



Enforcing Peace

A chronological record of the deployment of the
1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry Regiment to Kosovo
October, 2008 to November, 2009

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Chapter One

Ethnic Strife

History is a long chain of events—like building stones in a wall, compounding and falling into place over time towards what seems, in retrospect, to be an inevitable conclusion: some glorious or catastrophic event in the consciousness of human beings that is to be remembered for its magnificence or tragedy, depending on who is telling the story. Every nation has a history, even small ones like Kosovo.

Kosovo is a new nation carved out of a small southern region of Montenegro, formerly part of the federation of Yugoslavia, populated by about two million people, mostly ethnic Albanians. The first link in the modern history of Kosovo was forged in 1389, when Prince Lazar made a stand at “Kosovo Polje” (The Field of Blackbirds) against the invading Turkish Ottoman Empire and lost, introducing Islamic Albanians into the region. The Albanians were attracted by the fertile lands of Serbia in contrast with the rock-strewn mountains whence they came. Until then, the region had been predominantly Serbian and Orthodox Christian.

The next few centuries saw increasing migrations of Albanians into Kosovo and native Serbs fleeing to Bosnia until the Albanians became an overwhelming majority in Kosovo. But the Serbs never forgot, and a wave of new Serbian nationalism in the nineteenth century called on patriots to “Avenge Kosovo!” Albanians too, formed the “League of Prizren”



Map of Kosovo in 1912

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initiating Albanian nationalism, which of course infected Kosovo, in response to the passions of the Serb minorities within the region and the greater Serb majority in Bosnia.

By 1912, the Ottoman Empire was collapsing and Serbia joined other Balkan states to drive the Turks out of Europe. The arrival of the Serbian army under the Austria-Hungarian Empire in Kosovo was seen as liberation by the Serbian minority, but despised as an occupation by the Albanian majority. Bloody massacres and expulsions soon followed and were never forgotten.



Slobodan Milosevic

On June 28, 1914, Archduke Ferdinand of Austria and his wife were shot dead by a “Young Bosnian” Serb assassin, in a conspiracy with the Serbian military. Their objective was to break Austria-Hungary’s hold on the southern provinces so they could create a “Greater Serbia,” or a new Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, this act ignited World War I, due to a web of secret treaties and mutual defense pacts throughout Europe. It was during this war that the Serbian government of Kosovo was defeated and the Albanians took their revenge on the retreating Serbian troops. At the end of the war, however, it was the Serbians’ turn, as the army of what was then called Yugoslavia returned.

Between World War I and World War II, there were attempts by the Serbs to recover the region by sending in settlers, but these efforts were met with Albanian uprisings and unrest. The cycles of violence and reprisals continued into World War II, when Josip Tito, then Communist leader of the Yugoslavian Partisans, appeared to promise the Kosovar Albanians that the region could reunite

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with Albania after the war if they would join him against the Germans and Bulgarians.

Of course, this promise wasn't kept and after the war, President Tito, in the name of his Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, had to keep a tight lid on the province. Nevertheless, Kosovo was given full autonomy within Yugoslavia in 1974. This didn't satisfy the Albanians, who irritated the Serbs by demanding that they become a fully independent republic of Kosovo, but it wasn't recognized.

After Tito's death in 1980, the head of the Serbian Communist Party, Slobodan Milosevic, took over the reins of the country and a resurgence of ethnic and national strife began. In the following years, Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina all declared independence, ratcheting ethnic and nationalistic strife up to the breaking point.

In 1991, Bosnia erupted into war, during which millions were displaced and thousands died. In 1992, Milosevic formed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but it was not recognized by the West. By 1995, a fragile peace was realized



Ethnic composition of Kosovo in 2005

with the Dayton Accords, which was signed by Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia, but the country was divided up into three separate enclaves, each dominated by a different ethnic group.

In the late 1990s, the militant Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) had been formed and was busy attacking the Serbian police force and staging terrorist bomb attacks. Milosevic sent troops in to suppress the unrest, thus igniting a guerilla war. Conflicting separatist movements clashed with the police and traded sniper attacks, assassi-

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nations, and mass murders in numerous guerilla incidents. Finally, using NATO muscle, the U.N. moved to end the conflicts with calls for a negotiated truce complete with sanctions against the government and some two thousand “peace keeping” troops on the ground.

Even then, there was little real peace, and in one village it was discovered that nearly forty ethnic Albanians had been executed by Serbian forces and dumped into mass graves. In response to the international publicity this “ethnic cleansing” generated, President Bill Clinton, through NATO, accused Milosevic of sponsoring the violence and warned him that Yugoslavia would be subject to air strikes if he didn’t put an end to it. These blatant crimes against humanity were perpetuated against ethnic Albanians by the Milosevic regime which resulted in about 90% of the ethnic Albanian population moving en masse to the borders of neighboring countries. The United Nations Security Resolution (UNSCR) 1244 provided the legal framework for KFOR’s presence and was the source authority for UN intervention. Despite repeated attempts to negotiate a peaceful resolution, in March, 1999, President Clinton carried out his threat by launching air strikes on Serbian targets including the capital city of Belgrade for seventy-two straight days.

Montenegro had threatened to separate from Serbia and general elections were called in Yugoslavia in September, 1999. When Milosevic refused to concede his loss, an uprising began in Belgrade, with a million people marching on the capital and mobs attacking the Parliament building. The turmoil continued on in the ensuing years with Yugoslavia dissolving into a federation of Serbia and Montenegro, which included Kosovo. Although Milosevic was subsequently arrested and tried for crimes against humanity by an International Tribunal at The Hague, hundreds of civilians were killed or injured in ethnic violence on both sides.

Today, things have improved, but there is still an uneasy peace, with U.N. and NATO troops stationed there to keep the ethnic factions from killing each other. In addition, they must insure that the newly independent nations of Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia continue to build strong, stable governments and grow clean and prosperous economies.

At the time of this publication, Kosovo remains challenged with a weak economy dependent on foreign aid, high unemployment, rampant corruption, dilapidated infrastructure, and continued high levels of ethnic tension and unrest. Organized crime is widespread and engages in the cross-border smuggling of commodities, drugs, and arms, and is believed by many to influence local and na-

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tional politics. Ethnic violence is still present, particularly in the north. Although the Republic of Kosovo declared independence on February 17, 2008, the Republic of Serbia refuses to recognize it and remains influential within all ethnic Serbian enclaves, resourcing local “parallel governments” to provide services to ethnic Serbians. Local police are professional and well-trained, but are poorly equipped and beholden to potentially corrupt local politicians. ¹

Enter the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry Regiment who were alerted in 2008 for deployment to Kosovo as part of Multinational Task Force (East) (MNTF-E) of Kosovo Force, rotation eleven (KFOR-11). MNTF-E was controlled by Task Force Falcon, commanded by BG Keith Jones assisted by CSM Whittle. The KFOR 11 Task Force Falcon was composed of six battalions: the combined Polish-Ukrainian maneuver battalion (TF POLUKR), the Greek maneuver battalion (TF HELLAS), two U.S. maneuver battalions (TF SABRE and TF NIGHTSTALKER), a helicopter battalion (TF ARCTIC EAGLE), and a medical battalion (TF MED).

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Chapter Two

1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry Regiment

As part of the California National Guard, the men and women of the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry Regiment are true “Citizen Soldiers.” They come from all walks of life to spend their weekends training and preparing to defend their state or their country. They may be “Weekend Warriors”, but when they put on their ACUs and get to work, they’re all professional soldiers, the likes of which would have made our forefathers proud, combining *esprit des corps*, discipline, and high technology state-of-the-art equipment that gives them amazing combat capabilities.

The history of the 18th Cavalry dates back to 1885, when they were originally chartered as the 7th Infantry Regiment of the California National Guard. Later, they were consecutively identified as the 160th, the 185th, and the 223rd Infantry Regiments, until 1951, when they became the 111th Armored Cavalry. They finally received their modern identification as the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry Regiment in 1974.

In the past 116 years of proud and loyal service, they have earned campaign ribbons from active duty in World War I, World War II, The Korean Conflict, and as part of KFOR 11 (Kosovo Force 11) in 2009. The unit has been awarded a Philippine Presidential Unit Citation and the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation for their heroic actions in those theatres of war.



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The 1-18th Cavalry was mobilized for State Active Duty during the Los Angeles riots of May, 1992, for Operation Noble Eagle in 2003-2004, and during the Southern California wildfires of 2007. Their unit motto, “*Velox et Mortifer*” is Latin for “Swift and Deadly.”

Today, the Regiment is headquartered in a beautiful new brick and glass armory in Azusa, California. The unit currently serves as the Reconnaissance Element for the 79th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) attached to the 40th Infantry Division, headquartered in Los Alamitos, California. Their present mission is Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition (RSTA). As such, the 1-18th Cavalry is composed of two mounted cavalry, one dismounted infantry troop, and a Headquarters and Headquarters Troop. A dedicated combat service company is attached for direct support. (A troop is equivalent to a company of approximately 120 men.) The mounted reconnaissance troops are equipped with armored HMMWVs (“Humvees”) for self-transportation, while the dismounted infantry troops are typically deployed by either aircraft or cargo vehicle. As befits their 21st Century reconnaissance mission, the unit is outfitted with the latest combat equipment, including the Long Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System (LRAS3) for all-weather 24-hour long range surveillance and laser targeting, digital satellite battlefield management and communication equipment, body armor, and a formidable array of hand-held and crew-served weapons, from M-4 carbines to shoulder-launched missiles and heavy mortars.

