.
- Communication rebuilding — Partners and children may need time to reconnect emotionally and rebuild trust or closeness.
- Parenting — Children may react with excitement, anxiety, or behavioral changes as they adjust to the returning parent.

Protective Factors

- Strong social support
- Open communication with family
- Consistent routines
- Engagement in mental health services
- Physical activity and healthy sleep
- Purposeful goal-setting (education, career, community involvement)

June NCO of The Month

Sgt. Exabrena Tresalus is a dedicated human resources noncommissioned officer recognized for her determination, compassion, and natural leadership. She is advancing her academic foundation by pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology from Florida International University. Despite attending the National Training Center, premobilization, and the KFOR 36 rotation, she has maintained a 3.8 GPA while completing more than 36 credit hours per semester. Tresalus earned NCO of the Month due to her exceptional leadership, forward-thinking initiative, and profound impact on unit operations.

During the extended absence of the maneuver battalion human resources noncommissioned officer in charge, Tresalus seamlessly assumed the duties of this E-7 billet, demonstrating a level of professional maturity far above her current pay grade by anticipating administrative requirements and delivering critical briefings to senior leadership with the poise of a senior NCO. Furthermore, she voluntarily took on the immense additional workload of managing the personnel status for 10 companies, balancing these responsibilities while overseeing the entire pass and leave system and critical administrative preparations for demobilization of the 1-153 CAV's 210 Soldiers.

Her dedication to unit morale and welfare was equally evident when she personally raised over \$700 and worked tirelessly to support the U.S. COY's 250th celebration of Independence. Ultimately, Tresalus' sphere of influence extends significantly beyond her rank, providing essential mentorship to junior Soldiers while earning the deep respect of her peers. She has truly blossomed into a dependable leader who embodies the finest qualities of the NCO Corps.



June Soldier of The Month



Spc. Alexzandria Smith is a highly motivated and compassionate Soldier whose commitment to self-improvement and service to others sets her apart from her peers. Having recently earned her associate degree in psychology, she continues to pursue higher education and will begin work toward a bachelor's degree in healthcare this year.

Smith serves as the company's human resources specialist and consistently exceeds expectations through her exceptional technical proficiency, professionalism, and dedication to Soldier care. She is responsible for maintaining personnel records, processing administrative actions, managing IPPS-A and iPERMS transactions, and resolving pay and personnel issues that directly affect the readiness and welfare of Soldiers across the company. Her attention to detail and commitment to excellence ensures critical actions are completed accurately and on time, making her an invaluable asset to both Soldiers and leadership.

Beyond her assigned duties, Smith routinely invests time in the development of others by teaching classes on administrative topics such as Leave and Earnings Statements and award writing and helping Soldiers improve their knowledge and understanding of Army personnel systems. She has also demonstrated a

commitment to personal and professional growth through completion of her associate degree, pursuit of military correspondence courses, and preparation for continued higher education.

Smith is widely recognized for her selfless service, professionalism, and unwavering commitment to the Soldiers she supports. Her reputation for reliability, compassion, and technical expertise has made her one of the most trusted Soldiers within the company.

July NCO of The Month

What truly sets Sgt. 1st Class Francisco Pardo apart is the depth of character he brings to his leadership. A native of South Florida with 21 years of military service, he possesses a wealth of real-world experience, further sharpened by his work in the counterdrug unit. Those who serve alongside him know him as a straightforward, highly motivated individual who never compromises on the standard.

Due to unit personnel shortages, Pardo stepped up to perform the duties of a commissioned officer as the commander for K18. His selection for this role is a testament to his reliability and extensive experience. K18 was tasked with operating in the largest Area of Responsibility in southern Kosovo while maintaining the smallest personnel footprint among the Liaison Monitoring Teams. Despite these constraints, Pardo led K18 to seamlessly integrate with both the Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb communities.