Pride and high morale are hallmarks of the 1-18th Cavalry. Continuing traditions that date from the “Horse Cavalry” of the Old West, they proudly wear broad-brimmed black Stetsons with crossed sabers on the crown—a jolting anachronism when first seen on a soldier in digitally camouflaged ACUs.

Troopers are awarded spurs after completing the arduous “Spur Ride”, which they wear with honor and distinction during Cavalry ceremonies.



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Chapter Three

Task Force “Sabre”

Although the 1-18th Cavalry had not yet received a mobilization alert order, by the second quarter, 2008, the requirements and organization of the two U.S. maneuver battalions were settled. They would be composed of three combat arms companies and a small headquarters company; a support company was unneeded. In an effort to preserve future mobilization flexibility, state military headquarters decided that troop and squadron headquarters would not be deployed; the Troopers within these units would be transferred into “derivative” units for deployment. State military headquarters also decided that Troop C would not deploy, but the 140th Engineer Support Company (ESC) would after receiving combat arms military occupational specialty training (MOS-T).

Task Force Sabre was organized from the organic units of the 1-18th Cavalry and the 140th Engineer Support Company. The required strength of the derivative units exceeded the deployable strength of Troops A and B, so deployable Infantrymen from Troop C and Engineers from the 140th ESC were reassigned to them. TF Sabre Headquarters was populated with Troopers from HHT/1-18th Cavalry.

Not many know why the Cavalry Task Force was called “Task Force Sabre.” LTC Staack relates this story:

“Right in the middle of a brief during KFOR 11 Planning Conference in August 2008, a civilian contractor within the 205th Training Support Brigade asked me what the name of my task force would be. Not having given it a lick of thought until then, I defaulted to the Brigade SOP name for the 1-18th Cavalry, “SABER.” The contractor rolled his eyes and muttered, “That’s original.” Thinking fast, I retorted, “My Task Force is spelled S, A, B, R, E, like the old U.S. Cavalry spelling.”

By October, 2008, final plans for Task Force Sabre had been drawn up; personnel rosters were fully manned; and orders had been issued. Task Force Sabre was commanded by LTC Lars Staack, assisted by CSM Walter Murray. Troops A and B and the 140th ESC were designated maneuver companies, commanded by CPT Harley and CPT Sean Byrne, respectively. Support came from Headquarters Troop, commanded by CPT Trevor Phillips. CPT Bill Amran would

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Task Force “Sabre”

Senior Leader Organization Chart



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return to home station after mobilization to serve as the Rear Detachment Commander.

LTC Staack commented on preparations for deployment: “Pre-mob training was particularly challenging. We had been ordered to leave one of our Troops behind and accept the attachment of an unfamiliar Engineer Support Company; but two-thirds of the Soldiers within that company did not have a Combat Arms MOS and needed one prior to deployment. Our obligation to deploy a Troop and Squadron Headquarters to the Ukraine for “Rapid Trident 2008” would not be rescinded. The amount of mandatory pre-mob training for our citizen-soldiers was staggering, but authorized funding for additional pre-mob training periods and full-time augmenters would not be provided. We prevailed over these obstacles in true Cavalry fashion. Weekend drill periods and Annual Training (AT) would be lengthened by borrowing future training time; training periods would be staggered to extract the most from each period; and required pre-mob tasks would be accomplished while performing in the Ukraine. The level of commitment from Troopers was astounding. Many had to attend multiple schools, multiple ATs, and long IDTs while simultaneously holding down their civilian job and assuring their families that all would be well. The Soldiers of the 140th had it even tougher. Many had to attend Combat Engineer School in addition to everything else. I knew that they would feel a little like a “step child”, so I did all I could to integrate them into Squadron activities and make them feel like part of Task Force Sabre.”

LTC Staack’s staff would consist of

- ◆ Executive Officer - MAJ James Westerfield
- ◆ Chaplain - CPT Saul Castillo
- ◆ Personnel Officer (S-1) - 1LT Richard Counts
- ◆ Intelligence Officer (S-2) - 2LT Christopher Van Meter
- ◆ Operations Officer (S-3) - MAJ Dennis Keener
- ◆ Logistics and Materiel Officer (S-4) - CPT Trevor Phillips (additionally served as the HHT Commander)
- ◆ Communications Officer (S-6) - CPT Steven Weatherton
- ◆ Information Operations Officer (S-7) - CPT Duc Vo
- ◆ Civil Military Operations Officer (S-9) - CPT William Foss

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Southern California has always been a very diverse community, with every race and culture in the world toiling and living together in a varied and beautiful natural environment. As a microcosm of California, the 1-18th Cavalry is as diverse as the community it serves, creating a tolerant attitude that would serve it well in a place like Kosovo, a country where the populations had been killing each other simply for their ethnicity for hundreds of years. The young soldiers of the 1-18th Cavalry were up to the task at hand—defending the peace. Many of the 1-18th Cavalry had never been deployed overseas before and the anticipation was high.

The next step would be Pre-Mobilization (“Pre-Mob”) training.

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Chapter Four

“Pre-Mob”

It was still dark on Saturday, November 1, 2008, when Alpha Troop, Bravo Troop, Headquarters Troop, and the 140th Engineering Support Company arrived at their armories to prepare for the trip to Camp San Luis Obispo (CSLO) and pre-mobilization training. Later, they would be going to Camp Roberts (“Camp Bob” as they referred to it) in northern California. “Task Force Sabre,” the code name for the Kosovo deployment, was becoming a reality.

At the armory, rosters and records were checked and updated, while weapons and equipment were inventoried, issued, assembled, and checked. Of particular interest was the new M68 Close Combat Optics (CCO) sight system for the M4 carbine. The troopers had to install it themselves and were eager to try it out on the ranges.



Welcome to Camp San Luis Obispo

1 November 2008

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When roll calls had been completed, paperwork signed and filed, equipment checked and packed, and last minute goodbyes said, Task Force Sabre loaded onto their vehicles and began the four-hour journey to CSLO. As they rolled through the scenic Central Coast wine country of California, the men couldn't help but think about the future deployment, what it would be like over there, and how they and their families were going to get through the coming year. It was cool and overcast when they arrived at CSLO, but after a hot meal, they unpacked their gear and settled in for the upcoming week of training.

The focus for the next 30 days was to complete the specific qualifications required to progress to post-mobilization training at Camp Atterbury, Indiana. Specifically, every Trooper had to complete their unique requirements for Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills (WT&BD), Collective Tasks, Theater Specific Individual Readiness Training (TSIRT), Theater Specific Leadership Tasks, Individual and Crew Served Weapons Qualification, and Combat Lifesaver Qualification.

Every day started with a hot breakfast served either in the modern CSLO Dining Facility or from an outdoor "chow line," after-which, a refresher course of "Army Warrior Training" (AWT) began. This was intended to give troopers the opportunity to refresh skills that are essential to combat operations. After breakfast, the troopers re-familiarized themselves with the finer points of weapons and tactics in the classrooms and on the ranges.

There was training on the 9 mm M9 pistol, the M240B 5.56 mm machine gun, the M4 carbine and "Battle Drill Lane" exercises where the troopers practiced simulated patrols in Humvees through varied terrain, encountering different situations, both friendly and hostile—something they would soon be doing for real in Kosovo.

As important as the exercise was for the troopers, it was also an exercise in communication and control for leaders in the field and at



Hot chow at Camp SLO

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the command center, where the daily action was monitored and directed by staff personnel. At the end of the day, the Squadron's performance was critiqued and discussed at staff meetings.

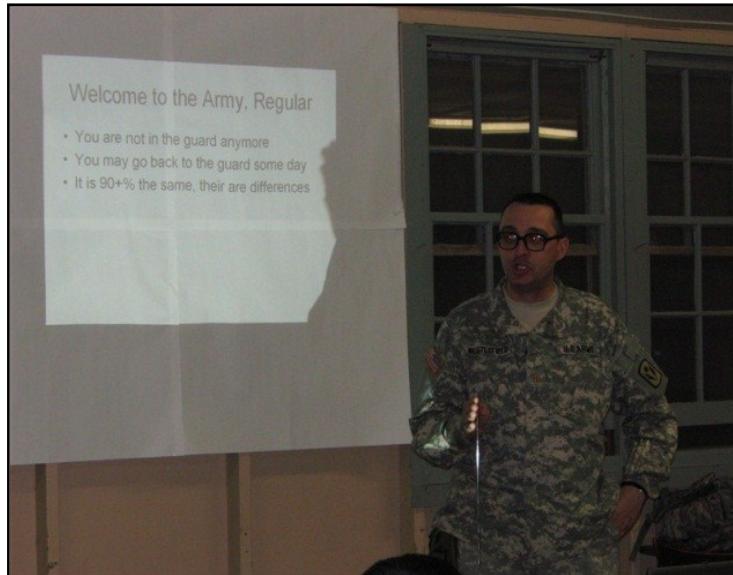


“Sabre 3” leads another daily training meeting with Unit Commanders

The following week found Task Force Sabre at Camp Roberts, also known as “Camp Bob” where D Troop had the honor of serving up the chow in the more primitive mess hall. On Monday, the officers were briefed by MAJ Westerfield on the implications of being in the Regular Army; for they would be “activated” for Kosovo. *“Welcome to The Regular Army”* a PowerPoint slide read:

- ◆ ***“You are not in the Guard anymore”***
- ◆ ***“You may go back to The Guard someday”***
- ◆ ***“It is 90% the same; there are differences”***

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Active duty reality sinks in!