Demonstrating the highest standards of operational readiness and quick decision-making under pressure, SFC Pardo also excels during routine operations. While conducting a presence patrol, SFC Pardo encountered a vehicle collision, immediately secured the scene and administered critical first aid to a crash victim. His decisive actions stabilized the individual until emergency services arrived, exemplifying his profound commitment to the safety of the local populace. Under his command, K18 has consistently set the standard for LMT metrics across the theater, leading in qualitative Daily Summary Reports, Civil-Military Cooperation projects, Counterintelligence networking, and physical fitness scores. Furthermore, the operational products generated by K18 have been widely adopted as the Standard Operating Procedure for all other theater LMTs.



July Soldier of The Month



Spc. Nickolas Larin distinguished himself through outstanding dedication, professional maturity, and an exemplary work ethic that consistently exceeded all organizational standards.

Leveraging extensive clinical expertise from his civilian career as a hospital technician, Larin brought a wealth of practical medical knowledge to the task force, significantly elevating the technical proficiency and clinical capabilities of his team. His advanced understanding of medical protocols and patient care workflows served as a vital asset to daily clinic operations. Furthermore, Larin seamlessly translated a strong foundation of teamwork, interpersonal communication, and service-oriented excellence into his military duties, delivering compassionate, patient-centered care of the highest caliber. His unique blend of technical competence and exceptional interpersonal skills fostered a welcoming environment for patients and boosted team cohesion.

Larin distinguished himself through exceptional clinical proficiency, versatility, and unwavering dedication to duty while serving with Task Force Medical. Demonstrating outstanding initiative, he was selected as one of only two junior medics to serve on the elite Critical Response Team. To ensure absolute

readiness for this high-stakes mission, Larin voluntarily dedicated extensive off-duty time to master advanced life-saving interventions, including blood product administration and cardiac monitoring, significantly enhancing the unit's trauma response capabilities.

Additionally, Larin served as a pivotal member of the Moulage Training Coordinator team. Leveraging his unique creative talents, he significantly enhanced the realism and effectiveness of mass casualty training exercises for Camp Bondsteel and Regional Command-West, directly elevating the theater's overall emergency response readiness.

BOOM OVER BONDSTEEL

Joint EOD response disposes of stockpiled ordnance



Sgt. Wiley Bullard, a team leader with 702nd Explosive Ordnance Company, assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR), Regional Command-East, works alongside Finnish and German EOD technicians June 10, 2026, after responding to a call that resulted in 94 World War II era artillery rounds being removed from a construction site. (Courtesy Photo)

Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount 134th PAD

On a clear spring night, the thunder of demolition rang across the camp with a deep, controlled concussion that shook the foundations of the wooden barracks and split the silence, stretching beyond Camp Bondsteel's rolling hills.

The blasts marked the end of an 11-hour Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East explosive ordnance disposal mission on June 10 that safely disposed of nearly 90 artillery projectiles uncovered earlier that day at a construction site.

Earlier that afternoon, Kosovo Police notified KFOR RC-E after a construction crew uncovered several unidentified ordnance items. The report was routed to RC-E's EOD element, which promptly mobilized. Within hours, the response expanded into a multinational effort as EOD technicians from the United States, Finland, Germany and the Kosovo Security Force joined the operation.

"My team leader counterpart in the Finnish EOD joined us on the initial reconnaissance, and

our German counterparts joined us immediately following one of their routine patrols that day," said Sgt. Wiley Bullard, team leader with the 702nd Explosive Ordnance Company, working out of Camp Bondsteel. "It was a great experience seeing how the different countries work together and navigate the complex international, joint environment to accomplish this type of response."

Upon arrival, teams established a cordon to keep civilians and non-essential personnel away from the hazards. They coordinated a safe approach route with local police; and the site leaders conducted a joint reconnaissance. What began as a report of only a handful of items quickly escalated. Bullard said the initial recon identified more than 20 artillery shells in the walls of the dirt trench.

As excavators continued their work that afternoon, the teams uncovered a total of 90 World War II era German artillery rounds embedded in the trench walls. Their condition was potentially unstable after decades of being buried.

An elementary school sits across the street from the site. Bullard said seeing the children

pass by as his team arrived reinforced the mission's stakes.

"As we drove by, it was a reminder of why we do what we do and why my mission is so important, to protect these communities," he said.