Out on the ranges at Camp Roberts, the troopers set about zeroing the sights on their M4 carbines and qualifying on targets that popped-up at different distances—from 25 to 300 meters. Troopers had to shoot from the standing, kneeling, and prone positions, and even while wearing a gas mask. It was here that they got to try out their new Sight Picture CCO scopes, and the response was generally “thumbs-up.” Sometimes logistics dictated that MREs (Meals, Ready to Eat) were issued for lunch, adding to the simulated combat conditions, not to mention the obvious culinary delight!

On the machine gun range, the troopers got to fire the M249 machine gun, a 7.62 mm rapid fire beast with an effective range of up to 800 meters and a maximum range of 3,000 meters. The troops looked forward to “rockin’ and rollin’” on the M249 which, being able to punch through the masonry that often provides cover for urban combatants, is more powerful than the M240B. Some of them hadn’t fired an M249 since Basic Training, if ever.

But the fun didn’t stop there! The next day, they were trained on the MK19 40 mm machine gun, a chain-fed monster on steroids that can lob a rapid volley of deadly little golf ball-sized grenades a couple of hundred meters with devastating results. The 40 mm grenade round is unique in that it makes a hollow “thump” when fired, followed a couple of seconds later by a very loud, satisfying “CHAM!” when it hits the target and detonates. When the MK19 fires a vol-

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ley, there is a “Th-th-th-th-thump ...” followed by “CH-CH-CH-CH-CHAM!” invariably bringing a grin to the face of the first-time shooter.



On the rifle range at Camp “Bob”

The following weekend, with the sun sinking in the west, the old camp barracks and streets echoed with the venerable marching cadences and Jody calls that are a signature of the U.S. Army, evoking the days when Camp Roberts was swollen with thousands of young recruits being trained to take on the Germans, the Japanese, the North Koreans, and the Viet Cong. Today, it was only the 1-18th Cavalry, forming up to receive awards and promotions—

most notably, the promotions of Staff Sergeants Daniels and Gaudia, who was given his next stripe by LTC Wallis, his former Battalion Commander.

Training resumed on Monday, as the troops went off to a live firing range for the M203 grenade launcher, a deadly attachment for the M16 family of weapons, including the M4 carbine. The M203 is a short tube and trigger assembly mounted under the rifle barrel that allows the soldier to fire single 40 mm grenades, in addition to his 5.56 mm rifle, rather like an old “over-and-under” combination rifle and shotgun. Various targets included simulated bunkers, small buildings with windows and vehicles at various ranges. Shots were taken from the standing and prone positions.

The troopers were told to spare any wildlife that might wander into their sights on the range, except the ubiquitous little ground squirrels that Camp Roberts seems to have in abundance. If they were to cease firing to avoid the squirrels, they could never fire a shot!

At the same time, other troopers were trained on the 12 gauge



A range at Camp Roberts

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combat shotgun, a version of the black “riot gun” used by police forces for close combat in the field or urban environments. The combat shotgun facilitates quick reaction shots that don’t allow for precise aiming. Its outstanding feature is that, in addition to the intimidation factor, it provides positive stopping power, without blasting through interior walls, possibly injuring innocent or friendly personnel in the next room.



Clearing an M240B machine gun



Saber 5 works on his tan while waiting for the M9 range to go “hot”



Home on the range

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Towards the end of the week, the squadron participated in communications training followed by Kosovo preparation and familiarization training in the classroom. From a command post set up in one of Camp Robert's old classrooms, squadron leaders and staff honed their command and communication skills, running simulations and drills of possible scenarios that might be encountered during deployment. The Squadron's time at Camp Roberts was nearly over.

On Sunday, November 25, the Task Force was assembled in the Camp Roberts field house for a departure ceremony. Family and friends of the Troopers were there to view the traditional military pageantry, accompanied by the 40th Infantry Division Band.



Casing the colors

tom when a unit is about to be deployed, the Squadron colors were ceremonially rolled up and placed in a protective case, not to be unfurled again until they took command in Kosovo.

That evening, officers and senior NCOs gathered to celebrate, presenting honorary Cavalry Stetsons to BG Jones and CSM Whittle. As the Squadron Leaders looked on, the pair were initiated in a "Wetting Down" Ceremony

"Stars and Stripes Forever" echoed in the cavernous hall as 40th Division Commander, MG John Harrell, California National Guard Commander, BG Keith Jones, and senior staff passed in review before the formation. In his remarks, General Harrell praised the troops for their professionalism and excellence during this phase of the training, and proclaimed that Task Force Sabre was "Green (ready) all around!" Then, as is the cus-



Trooping the line

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where they quaffed non-alcoholic drinks from their new Stetsons. (Alcoholic beverages were prohibited per General Order Number 1). Later, General Jones Awarded CSM Claude the Meritorious Service Medal for his performance as Acting Command Sergeant Major of the 79th Brigade Special Troops Battalion.

In his closing remarks, General Jones said that the 1-18th Cavalry was going to have a crucial role in Kosovo. He said the gathering of intelligence is essential to controlling the situation and maintaining the peace. *“Our role is to observe, and provide a safe and secure environment,”* he said, *“Our motto will be Peacemakers - Freedom’s Forge.”*



**BG Jones and CSM Claude about to receive their
Cavalry Stetsons**

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MG Harrell and LTC Staack at the farewell gala

The 1-18th Cavalry was ready to go on to the next phase, Post Mobilization Training: Urban Warfare and Non-Lethal Weapons training at Camp Atterbury near Edinburgh, Indiana. Then it would be on to the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) at Hohenfels, Germany for the final collective certification, and finally on to Kosovo!

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Chapter Five

Camp Atterbury

It was dawn, Friday, December 5, 2008. This was it! The 1-18th Cavalry was leaving California and wouldn't return for one year. Troopers said goodbye to their loved ones and friends and gathered at the Azusa armory to prepare for their departure.

At about 0700 hours, the men were ordered to fall in. First, roll calls were completed—everyone was present or accounted for. Then, after a few words from LTC Staack, several promotions and awards were made, and the order to fall out was issued. The troopers began to load their gear onto the vehicles waiting to take them to John Wayne Airport in nearby Orange County. There, they were going to board a chartered Northwest Airways jumbo jet waiting to take them to Camp Atterbury Joint Maneuver Training Center, twenty-five hundred miles away, in Edinburgh, Indiana.



**Awards and Decorations ceremony
prior to departure**

Built at the beginning of World War II, Camp Atterbury had trained troops for several infantry divisions that saw action in Europe, and had even served as a prisoner-of-war camp, housing German and Italian prisoners. Later, it was assigned to the U.S. Air Force and then the Indiana Na-

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tional Guard. In the fall of 2008, it was an important facility for thousands of regular and reserve forces who trained there for the unique circumstances they would encounter when they would be deployed to Kosovo, Afghanistan, or Iraq.



Loading up for Camp Atterbury

the troops retired to a nearby USO Lounge to play pool and foosball, watch TV, drink soft drinks, or try to nap, while the talented SGT James played a few riffs on the electric guitar provided by the USO.

By 0930 hours, the Squadron was on the tarmac at John Wayne Airport, waiting with all of their personal gear to board the jet. It was a beautiful, warm Southern California December day and in the best traditions of the Army, men lay on top of their bags in the shadow of the big jet, “trying to catch up on a few Z’s” while they waited. Since this was a charter flight, it took a while to load all of their bags and ready the plane, so some of



A few “Z’s” before leaving

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Finally, at about 1230 hours, they began to board and they were on their way. They arrived in Indiana at about 1930 hours, central time. When the door was opened and the ramp was pushed up to the airplane, they stepped off into a cold Indiana winter night. They knew they'd better get used to it because this is where they were going to be for the remainder of the year and who knew what the winter weather was going to be like in Kosovo?

After arriving at Camp Atterbury, they immediately began processing at the Soldier Readiness Center, a new facility that can process up to three hundred soldiers a day. Here, their records were updated, medical fitness determined, immunizations brought up to date, and all of the other sundry bureaucratic things the Army requires for mobilization were accomplished. At about 0130 hours, the troops were given a mobilization briefing and finally allowed to go to bed. It had been a long day and it was guaranteed there were going to be more where that came from! For

the next eight weeks, they would be trained for deployment overseas. Sometimes it would be grueling; sometimes it would be fun, but it was always intense and interesting.



Arriving at Camp Atterbury



**Urban warfare training at
Camp Atterbury**

The 1-18th Cavalry wasn't going to war; this was literally going to be a "police action," so in addition to the traditional warrior skills intended to be used for "killing and breaking things," they had to be trained in the non-lethal weapons and tactics that are familiar to police forces the world over in preparation to manage what was euphemistically called "the worst day in Kosovo", similar to the events of March

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2004. As 1LT Cyrus Harrell would later put it, these warriors had to “*kind of tone it down a little bit,*” saying that the troopers had to “*be significantly less aggressive*” than they would expect to be in a combat situation—a real concern, and not as easy as it sounds.