EOD standard operating procedures emphasize safety at every step: cordon, reconnaissance, render-safe assessment, transport, and final disposal. The joint team cataloged and sorted the munitions on site, deeming them safe for transport. Within the operational limitations of KFOR, the ordnance was judged safe for transport but not for storage, so the mission required immediate disposal. However, with such a large mass of ordnance, logical challenges emerged.

This effort required rapid coordination. The 702nd EOD communicated with Finnish forces to secure heavy transport. A Finnish Armed Forces semi-truck was used to transport the load back to Camp Bondsteel's demolition area.. On arrival to the camp, controlled demolition operations would follow EOD procedures for safe emplacement of charges, evacuation of non-essential personnel, and remote initiation.

Bullard said the team coordinated with base security contractors from Continuity Global Solutions to escort the truck onto base and begin demolition operations at approximately 12:15 a.m.

Staff Sgt. Dylan Alfaro, the unit's EOD noncommissioned officer in charge, emphasized the operational benefits of such responses.



Sgt. Wiley Bullard, a team leader with 702nd Explosive Ordnance Company, assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR), Regional Command-East, works alongside Finnish and German EOD technicians June 10, 2026, after responding to a call that resulted in 94 World War II era artillery rounds being removed from a construction site. (Photo Illustration)

"Responses like these help the team learn more about our area of operation," Alfaro said. "Real-world responses sharpen local knowledge of terrain, hazards, and community dynamics that are invaluable for future responses."

The total response time was about 11 hours, a timetable that reflects both the scale of the find and the deliberate care required.

"It makes for a long day, but safety dictates pace," Bullard said.

Alfaro pointed out the learning aspect of the mission as well.

"It's one thing to train, it's another to apply that training in realistic conditions," he said. "Working side-by-side with Finnish, German and KSF technicians reinforced interoperability and standardized procedures, improving joint response for future operations."

As dawn broke over Camp Bonsteel, the quiet that followed the thunder reflected the disciplined work of multinational teams operating under established EOD procedures.

"Our goal is to return the area to a safe condition for the community," Alfaro said.

EOD missions like the Vushtrri response are more than tactical successes; they are daily contributions to the mission's strategic objective to maintain a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement for all people in Kosovo. Removing legacy ordnance from public works sites and transportation corridors directly reduces civilian risk and supports the local population's sense of security.



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 702nd Ordnance Company (EOD) based out of Grafenwoehr, Germany, and assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, alongside members of the Finnish Armed Forces, Germany Army, and Kosovo Security Forces pose for a photo at the completed of clearing unexploded ordnance at a construction site in Vushtrri, Kosovo, June 10, 2026. (Courtesy Photo)



GROWING THROUGH THE UNKNOWN

FINDING CONFIDENCE IN KOSOVO

Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto

134th PAD

For Cpl. Estefany Rodriguez, the reality of deploying did not fully set in until the final weeks before she left home.

After years of hoping for an opportunity to deploy, her excitement gradually gave way to uncertainty as she prepared to leave her family and familiar routine behind.

"I think it really hit me about two weeks before leaving," Rodriguez said. "I would get emotional sometimes just thinking about my family."

Rodriguez, a Colorado Army National Guard Soldier assigned to Company A, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment (General Support Aviation Battalion), is currently supporting Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East. She learned about the deployment in 2024 and volunteered after receiving encouragement from her leadership.

"At first, I was excited," she said. "Ever since I joined the Army, I wanted to deploy."

As the departure date approached, however, Rodriguez realized she was not alone in balancing that excitement with the emotional weight of leaving home.

"Everyone was excited, but you could tell something was lingering underneath," she said. "People just didn't always say it."

Rodriguez spent nearly a year on orders preparing for the mission and developing her skills in supply operations, inventory management and logistics systems. She originally expected to work alongside a senior supply clerk, but the position became vacant before the deployment.

The change left Rodriguez with significantly more responsibility than she had anticipated.

"At first, it was hard," she said. "I didn't fully know what I was doing, but I had people around me who were willing to help."