This meant being taught how to form up into a human barrier two or three men deep, with large Plexiglas shields to protect them from any projectiles a mob might throw at them, or learning how to use just their hands and a baton to take down an unruly, un-armed civilian for arrest without injuring him. They would learn how to use the FN 303 compressed air gun to fire non-lethal paint balls to mark or deter any trouble-makers that might get out of control in a demonstration or mob action, and how to use the M203 grenade launcher to fire rubber projectiles or tear gas to dissuade any malicious advances or attempted assaults by the crowd.



The FN 303 compressed air paint ball gun



Anti-riot training

At one crowd control drill, the “aggressors” were simulated by well-padded 1-18th Cavalry troopers wearing red or yellow tee shirts, yelling at the phalanx of defenders or trying to pelt them with rocks or bottles. Some, like the “mother with child” role that SGT Cabrerra played while cradling a baby doll, were innocent by-

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standers or victims. This training was not always fun and games for the trooper who was playing the aggressor. At one point, it got so realistic that red-shirted CSM Claude received a bloody lip for his efforts.

One of the more memorable courses involved the use of pepper spray. As the name implies, pepper spray is a commercial distillation of hot chili pepper essences in a small spray can. Not only did each trooper have to be trained on how and when to use this liquid fire, but then they had to experience it themselves by having their eyes sprayed and then being forced to use a baton to blindly “fight” their way through a couple of “aggressors.” Only then were they allowed to wash their stinging eyes with cold water and recuperate. The cold water felt good on their faces despite the freezing weather, but it was still several minutes before the stinging went away and they could see clearly again.



CSM Claude gets a “taste” of very realistic training!



A little pepper spray makes for very realistic training

Another non-lethal weapon added to their arsenal was the taser, a small hand-held weapon that fires a couple of wires with barbs on the ends and delivers ten thousand volts of non-lethal electric current into the hapless victim. When the strongest man gets hit with a taser, he can only fall on the ground and writhe in pain for several minutes afterwards, totally incapacitated. Troopers were trained on how and when to use it, and hearty volunteers were hand-wired to experience its effects on them-

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selves. Some cried out; others didn't; but they all grimaced and convulsed with pain—a badge of courage rightly earned, with bragging rights!

This was the age of the roadside IED (improvised explosive device), and an amazing machine called the “Humvee Egress Assistance Trainer” simulated what it's like to be inside a Humvee that gets rolled over by the blast of an IED.

Essentially, the device is a complete Humvee chassis on a motorized spit. It rotates through 360° over and over, scrambling and disorienting the troopers and their equipment inside, until coming to rest upside down. That's when the squad must quickly find their way out of the vehicle and be prepared to defend themselves, since it might be on fire or subject to an RPG round or other fatal attack.

It wasn't easy getting out; your head would still be spinning and you didn't know which way was up for several seconds. The machine gunner's position on top was the most at risk, as he could get thrown out or crushed in the rollover, so he had to learn how to duck down immediately to protect himself. Even in this relatively slow, gentle simulation,



The Humvee Egress Assistance Trainer

with no-one injured, the troopers still had trouble opening the doors and exiting with their rifles at the ready.

In the course of training for their operations in Kosovo, the regiment practiced how to plan and execute patrols in urban or rural civilian areas using the Humvee as their patrol vehicle in addition to the traditional methods used on foot in forests or unimproved

areas. Commanders practiced laying out patrol routes through towns and villages with code names like “Droopy” and “Tweety” laid out in crude models on a classroom floor.

Local civilian volunteers played Kosovars with scripted situations or problems to present to the troops as they passed through the simulated village or farmland. In addition, the troopers practiced patrolling in up-armor Humvees or rapid insertion into trouble areas with their riot gear by helicopter. Abandoned buildings on the base were used to train the troopers in urban cordon-and-search tactics, teaching them how to safely surround, enter, secure, and search a building for suspected militants or contraband.

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Troopers were allowed leave to visit family during Christmas if they wished to pay their own airfare, or a pass if they remained in the Edinburgh area. However, New Year's, 2009 passed at Camp Atterbury with the troopers thinking of family and friends back in warm, sunny, California.

Now it was time to deploy overseas. Next stop: Hohenfels, Germany!

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Chapter Six

Hohenfels, Germany

On January 21, 2009, the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry Regiment stepped off a chartered World Airways jumbo jet onto a cold, wet, tarmac somewhere in Europe. The place was Hohenfels, Germany. Now there would be no more anticipation, no more planning, no more worry that some detail had been forgotten. Now there would be action—the deployment had become real!

Hohenfels is the name for a small town in Bavaria, about 60 miles from the Czechoslovakian border and an hour and a half drive from Munich. Hohenfels means “High Rock” or “High Cliff” in German. Originally, it was a training area for Hitler’s army.



It was commandeered in 1951 for use by American and NATO forces in the Cold War. In 1988, it became the home of the U.S. Army’s Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC). Its mission was “to provide realistic combined arms training for the United States and NATO forces in force-on-force exercises.” In December 2005, it became known as the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC), where multinational troops were to be given final orientation and training for deployment to places like Kosovo and Afghanistan.

Task Force Sabre, along with all other U.S. forces within Task Force Falcon, would be evaluated by Regular Army Observer/Controllers for their ability to complete their mission in Kosovo. The CMTC afforded them the opportunity to fine-tune their battle skills through situational training exercises (STX), field

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training exercises (FTX), and mission rehearsal exercises (MRX) before final deployment. It would be the first time that Task Force Falcon performed collectively as a brigade-sized element and the first time Task Force Sabre performed collectively during arduous multi-day 24-hour operations. Failure at

the CMTC was unthinkable; without Regular Army certification at the MRX, the unit would be going back home.

The STXs were described as “mini-scenarios” where local role players, who happened to be fluent in German and Arabic, populated very realistic villages with storefronts, mosques, and churches in the countryside while the trainees patrolled the areas and attempted to cope with the scripted situations presented to them.

This might include a Serbian priest complaining of threats from Albanians, reports of a weapons cache and hostile militants in the area; an IED that left one or more casualties needing aid; unrest and rioting in the town square, or a friendly aircraft that went down in hostile terrain.

Of course, role players and troops alike wore “laser tag” harnesses, and all weapons were safely loaded with blanks. All the while, experienced trainers observed the troopers, refereed and advised when needed, and took notes that would be used in later critiques.



Very realistic training

While the troopers ran through the STX lanes, the command staffs went through Command Post exercises, practicing how they would operate and control their forces in the field. For Task Force Sabre, the exercise was named “Klokot” after one of the towns in the Operating Area. Emphasis was on “hot spots” and riot control.

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The MRX rehearsal took place in a sophisticated “Map Room” at the Command Post, with a large scale map of the operating area laid out on the floor. Accurate models of the various buildings and landmarks in the area were set up and labeled so that commanders could walk around the area like some kind of “Gulliver” and visualize it in “3-D” from all angles, while making plans for his part of the operation, or rehearsing it over and over again to get the details correct—a tried and true military technique called “sand box rehearsal.” At Camp Roberts, the models were made of Popsicle sticks and milk cartons. Here, they were nice, wooden scale models, reminding one of the wooden coo-coo clocks, nutcrackers, and pull toys German craftsmen are famous for the world over.



Sand box rehearsal

In an interview a couple of years later, MAJ James Westerfield, the Executive Officer of the 1-18th Cavalry, said that unlike most MRXs, this one had a cool-down phase that was intended to resemble a quiet period of information gathering and putting down hot spots. In all, he said he thought the training the regiment received was “outstanding.”

When all the training was finally complete, the troopers got a one day pass into the local villages as well as a one evening pass into main post for dinner and a supervised beer, if desired. As LTC Staack noted, each man got a chance to have *“a bottle of beer to last the rest of the year.”*

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Within a couple of days, they would be in Kosovo. They were as ready as they could be; they had graduated with honors. Now came the real test: enforcing the peace in Kosovo!



Two for the road

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Chapter Seven

Camp Bondsteel

On Valentine's Day, 2009, troopers from Task Force Sabre were introduced to their new home in Kosovo: Camp Bondsteel, a sprawling U.S. Army base, commanded by BG Keith Jones, Task Force Falcon Commander, that lies beneath the impressive countenance of snowy Mount Duke. Locally known as "Ljuboten" Mount Duke is an 8,196-foot peak that is often called "the Matterhorn of the Sar Mountains" for its graceful, pastoral slopes and rugged approaches to the peak. A favorite for mountain climbers, Mt. Duke is a major landmark in the area, visible from both Skopje in Macedonia to the south and Pristina in Kosovo to the north.



Alpha Troop soldier on Mt. Duke

Unfortunately, with both incoming and outgoing battalions, there weren't enough rooms available for them; so they were temporarily billeted in intermodal shipping containers until suitable quarters were ready. To add to the misery, a mountain storm came along and dropped several feet of snow in front of their doors, trapping the occupants inside the corrugated steel boxes until someone dug them out!

Built in 1999, Camp Bondsteel covered over 950 acres of land in the southeast corner of Kosovo, known as the "American Sector", near the town of Urosavec and just a few miles from the uneasy borders of Serbia to the north and Montenegro to the south. Camp Bondsteel was shared by the Multinational Task Force -East (MNTF-E), which consisted of contingents from Ukraine, Italy, France,

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Poland, Norway, Ireland, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and others, in addition to the United States.

The camp was named after Army SSG James L. Bondsteel, who had been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism while serving in the Republic of Vietnam. Camp Bondsteel was protected by a broad, defensive perimeter that was seven miles in circumference, with a two-and-a-half meter earthen berm behind it. Above that were nine watch towers overlooking a cleared field of fire of about a hundred meters, between the forests and farmlands that lay beyond.



Camp Bondsteel

Within the camp's gates, there were storage areas for ammunition and confiscated weapons, an inner fenced detention center, and an aviation area with fifty-two helicopter landing pads, including separate areas where heavy-lift helicopters such as CH-47 Chinooks could operate freely and handle bulky loads. Of course, there were also motor pool and vehicle maintenance and storage areas. Since there were no modern sewage systems in the neighboring towns, the base had to have its own sewage treatment facility, with large settling tanks, lagoons, and filtration systems within the perimeter.

There was also a well-equipped hospital, a large two-story post exchange, and a movie theater. At the comfortable morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) facilities, troops could play billiards, Ping-Pong, and video games and use facilities provided for internet access and teleconferencing, allowing them to keep in touch with their families back home.

There were also spacious recreational facilities that had gyms, basketball and volleyball courts, and up-to-date exercise and weight equipment. If you craved

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something the dining facilities didn't offer, there was a Burger King, an Anthony's Pizza, and a cappuccino bar.

Since General Order Number One forbade the consumption of alcohol on base, only non-alcoholic drinks, such as soft drinks and "near-beer" could be obtained on the post. It was for this reason that the Greek contingent refused to stay at Camp Bondsteel, but set up a base of their own just down the road, with the requisite drinking establishments on their post!



Camp Bondsteel Dining Facility

The 1-18th Cavalry troopers were finally housed among the two-hundred-and-fifty chocolate brown Southeast Asia (SEA) style single-story wood frame huts that were arrayed in neat grids on the base. Each SEA hut held up to six persons and provided hot and cold water, heat, air conditioning, latrine facilities, electricity, and telephones. Male and female troops were assigned to separate huts according to their gender. Officers and senior NCOs were housed in ten-room SEA huts with individual latrines.

Several modified SEA huts were used for Special Operations Command and Control Elements (SOCCE) and served as headquarter facilities. Generally, the 1-18th Cavalry found the accommodations safe and comfortable, but they had to have adapters for their personal electronic equipment to work on the European 220 volt, 50 Hz electricity.



Barracks at Camp Bondsteel

Camp Bondsteel was divided into two general

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sections called “North Town” and “South Town.” Each sector had a modern dining center that provided high-quality hot meals with a variety of side dishes, and included separate salad, potato, and dessert bars. A twenty-four hour section in each facility provided sandwiches, coffee, and a continental breakfast for soldiers pulling late-night or early morning duty. There were two inter-faith chapels—one in each sector—and finally, there was the Laura Bush Education Center, where troops could take continuing education courses, or work on a college degree.

A few days after they had arrived, the Squadron Colors were uncased in a solemn Change of Command ceremony that made it official; Camp Bondsteel was going to be the headquarters of Task Force Sabre for the coming year! Talking about Camp Bondsteel, CSM Walter Claude posted this e-mail to family and friends...

Family and Friends,

Since the last time we sent out a newsletter, we have moved over to Camp Bondsteel and conducted a TOA (Transfer of Authority) with KFOR 10. What does this mean to us? This means that we have officially taken the responsibility for the mission. We are now doing patrols every day in the towns and cities near Camp Bondsteel to insure a safe and secure environment for the people of Kosovo.

We have had many visitors come to see us while we have been here, and we were fortunate to have the President of Kosovo at our TOA. It was nice to see that the country of Kosovo appreciates us so much that the president of Kosovo made an appearance. There was talk that the California Governor may visit our TOA. It was disappointing, but our California Governor was unable to make our TOA, I am sure he was busy.

*We just recently had the King and Prince of Albania visit one of the cities in our sector. LTC Staack and I were invited and were able to meet the Prince. We had several troopers with us that day who were able to meet him as well. It was a good day for people of Kosovo and our Troopers. We have been keeping busy here at Camp Bondsteel; we have sport events all the time and as the mission allows, our troopers will take part. Our very own 1st/40th Engineers went all the way to the final game, but we did not take home the gold. They sure did one heck of a job and played hard.**

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I am always reading about the Family Members getting together and going places. I think this is great, please keep it up, and if you are not in the loop with FRG (Family Readiness Group), please Contact Valerie Claud Murray; she is the Squadron FRG Contact. Valerie will be more than happy to help you and remember it is never too late to go have fun. Heck, the summer months are coming up and I hear the FRG is going to be spending the night down at the beach as one of the events they are planning. I know there are a lot of Family Members who have been with the FRG since day one, WOW you all are doing great. I cannot believe all the events, classes, and gatherings you have had. I have met every Troop or Company FRG Representative and I can say that each one of them cares about all of the Families. Please stay involved.

*CSM Claude, Walter
Task Force Sabre, "Freedom's Forge"*

** (Editor's note: It was a hard-fought game of soccer that surprised the Europeans with America's prowess in that sport. We were told that the TF Sabre troopers might have won except for some questionable calls by the referees.)*

The international flavors of the occupants made Camp Bondsteel feel rather like an Olympic Village; with young people from all over the world learning how to cooperate and work together. Many friendships were to be made, and many exercises in improving international relations were to be attempted.



Ukrainian friends at Camp Bondsteel

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However, 2008 had just ended with unrest in Mitrovica, where Serbs were protesting the upcoming first anniversary of the creation of Kosovo, portending events that might come to test that cooperation. This was a peacekeeping assignment to be sure, but it could become a combat operation at any time.



Gate 1 on the Serbian border

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Chapter Eight

The Kosovo Area of Operations

When the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry arrived in the newly-founded Republic of Kosovo, it was only one year old, having declared independence on February 17, 2008. It was a tiny nation, a little bit larger than Delaware, populated by about two million souls, mostly ethnic Albanians, a Serbian minority, and a smattering of others, including Bosnians, Turks, Romas, Goranis, and even Egyptians. The United States of American had recognized the Republic of Kosovo, but many contributors to KFOR had not. Consequently, KFOR Soldiers were directed not to support or appear to support Kosovo independence.

Located in the central Balkan Peninsula, with the Adriatic Sea to the west, the Aegean Sea to the south, and the Black Sea to the east, it is in a temperate zone that experiences relatively cold winters, with heavy snowfalls, especially in the higher elevations, and warm, dry summers and autumns. The greatest amount of precipitation occurs from mid-to-late autumn to winter, when warm, moist air off the Adriatic Sea meets cold, continental air masses from the north.

The geography of Kosovo could be described as a large landlocked basin, averaging between 400 and 700 meters (1,300 and 2,300 feet) above sea level, surrounded by several high, rocky mountain ranges, that tower up to 2,565 meters (8,415 feet). It was the peaks of these surrounding mountains that defined the borders of neighboring Montenegro in the west, Albania in the southwest, Serbia in the north and east, and Macedonia in the southeast. Indeed, the southern mountain pass provided the gateway into the country from nearby Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, which lay only about fifteen



Map of Kosovo

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miles from the border.

The scenic countryside ranged from cultivated fields, vineyards, and pastures, to alpine meadows, hardwood and pinewood forests, and rugged, snow-capped peaks. There is an abundance of wild game in the outlying areas, including stag, boar, rabbit, etc. and a few predators, including foxes, wolves and bears. There are several lakes, natural and man-made, and a number of mountain streams, teeming with trout.



Typical Kosovo village

The economy is essentially agrarian, with some light manufacturing in the larger cities and mining in the mountains. In the post-communist era, private businesses were struggling, especially in the uncertain economic environment that faced the European Economic Union at the time and the nation was still recovering from the civil war of the 1990's. Unemployment, especially among the youth, was high and led to crime and unrest.

The cities, like Pristina the capital, were a mix of drab soviet-style apartments and administration buildings, sleek, modern offices and hotels, quaint old stone houses with red tile roofs, a scattering of ancient Roman and Byzantine edifices, and proud historic mosques and churches—some of them hundreds of years old.



A Kosovo neighborhood

In poorer neighborhoods and villages, storefronts, schools and homes with narrow doors, small windows and flat roofs, were roughly fashioned from cement blocks, apparently without regard to building codes, if they existed. Though they were often painted in happy pastels, it still didn't disguise their rather tawdry appearance, especially next to the quaint old stone houses that were to be seen next door, or just outside of town.

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Abandoned homes of all kinds were scattered throughout the towns and countryside where, the troopers were told, Serbs had been living before the separation.



Local Kosovars

In a fit of spite before they left, they had destroyed the deeds or other records of ownership to confound anyone who might want to take possession of them in their absence, leaving them to slowly go to ruin.

Kosovo was a place of contrasts, where fashionable youth sipped cappuccinos at sidewalk cafes, as a ragged farmer, on his way to market,

drove by in an ox cart with two solid wooden wheels, loaded to the gills with valuable firewood. It was a place where hundreds of pilgrims, carrying candles at dusk, solemnly walked behind a procession of priests carrying a statue of the Black Madonna and singing hymns, while across town could be heard an orchestra of drums, flutes and tambourines, playing a lively Turkish tune for a Muslim wedding celebration.