With support from her leadership and a commitment to improving, Rodriguez learned to manage the section's demands and solve problems more independently. Over time, uncertainty gave way to confidence.

Staff Sgt. Dennis Davis, Rodriguez's non-commissioned officer in charge, said her initiative and ability to prioritize have helped her succeed in the role.

"When I give Cpl. Rodriguez a task list, she is able to determine what is most important and gather the resources she needs to complete it sooner than anticipated or required," Davis said.

Davis said one of the clearest signs of Rodriguez's growth has been her willingness to hold others accountable and assert herself as a leader.

"Supply is extremely complicated and demanding," Davis said. "You have to stand your ground and hold people accountable. Seeing her find her voice and assert her authority to ensure property is taken care of has been amazing."

Several months into the deployment,

Rodriguez said the environment that once felt unfamiliar has become part of her daily routine.

"It doesn't really feel like a deployment anymore," she said. "It just feels like I'm on orders again, only in a different place with different people."

That sense of stability did not come immediately. Rodriguez said the first month tested her ability to adapt, but establishing a routine and building relationships with those around her helped her find her footing.

"I've built strong friendships here," she said. "That's made it a lot easier."

Rodriguez has also made a conscious effort to move beyond her comfort zone. She joined a running team, began working with Soldiers outside her immediate section and embraced opportunities to grow personally and professionally.

"I usually stick to my group and the people I know in my section," she said. "But lately, I've been talking to more people and trying new things."

Serving as a corporal has further challenged Rodriguez to develop her leadership style. As a junior noncommissioned officer working with both junior enlisted Soldiers and more experienced NCOs, she said the role has encouraged her to hold herself to a higher standard.

"I have to show that I deserve to be in that position," Rodriguez said. "I don't think of it as trying to prove myself to anyone but proving things to myself. When you're in competition with yourself, that's really when you're winning in life."

Looking back, Rodriguez said the most difficult part of the deployment was not the mission itself, but the uncertainty she felt before leaving home.

If she could speak to the Soldier she was when she first learned about the deployment in 2024, her message would be simple.

"I would tell myself not to worry so much," Rodriguez said. "This is going to help you grow and open new opportunities for you down the road in your career."



Colorado Army National Guard Cpl. Estefany Rodriguez, a supply specialist from Company A, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment, is currently assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR), Regional Command-East, at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. It's Rodriguez's first deployment which she says has helped her grow as a Soldier and a junior NCO. (U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)

KFOR RC-E Task Force Medical: Always Ready



Florida Army National Guard Capt. Benjamin Duppstadt, right, an emergency medicine physician assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East's Task Force Med, supervises Spc. Nickolas Larin, left, a combat medic, performing suturing procedures on a Soldier at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, May 24, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)

Capt. Balinda O'Neal

134th PAD

What began as a celebration marking 100 days boots on ground quickly became a reminder that emergencies can happen at any time and that Soldiers across Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East stand ready to respond.

During a morale event at Camp Bondsteel, a Soldier assigned to KFOR Regional Command-East collided with a volleyball pole while participating in a blindfolded obstacle challenge, sustaining facial lacerations and a concussion.

The Soldier initially underestimated the severity of his injuries.

"Can I finish the race?" he recalled asking after fellow Soldiers rushed to assist him and removed his blindfold.

Fellow Soldiers immediately rendered aid while members of the Florida Army National Guard's 715th Military Police Company coordinated transportation to the Task Force Medical Clinic.

It was not until he caught a glimpse of his reflection in the vehicle window

during the ride to the clinic that he realized what he thought was sweat running down his face was actually blood.

At Task Force Med, medical personnel with Florida Army National Guard Company C, 53rd Brigade Support Battalion, immediately began evaluating the Soldier for potential head trauma while treating multiple facial lacerations.

"When Capt. Duppstadt arrived, he didn't miss a beat and jumped straight to action," said the Soldier.

For Capt. Benjamin Duppstadt, an emergency medicine physician, the incident demonstrated the importance of maintaining emergency response capabilities at all hours.

According to Duppstadt, Task Force Med maintains continuous emergency response capabilities outside normal clinic operations. A medic remains on duty after hours to receive patients, conduct initial assessments and coordinate with credentialed providers when additional treatment is required.

"We have 24-hour operations outside of our traditional sick call clinic hours," said Duppstadt.

Following the Soldier's arrival at the clinic, medical personnel conducted a comprehensive trauma assessment and Military Acute Concussion Evaluation 2 screening using established protocols. Providers assessed him for signs of more serious head injuries, evaluated neurological function and treated multiple facial lacerations.

Because some of the injuries involved the mouth, Capt. Ramzi Matar, a dental officer, assisted with treatment by administering nerve blocks before wounds were repaired.

The Soldier received both internal and external sutures and was placed on a progressive return to duty plan. Medical personnel continued to monitor his recovery through follow-up evaluations, and he subsequently returned to duty.

While the injury itself was unexpected, the response demonstrated the coordinated efforts required to provide timely medical care in a deployed environment.

The incident also provided a valuable training opportunity for Task Force Med personnel. Under the supervision of credentialed providers, Spc. Nickolas Larin and Sgt. Billy Montalvo, both combat medics, assisted with suturing proce-

dures as part of the Soldier's treatment.

"This is something that we see, fortunately, fairly infrequently during this deployment so far, but it's something that we should know how to do," said Duppstadt. "All 68 Whiskeys should be able to put some sutures in effectively."

For Larin, the opportunity reinforced skills that are routinely practiced during training but less frequently performed in a clinical setting.

"The last time we did suture training was with sewing bags in Germany five months ago," said Larin. "So, doing it on live flesh was a good experience."

The Soldier said hearing the medical team communicate throughout the procedure reinforced his confidence in the care he was receiving.

"What made me comfortable was hearing Capt. Duppstadt and Capt. Matar guide Spc. Larin and Sgt. Montalvo through the entire process, step by step, with each suture," said the Soldier.

Although the injury briefly interrupted the celebration, it also served as a reminder that emergencies can happen at any time. Whether responding to operational requirements, training incidents or unexpected injuries during community events, emergency responders remain prepared to support Soldiers whenever needed.

Looking back on the experience, the Soldier said the incident reinforced his confidence in the medical professionals supporting Soldiers across RC-E.

"Even though I was nervous at first, seeing how Capt. Duppstadt, Capt. Matar, Spc. Larin and Sgt. Montalvo worked together and gave me a lot of confidence in their ability to take care of any Soldier here," said the Soldier.

The incident highlighted the professionalism and teamwork of everyone involved, from fellow Soldiers who rendered immediate aid, to members of the 715th Military Police Company who coordinated transportation, to the Task Force Med personnel who provided treatment and follow up care. Together, their actions ensured the Soldier received timely medical attention when it mattered most.



Florida Army National Guard Sgt. Billy Montalvoarias, right, a combat medic currently assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East's Task Force Med, cleans a wound prior to suturing procedures for a soldier who sustained an unexpected injury on Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo May 24, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)

SKYFALL SIMULATION:

A DOWNED AIRCRAFT EXERCISE

Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount

134th PAD

Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command East's Task Force Aviation and multinational partners conducted a downed aircraft exercise June 25, near Camp Bondsteel, rehearsing search and rescue, medical evacuation and aircraft recovery procedures following a simulated UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter hard landing.

The realistic scenario challenged aviation, medical, maintenance and security personnel to coordinate a rapid response across KFOR RC-E's multinational footprint, reinforcing the force's ability to respond to real-world emergencies.

The exercise unfolded in deliberate phases. After an overdue aircraft report from Task Force Aviation's Tactical Operations Center, aviation crews initiated an overdue aircraft search and directed Tennessee Army National Guard medevac aviators with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment (General Support Aviation Battalion) to the aircraft's last known location.

Shortly after, medevac crews arrived. Flight medics triaged wounded personnel while two litter patients were airlifted and two others were transported by ground ambulance to the Camp Bondsteel Role 1 medical facility.