In one of his missives to the Squadron's families and friends, LTC Staack stated...

"... Your Troopers and Soldiers have settled into a routine here at Camp Bondsteel; albeit a routine that consists of helping people on a daily basis. Before I explain our duties, I will describe what we have found in our part of Kosovo.

The TF Sabre Area of Operations (AO SABRE) terrain consists of rolling hills to the north and small mountains to the south. The urban areas consist of the small city of Vitina, smaller towns, villages, and hamlets of just a few houses. The roads vary from narrow, paved two-lane roads that carry most of the wheeled and hoofed traffic, to improved single-lane dirt roads that can be a village's only contact to the world, to unimproved, rutted dirt roads up in the mountains used by our patrols and smugglers.

The landscape is beautiful. Since we have arrived, the rural landscape in which we live has turned from fall brown, winter white, to spring green. Mount Duke rises up to a sharp peak in the near distance with its majestic crown of snow. It

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is the king surrounded by a royal court of other blue mountains. The farmers are beginning to fertilize the wheat they sowed last fall, or plow and plant the corn. Tractors are everywhere, even on the main highways. We see more people outside now, preparing their gardens, and repairing their houses and roads. Children are everywhere; Kosovars have been busy since the war ended.

Kosovo consists of an eclectic mix of old and new, dirty and clean, friendly and hostile. One of the first impressions Westerners remark on is the trash strewn about. Public trash pickup is spotty in rural and semi-rural communities and public access to a waste disposal site is unheard of. Consequently, it is common for people to burn their household garbage, dump it near a riverbed, or throw it on the side of the road. Plastic doesn't burn or decay, so the land is littered with plastic grocery bags hanging from bushes, trees, and clogging the many streams. I have insensitively proclaimed the plastic bag as the official flower of Kosovo as its white plumes can be found blowing proudly everywhere.

Another characteristic of normal Kosovo life that reinforces a Western perception of uncleanness are typical Kosovo bathroom facilities. Kosovars just have a different standard of cleanliness expectations. Many, if not most schools have outdoor latrines without running water. Try to imagine the worst possible sanitary conditions and you may be able to guess how we find them. My NCOs agree that they wouldn't let their soldiers use such facilities, but Kosovars are OK allowing their children to use them. Older public buildings, including the Vitina Municipality Building, have "Turkish Toilets" that are tiled holes in the floor that can be flushed. Modern buildings and most new homes have "western-style" facilities; "western-style" as in European style, not American. Kosovars are clean too. Their clothing will be clean, neat and pressed; particularly working professionals. They take great care in their appearance; both men and women will wear the latest European styles, although the clothing will be Chinese made copies from designer originals. Also, you have never seen so many car washes; they are everywhere.

*The towns and villages often have a unique mix of old and new buildings. Ancient adobe buildings are everywhere, along side newer red brick buildings. Kosovars do not shy away from trying new things, so the newest buildings are often very modern-looking, with dramatic arches, columns and overhangs as well as bright, bright colors. Palm trees seem to be very popular for some reason, so you often see artificial palm trees near buildings or painted on the side of a house. Kosovars love to build. They build new houses, new barns, new warehouses, and new commercial buildings. They build so much, that many of the buildings vacant. Perhaps they are planning to have more children." **NOTE 1***

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There were other problems than ethnic strife; sometimes there was electricity, sometimes there wasn't. In the countryside, schools lacked books, equipment, supplies, or teachers, or were even non-existent.

Adequate health care was rare, and sometimes injured or sick people had to travel long distances on unimproved dirt roads or highways that badly needed repairs to get to a hospital or doctor. Illicit arms, drugs, and human trafficking, along with the corruption that enables it, were common across its borders.

Approximately 40,000 mines and munitions left over from previous conflicts were still lying around, waiting to maim or kill an innocent person. The Kosovo Police were professional, but under-manned and poorly equipped, but in the coming months, TF Sabre would settle into its routine—patrolling the villages, talking to the people, attempting to resolve civic problems, gathering vital information, helping to build schools, and just being good ambassadors for peace, tolerance, and democracy.



Local Kosovars

LTC Staack eloquently summed it all up in May, 2009, in an open letter to all the families and friends of the Task Force...

"The people in our AO show many differences and similarities with us. They look like many of us; in fact, put them in a uniform and they could look like an American of either European or Hispanic ancestry. The prominent ethnicity is Albanian, with Serbian, Croatian, and Gypsy minorities. It is virtually impossible for anyone to tell Albanian Kosovars apart from Serbian Kosovars. Yet, their centuries-old distrust and hatred of each other reside in their differences. The most obvious difference is the language. Serbian is understood by Serbs and older Albanians because it was the only language permitted in public schools until 1999. Their names are quite different too. The dress of older Kosovars is a little different. Older, traditional Albanian men will wear a white fez-looking cap; those more modern wear a French style beret. Older, traditional Serbian men wear a brown wool cap that resembles the old Army campaign cap. However, you could not tell the difference between a modern Serb from Albanian. Our Serbian and Albanian interpreters get along very well because they know each oth-

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er as people. Unfortunately, Albanians and Serbians as a group continue to distrust, and yes, hate each other.

*The predominant languages are Albanian, Serbian, Serbo-Croat, and a little English. Most of the people in our AO speak Albanian and all of our patrols bring an interpreter. Kosovars are kind and pleasant for the most part, grateful to all Americans and respectful of our martial capabilities. Although Kosovo declared their independence over a year ago, most still identify themselves by their ethnicity rather than their country. Hence, you see the Albanian flag on about every fifth house in our AO along with the Kosovo and U.S. flag on about every tenth house. This self-perception is important to note because it affects every aspect of a Kosovars life.” **NOTE 1***



Flag of Kosovo

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Chapter Nine

The Mission

What was the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry's mission in Kosovo? How do you define "*Enforcing the Peace*?"

LTC Staack said the mission was "to ensure a safe and secure environment" and "set the conditions for the legitimate government to take over operations." KFOR 11 Task Force Falcon was composed of six battalions: the combined Polish-Ukrainian maneuver battalion (TF POLUKR), the Greek maneuver battalion (TF HELLAS), two U.S. maneuver battalions (TF SABRE and TF NIGHTSTALKER), a helicopter battalion (TF ARCTIC EAGLE), and a medical battalion (TF MED). Not all of the American forces were from California. Tactical aviation support was provided from the Alaska Air National Guard and medevac support from the Maryland National Guard. The medical unit was from the U.S. Army Reserves, while explosive ordnance disposal was provided by the Virginia National Guard.

According to MAJ Westerfield, Task Force Sabre's mission was "to maintain and secure a safe environment (SASE) for the people of Kosovo;" and to "maintain freedom of maneuver (FOM) for U.S. and NATO forces." The intent was to allow humanitarian and government organizations to come and to go, while interdicting any hostile action, human trafficking, or the movement of contraband across the borders and within the country.

Task Force Sabre gathered information about local activities, civic and infrastructure problems, ethnic strife, and crime and forwarded it on to Task Force Falcon command and staff who would forward information and analysis to the KFOR Commander (COMKFOR). The Task Force Sabre command and staff would often share pertinent unclassified information with local civilian law enforcement and political executives so that local institutions were empowered to resolve issues on their own. In addition, TF Sabre identified and reported unexploded ordnance and responded to ethnic clashes, accidents, and riots, and provided security for local traditions like festivals and religious processions.

How do you go about doing all of this? You patrol the AO and go out and talk to the people! As LTC Staack said in his letter home...

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“... Now, let me provide a better understanding of what we do in our part of Kosovo. KFOR provided a particularly important role right after the 1999 war; it ran everything—absolutely everything. The United Nations Mission in Kosovo took over key administrative functions shortly after the war, but KFOR continued to provide crucial security and governmental support. In the eyes of the Kosovo people, either Serb or Albanian, KFOR remains the supreme arbitrator whose integrity is above reproach. Kosovars administer all functions within their governmental institutions now. KFOR remains the final authority on maintaining security and guaranteeing freedom of movement, but we also advise on and facilitate the governance. In this function, TF Sabre performs a myriad of missions. Here is a listing of a few...

- ◆ *Continuously gather information relating to the political, economic, and social status of the communities*
- ◆ *Enforce the Military Technical Agreement (MTA) with Serbian Armed Forces (SAF) along the Administrative Boundary Line with Serbia*
- ◆ *Patrol the International Border Line along the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) with both Kosovo and Macedonian Border Police*
- ◆ *Conduct surveillance of suspected smuggling routes*
- ◆ *Continuously disseminate information designed to facilitate a higher standard of living*
- ◆ *Perform radio programs designed to disseminate information to encourage people to live better and healthier lives*
- ◆ *Facilitate better communication between governmental institutions and with their citizens and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)*
- ◆ *Identify infrastructure and economic needs and match them to NGOs with resources*
- ◆ *Prepare to protect lives and property from enemy combatants*
- ◆ *Provide Kosovars with hope and optimism for the future*

We conduct varied missions in the conduct of our duty. The line companies usually conduct patrols that last anywhere from a few to several hours. The soldiers depart Camp Bondsteel in HMMWVs wearing their Kevlar helmets and load bearing vests and carrying their ballistic vests, extra clothing, food, and water. Once outside the gate, we lock a magazine of ammunition into our weapons. We typically drive 30 to 90 minutes to reach our patrol area.