Finally, the Downed Aircraft Recovery Team (DART), with maintenance specialists from Company D, 2-135 (GSAB) aboard another UH-60 Black Hawk, assessed whether the downed aircraft could be repaired on site, recovered or required removal.

Leaders said the exercise tested command-and-control procedures and coordination across the force.

"We have a bunch of different battle drills within our TOC, one of which is an overdue aircraft procedure," said Colorado ARNG Capt. Alex Aleu, observer-controller-trainer for the exercise and commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2-135 (GSAB). "The exercise tested communications, battle tracking and the flow of critical information from our TOC up to the brigade Joint Operations Center and back down to maneuver elements."

The exercise emphasized the command relationships and the timing required to



Florida Army National Guard combat medics with Company C, 53rd Brigade Support Battalion, assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, load simulated patients from a downed aircraft exercise into a field litter ambulance near Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, June 25, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount)

coordinate a rapid response.

"When you do an incident rehearsal with aviation, there are certain benchmarks you have to hit," said FLARNG Chief Warrant Officer 4 Jimmy Huck, a brigade aviation officer with the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. Huck described how aviation assumes a 15-minute ready posture, tasking medevac assets first while notifying the brigade JOC to mobilize military police, maneuver quick-reaction forces and local law enforcement when necessary.

Capt. Kevon Harris, Huck's brigade aviation counterpart, stressed the JOC's role.

"The JOC also alerts the brigade commander of all resources that are shifted to assist with a scenario of this kind," he said. Harris noted that within four hours the exercise had all elements in place and patients were routed to appropriate care, a standard he called a success.

Medical response was another key focus of the exercise. 1st Lt. Lauren Sokolowski, a brigade medical officer with the 53rd IBCT, highlighted the importance of standardized casualty reporting and movement.

"Our job in medical operations is to facilitate nine-line medevac requests, making sure ground and air assets are tracking and helping with



A Tennessee Army National Guard flight medic with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment (General Support Aviation Battalion), assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, conducts casualty care and triage to Florida ARNG role players during a downed-aircraft exercise in Kosovo, June 25, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount)

casualties.” Sokolowski also said the exercise refined medical equipment and hands-on skills for both medics and nonmedical Soldiers tasked with casualty cards and basic life support.

Interoperability remained a recurring theme. Aviation crews from multiple ARNG units simulated the downed flight crew; Colorado and Tennessee Guard aviators performed the casualty lift; and quick-reaction and security responsibilities flowed between the Florida ARNG’s 715th Military Police Company and the Latvian Armed Forces. Meanwhile, the DART arrived with maintenance personnel to evaluate structural damage and develop a recovery plan, a deliberate, safety-first sequence that ensures the right technicians, tools and approvals are in place before recovery operations begin.

The exercise also underscored the value of



Latvian Armed Forces soldiers assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, provide site security alongside members of the Florida Army National Guard’s 715th Military Police Company, also assigned to RC-E, during a downed-aircraft exercise in Kosovo, June 25, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount)

rehearsal. Aleu said the training is an annual requirement that gains complexity in theater, offering opportunities to integrate NATO partners and host-nation responders in ways not possible at home.

“We practice this stuff stateside, but it’s definitely more encompassing here with all the entities that can have a piece and play in the exercise,” he said.

By day’s end the scenario had given KFOR vital practice in life-saving timelines, multinational coordination and the logistics of aircraft recovery that are all core components of maintaining a safe, secure environment and protecting the people of Kosovo. The real casualty, of course, would be complacency. These rehearsals keep the force ready when lives depend on speed, precision and teamwork.



Tennessee Army National Guard flight medics with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment (General Support Aviation Battalion), assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, escort simulated casualty patients towards a UH-60 Black Hawk for transport to a hospital during a downed-aircraft exercise outside Pristina, Kosovo, June 25, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount)

Soldiers helping Soldiers: More than a closet



Spc. Azavyon McFarland **134th PAD**

At the Camp Bondsteel chapel in Kosovo, where Soldiers gather to share in faith and community, an unassuming shelter just outside provides more than meets the eye.