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Once a patrol dismounts, soldiers replace their Kevlar helmets with patrol caps and then sling their rifles behind them. The purpose of this is to present a non-threatening appearance while still having the capacity to defend yourself and others. Patrols will mingle with Albanian or Serbian people or actively seek a specific person in order to collect or disseminate information.

A typical information gathering mission might be to survey a school to determine what their needs are. The Kosovo Municipal Government is responsible for maintaining schools and other important governmental functions, but KFOR continues to monitor governmental functions as the local governments are still working out the finer points of government and fund acquisition. I posted pictures on the Sabre picture website of Troop A refurbishing school desks at Debelde; this was a result of a survey they conducted at the local school.

Units also conduct patrols along the boundary with Serbia and the border of FYROM in order to disrupt smuggling and coordinate with SAF and Macedonian Border Police. These patrols are often in rugged mountainous terrain where a Staff Sergeant has autonomous control of this patrol and mission. These patrols are important. First, we perform valuable anti-smuggling missions. Kosovo is one of Europe's gateways for drugs and human trafficking. Maintaining contact with the SAF while performing our MTA mission is also important because it was the SAF who originally invaded Kosovo; they must be assured that we remain vigilant to any potential excursions into Kosovo they may be contemplating.

Our Troopers are often called to perform missions far away from Camp Bondsteel. Troop B recently returned from a mission in northern Kosovo. These missions are conducted under more strenuous and austere conditions. Northern Kosovo has predominantly Serbian people who do not appreciate our presence, yet respect our martial capability. The 140th Engineer Support Company recently returned from serving as security at the main KFOR headquarters in Pristina. Besides the long hours that they work, they face the additional challenge associated with being the only unit at a NATO Headquarters that is not allowed to drink alcohol!

CPT Bill Foss, with SFC Mel Weaver, keep busy coordinating between TF Sabre units, municipal government officials, and non-governmental organizations in order to improve the infrastructure in our AO. Although it is truly a team effort, their lead will ensure that the Vitina and Gnjilane municipalities have a new fire station, bridges, improved schools, roads, as well as improved economic opportunities before we leave.

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2LT Chris Van Meter and SSG Daniel Ratner are our intelligence wizards. They collect and analyze information from unit patrols, secret reports, and adjacent units in order to give all of us a better understanding of the people, organizations, and situation we work with or within so that we are more effective. The unsung heroes are those soldiers who provide direct support to us; like 1LT Richard Counts and SFC Anthony Tellez, our administrators, and CW3 Bob Leveronne and SFC Frank Beck, our logisticians. Of course, I can't forget the man who listens to our problems, prays with us, explains the opinion of Kosovar religious leaders and keeps us laughing, Chaplain Saul Castillo.” **NOTE 1**

Military Liaison Monitor Teams (LMTs) would set up in storefronts of towns, talk to the locals, including SOIs (Spheres of Influence) and report back to headquarters. Typically, these were two California Guardsmen at a time, only armed with pistols and driving civilian cars. The squad patrols were armed combat military vehicles, such as Humvees, backed up by about seventy men. By the end of mobilization, only six to seven patrols went out each day, as the number of LMTs grew. The brigade was still there if something happened.

1LT Cyrus Harrell, the Platoon Leader of 1st Platoon, Alpha Troop, in Kosovo said, “... *the normal mission for the 1-18th Cavalry is RSTA,*” (Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition), “*but Kosovo was different; not only did we have to chase bad guys when we encountered them, but provide intelligence and information on any arms, drugs, or human trafficking to KFOR police authorities.*” Also, the Troopers had to be on the lookout for any info regarding extremists or religious fundamentalists that might be in the area trying to stir things up.



**19 February 2009
A Cold day in Kosovo**

Enforcing The Peace

“We had to get to know the leaders in each village,” 1LT Harrell said, or anyone who could tell us about anyone who might be trying to incite violence, either against Americans or another group.” Nevertheless, this was a peace enforcement mission, and 1LT Harrell had this to say about it: “In a peacekeeping environment, at least for me, as far as I was taught in the school houses, I was able to apply pretty much everything, but what I had to do was tone it down a little bit, I had to be slightly less aggressive—well, significantly less aggressive—and really focus on interpersonal skills and understanding that, no matter where you are in the world, people are people.”

In fact, during the entire deployment, no-one in TF Sabre fired a single shot in anger and, 1LT Harrell said, *“I only came close to drawing my weapon in a two-way threat once ... However, “where we were coming from is, ... we sit down and get straight to business, saying, ‘Hi, what’s your name? Okay, what do you want?’ But there, you really have to sit down and establish a relationship with the people, and operationally and tactically, that’s valuable; it’s not just crap, it’ll help you in the long run. There’s this one village where there was a family of cattle farmers. They had much more in common with my own family back in Oklahoma and I just seemed to relate to them. They had to do the same thing in Iraq and Afghanistan and yet maintain a higher aggression level, so I would say definitely keeping an open mind, remaining flexible, using what you were taught creatively—not by the book—but creatively. I mean there is nothing I was taught in Armor School that could be applied to a peacekeeping mission. You always have to have in the backs of your mind “What’s the worst thing that could happen right now, and if it does, how am I going to react to it?”*



Winning the hearts and minds...

Enforcing The Peace

1LT David Martinez, First Platoon Leader, Alpha Troop, agrees with 1LT Harrell's assessment. When asked about a trooper's level of aggression, Martinez said, *"You don't go in with your guns blazing ... it just makes the situation worse. You must take it down a notch—this is a mission where you have to focus on your lighter side."*



Giving medical support to the Kosovars

The bottom line is that, for all the hundreds of daily patrols, very little of any consequence happened. There was an allegedly accidental shooting in Killokot, where a 7.62 mm Tokarev pistol had been disposed and recovered, but the suspect in the shooting was released by local authorities. On another patrol, one of the troopers reported losing a magazine of M-16 ammunition. Since every round had to be accounted for, repeated searches were made, but it was never recovered.

There were substantial problems associated with receiving electricity. Kosovo did not produce enough electricity to meet their needs, so electricity to communities would often be turned off as part of the nations "rolling blackout" plan, with communities with large unpaid electrical bills being the hardest hit. CPT Duc Vo, Information Operations Officer (S-7) for the 1-18th Cavalry, reported that there were disputes about how people were going to pay the electricity bills. Most ethnic Serbs refused to pay their electrical bills because they feared that if they began to pay their bills, they would be held accountable for the last ten years of unpaid bills. They were told by the Kosovo Electric Company (KEK),

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“If you don’t pay your bill now, we are taking you off the grid. It was a very tense situation with local Kosovo-Serbian communities threatening to riot and prevent freedom of maneuver on major roads. At one point, LTC Staack placed the Task Force on alert and an entire Troop with full crown-control gear was placed behind a hill directly adjacent to the village of Pasjane. Fortunately, the contacts and good will established by Task Force Sabre was able to alleviate the situation. Within Pasjane, CPT Vo was able to establish talks between KEK and an influential Serbian with whom he had built a relationship, bypassing the uncooperative Serbian parallel government leadership. In another instance, LTC Staack invited a EULEX advisor to KEK onto his radio program to inform listeners that Kosovo law prevented the collection of debts over one year old if the bills were current for a year; so if they just paid their bills for a year, the ten-year-old debt would be forgiven. Although other KFOR units within other parts of Kosovo at other times had to resort to force in order to maintain freedom of maneuver, Task Force Sabre was able to control the situation without violence, using legitimate Kosovar institutions.



On patrol - 18 April 2009

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Much of the patrol time was just spent visiting the villages and talking to people or having lunch or dinner in a local restaurant and keeping their eyes and ears open. The troopers received reports of vandalism, graffiti, small arms fire, or maybe a hand grenade. There was a murder and a missing person case, but they were all domestic in nature and handled by the local Kosovo police. As Chaplain (CPT) Saul Castillo put it, there were no massive armies, but small groups of armed criminals and blood feuds to deal with. *“The emotional scars from the killings during the 1990s were very strong,”* Castillo said, *“and families talked about it as if it were yesterday.”*

But it wasn't always “cops and robbers.” There were a great many civil affairs duties that the troopers gladly took part in. Every trooper knew he was an ambassador for tolerance, democracy, and the United States of America, in particular, but they couldn't help looking at the people and sincerely wanting to help them build a nation with a decent, civil society.

There was no arrogant cultural superiority here; we weren't there to transform Kosovo into our own version of a “civilized society.” We were only there to make it safe for the Kosovars to build their own nation as they saw fit, but within a peaceful political environment.

There were schools to be rebuilt, Boy Scout troops to train, English classes for the locals, medical clinics to establish, police to be trained, and roads and utilities to repair and secure. There was a future for Kosovo to build—with our help. A noble undertaking, indeed, for these modern Knights of the Order of St. George!

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Chapter Ten

Civil Military Operations

The most satisfying task that Task Force Sabre undertook was to help the Kosovars repair their society. Although Civil Military Operations (CMO) funds had been severely cut, Task Force Sabre found ways around this constraint through focused work, volunteerism, and good old-fashioned Cav ingenuity.