When Soldiers deploy, they're often in need of extra supplies. When they depart, they have more items than they can bring home. The Soldiers' closet, the official name of the shelter outside the chapel, helps bridge the gap for many Soldiers during a deployment. But it's more than a one-stop shop.

"A lot of the morale items and books are donated from Soldiers from the last rotation or current service members here, so they bring it in and donate it," said Sgt. Marie Pattison, the lead volunteer and a religious affairs specialist with Colorado Army National Guard, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East.

The Soldiers Closet also receives care packages from organizations that support deployed service members. Pattison said volunteers process about 25 to 30 care packages each week, by sorting items, organizing shelves and preparing

donations for others.

The closet serves two purposes, helping Soldiers get what they need while limiting waste footprint during the deployment, Pattison said.

Beyond donations, the Soldiers' Closet has become a small community. Some Soldiers stop by to browse books, look through clothing or find craft supplies. Others come in simply to talk.

"It's become like a little community," Pattison said. "It ties us to previous rotations. There's that feeling of continuity and leaving something for the next people."

The Soldiers' Closet also supports communities beyond Camp Bondsteel. When supplies exceed the needs of the installation, KFOR Liaison Monitoring Teams help distribute items to local organizations in Kosovo, including shelters in need of hygiene products.

Pattison said volunteers have contributed more than 400 hours to keep the space organized and welcoming.

"I'm so proud of my volunteers," Pattison said. "They are some of the best people."

For the Soldiers who donate, volunteer or stop by, the closet is more than a room of supplies. It has become a place for giving, conversation and community.

Deployment Highlights

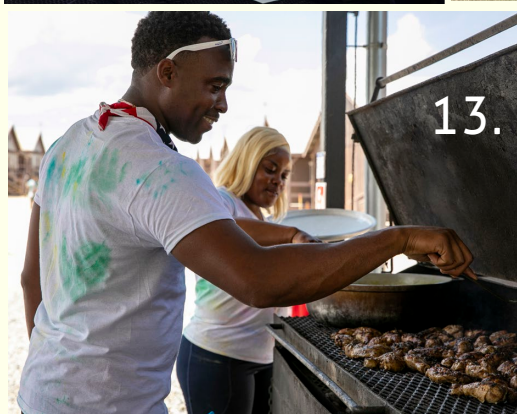
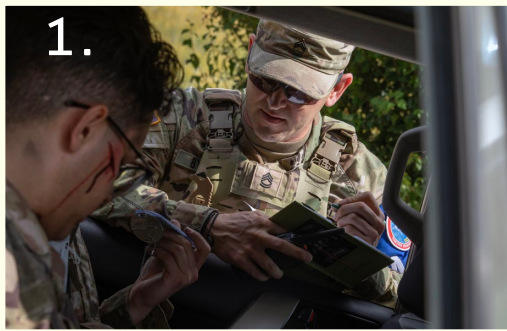


Photo Captions

- 1.** Florida Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Steven Byram, the incident commander with the 715th Military Police Company, assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, identifies medical interventions on a tactical casualty card belonging to a FLARNG patient role player during a downed-aircraft exercise in Kosovo, June 25, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount)
- 3.** Florida Army National Guard Spc. Cameron Shepherd, a part of Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East's Liaison Monitoring Teams, pours water into a squirt gun for kids at a community day event in Kamenicë/Kamenica, June 20, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Spencer Rhodes)
- 5.** A U.S. Army UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment (General Support Aviation Battalion), supporting Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, flies over Pristina, Kosovo, with a U.S. flag displayed from its open cabin door during a flyover supporting the U.S. Embassy's Independence Day celebration, June 30, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Balinda O'Neal)
- 7.** Florida Army National Guard Capt. Mary Samarkos, a legal officer with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, throws a football while playing with students during a U.S. Independence Day celebration at Future School in Gjilan/Gnjilane, Kosovo, July 3, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Spencer Rhodes)
- 9.** 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, July 6, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)
- 11.** U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East pose for a group photo with students and teachers from Future School following a U.S. Independence Day celebration in Gjilan/Gnjilane, Kosovo, July 3, 2026. The event featured games, cultural exchange and informal engagement, strengthening relationships between KFOR Soldiers and the local community. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount)
- 13.** Florida Army National Guard Soldiers from Troop A, 1st Squadron, 153rd Cavalry Regiment, currently assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, cook Jerk Chicken for participants of the 5k Color Run after the event at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, June 5, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Spencer Rhodes)
- 15.** Tennessee Army National Guard Sgt. Stetson Dewberry, currently assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, pushes through the final two miles of the Norwegian Ruck March at Camp Bondsteel Kosovo, May 17, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Spencer Rhodes)
- 2.** Florida Army National Guard Soldiers from Troop A, 1st Squadron, 153rd Cavalry Regiment, conduct an infil drop-off at the start of a patrol along the Kosovo Administrative Boundary Line, June 27, 2026. (Courtesy photo)
- 4.** Florida Army National Guard Maj. Adam Glassick, a physician assistant with Company C, 53rd Brigade Support Battalion, assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East Task Force Medical, demonstrates airway-opening techniques for healthcare professionals at Ambulanta Kodra e Minatorëve in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Kosovo, July 13, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)
- 6.** Florida Army National Guard Sgt. Timothy Matthews, right, with C Troop, 1st Squadron, 153rd Cavalry Regiment, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East's Liaison Monitoring Team, poses for a photo with a young student from the English Language Corner in Kamenicë/Kamenica, Kosovo, after he was able to don Matthews' gear, during a community day event, June 20, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Spencer Rhodes)
- 8.** Florida Army National Guard Soldiers with Troop A, 1st Squadron, 153rd Cavalry Regiment, assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, conduct a patrol along the Kosovo Administrative Boundary Line, June 24, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)
- 10.** Ryan McCombs, vocalist for American rock band Drowning Pool, performs at an Armed Forces Entertainment concert at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, July 1, 2026. Events like this boost troop morale, strengthen unit cohesion and resilience, and support Kosovo Force (KFOR)'s mission by sustaining the readiness and well-being of forces who maintain a safe and secure environment for all people in Kosovo. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Seth LaCount)
- 12.** From left to right, Florida Army National Guard Sgt. Jessica Siragusa, Spc. Alexzandria Smith, Sgt. Justin Preston and Sgt. Billy Montalvoarias, from Company C, 53rd Brigade Support Battalion, all assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East, pose for a photo during the 100 Days Boots on Ground event at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marc Marmeto)
- 14.** A German Soldier assigned to Kosovo Force (KFOR) Regional Command-East briefs other NATO partner nation service members assigned to KFOR RC-E, including Florida Army National Guard Soldiers, prior to the start of the official German "Schützenschnur," at Camp Novo Selo, Kosovo, April 23, 2026. The Schützenschnur is a joint training event where foreign service members are able to fire German weapons to earn the official German Marksmanship Badge. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st. Class Nicholas Quevedo)



Gator Outreach Program Presents:

Pristina Animal Shelter

Saturdays from 0800-1700

What You Can Do:



Play with Dogs



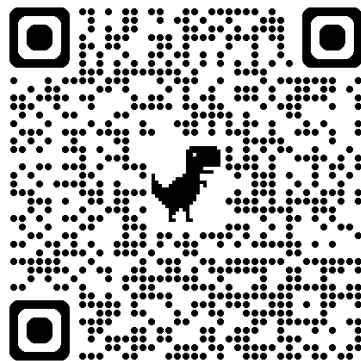
Build & Clean Shelters



Earn hours towards your Volunteer Service Medal



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KOSOVO FORCE 36 PHOTOS



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Commander

SSG Spencer Rhodes,
RC-E Public Affairs NCOIC

SSG Seth LaCount,
PAD NCOIC

SSG Marc Marmeto,
Public Affairs NCO

SPC Azavyon McFarland
Public Affairs Specialist

We hope you've enjoyed the content featured in this newsletter and across multiple social media platforms, DVIDS, and the public photo drive. If you have story ideas, photos, or events you'd like highlighted, we welcome your submissions and are happy to help share your story. The earlier content is submitted, the better we can support future coverage.