Task Force Sabre had the most CMO projects nominated, funded (\$500,000), and completed within MNTF(E). With oversight from the CMO Team (CPT Bill Foss, SFC Mike Artizone, SFT Kevin Kingsbury, and SFC Mel Weaver), and working along side the local municipal public works, Task Force Sabre engaged in the support of bridge building, school and road improvements, civic programs, and language training.

Troop A identified five bridges that were so dilapidated that villagers were unable to travel from their homes during the rainy season. The CMO Team nominated them for replacement, coordinated local approval, and ran roughshod over the byzantine process until they were demolished and rebuilt. The 140th ESC identified poor roads that could easily be repaired by their Soldiers using military equipment available at Camp Bondsteel. When the Camp Bondsteel Garrison refused their use, CPT Sean Byrne coordinated the use of a neighboring unit's Small Emplacement Excavator (SEE) for a combined engineer operation with the POLUKR Battalion.

All Task Force Sabre units were familiar with requesting, coordinating, and performing security for MEDCAPS (Medical Civic Action Program), DENTCAPS (Dental Civic Action Program), and VETCAPs (Veterinary Civic Action Program), where qualified personnel provided medical assistance to Kosovars in need. The MEDCAP for the Kosovar War Veterans contributed immensely to the trust developed between the Kosovars and Task Force Sabre in the municipality of Vitina.

Three schools had new sanitary latrines rebuilt to include leech ponds to facilitate proper drainage and to mitigate the spread of disease. Several schools were improved or refurbished by Soldier volunteers and in coordination with local leaders and USAID. Task Force Sabre also was able to have running water restored to an apartment complex that had been without for three years and distrib-

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uted several hundred pounds of clothing and blankets to the Red Cross of Kosovo.

Earth Day 2009, was a huge success in which 65 new trees were planted in the Municipality of Vitina, with local leaders and local citizens participating along with LTC Staack, CSM Claude, and other TF Sabre Troopers. In short, the 1-18th Cav left a lasting impression on the Kosovars during their time in Kosovo operating throughout the Municipality of Vitina. Of all the CMO projects Task Force Sabre undertook, there probably wasn't one that was more enjoyed than helping the schools and the children.



Kosovar children in English class

As S-7 (Information/Operations Officer) for the 1-18th Cavalry, CPT Duc Vo along with SFC Willy Glasper, SGT Scott Smith, and many others were instrumental in setting up English classes in conjunction with the United States Agency for International Development.

At this particular school, in a predominantly Serbian area, the Serbian children would attend in the morning and the Albanians would attend in the afternoon. According to Van Meter, the troopers actually got some five-to-seven-year-olds together in one room with "great interaction," but, due to their own language barriers, they still sat apart.

Chaplain Saul Castillo was also a high school teacher back in California. Once a week, he went to teach the kids English at local schools. Along with CSM Walter Claude, he also taught English to some Albanian and Serbian war veterans. He and 1LT Baldwin, 1LT Van Meter, CPT Phillips, and others, all taught English classes on a rotating basis.

At first, they only did three classes, but as time went on, they trained more Cavalry Troopers to take on the responsibilities until eventually there were up to thirteen different schools in the program. Many 1-18th Cavalry troopers would participate in the program in one way or another.

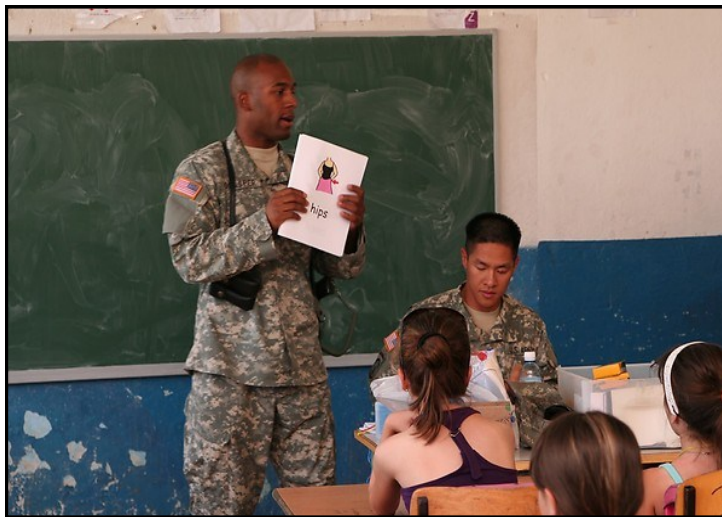
CPT Vo reported that with the help of interpreters Ivica Samardzic and Mirlinda

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Sylejmanthey, he was able to convince the Kosovo Education Department to fund the first Albanian/Serbian Kosovar Youth Camp. The Camp provided activities to 30 children with ages ranging from eight to sixteen at the Brezonvica ski resort in southern Kosovo.

Vo believed there were no ethnic tensions between the kids, just a language barrier. Perhaps having a language like English in common would overcome that barrier. Some of the kids forged strong friendships at English Camp and now keep in touch with each other—hopefully, friends for life.

1LT Kenneth Reiley had participated in the English Club as well, but he also was an Eagle Scout, and he connected with a Serbian Boy Scout Leader. When he noticed that the boys had never seen a fire extinguisher, he brought up some fire extinguishers, built a little fire and trained the boys in how to use them. “That was a great experience for me,” he said, “being a former Boy Scout.”



English class



School supplies for the children

Above and beyond the call of duty, the 1-18th Cavalry collected and donated supplies for schools, some of which didn't even have desks, chairs, or indoor plumbing for the students to use, not to mention pencils, paper, or text books. 1LT Christopher Van Meter, the Intelligence Officer (S-2) for the 1-18th Cavalry, contacted Ceres

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High School, where he was a teacher, to share his experiences in Kosovo teaching the locals English. The California students wanted to help, so they organized and sent sixty to seventy cases of school supplies to help out. Van Meter said they were able to bring together Serbian and Albanian school officials to distribute the supplies, but they still refused to talk to each other.



**A Kosovar child “checking out”
his box of school supplies**

Troopers from the 1-18th Cavalry took great pride in helping rebuild and furnish schools for the people of Kosovo. After all, many of them had children of their own and could not look upon the bright smiling faces of the children of Kosovo without concern and compassion. Whether building an outhouse, painting a classroom, or building benches

and desks, this was an act of love, and more than worth the effort.

TF Sabre Soldiers frequently maintained the crowd control skills learned at Camp Atterbury. Although crowd control is not a fundamental skill for U.S. Soldiers, many European armies have domestic riot control elements in them. The training wasn't frivolous, as there had been riots in Merovica, to the north, just before the 1-18th Cavalry arrived there, with the Serbs protesting the separation of Kosovo from Serbia.

1LT Harrell reported: *“We worked with the Portuguese, French, Irish, Germans, and the Swedes quite frequently. The Irish and us were rioters during a training scenario with the Portuguese and the French—I don't know who thought it was a good idea to have the Irish or the Americans (the people from L.A.!) as the rioters, but we kind of overwhelmed the blue forces ... it was interesting to see how other people do things.”*

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(Indeed, SGT Manuel Campos of the 140th Engineers reported that the “aggressors” went right through the Portuguese concertina wire and actually captured some of the policemen and their gear! – Editor)

1LT Harrell continues, “One of the times we got called up for riot training, ... we got parked in someone else’s parking lot! We were in the Swedish camp working with the Germans to react to a (simulated) riot in downtown Prishtina, so you have Americans and Germans sitting arm-in-arm—both in different types of riot gear, there to do the same mission.

I was stationed in the German TOC (Tactical Operations Center) sitting in the corner listening to them all speak in German (they spoke bad English and I spoke bad German) and so the lieutenants and I are talking about whatever young lieutenants talk about—whether it’s the Army or girls, or different weapons, i.e., my tank is better than your tank, etc., and the cool thing is that the Swedish commander came in and the German commander came in and they went into a room that wasn’t quite sealed off, and you could hear what they were saying – the German commander couldn’t speak Swedish and the Swedish commander couldn’t speak German, so they both conducted their meeting in English!

Not to say that we’re the dominant country, but to see that they both spoke English was cool!”

This exercise came to be known as “The Great Smokeout” thanks to the piles of old tires that had been set ablaze to provide a little realism. Major Westerfield said that he thought it was “a little hilarious” that the Americans would turn out for training in full combat gear, including body armor, backpacks, weapons, etc., while the Europeans were equipped with sophisticated riot gear, including big Lucite shields, special helmets with hinged face guards, armored vehicles with water cannons and tear gas launchers, among other things.

There were also missions where 1-18th Cavalry Troopers were assigned to provide security for medical units to hold clinics in the villages, where there were no hospitals and few doctors. Again, the Troopers of the 1-18th Cavalry were gratified to be of service on these occasions, and the locals turned out in large numbers to make good use of the rare opportunities for medical care.

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Chapter Eleven

The Black Madonna

On Ascension Day in August, 2009, the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry provided security for the festival of the Black Madonna in Prishtina. There are a number of “Black Madonnas” throughout the world, especially Europe. Generally, they are statues of the Virgin Mary, notable for the fact that she is depicted with dark or black skin, despite having obvious Caucasian features or origins. Often they were carved in Medieval times and either got their dark color from a sooty patina deposited over the ages by innumerable tallow candle flames, or they were carved from a dark hardwood in the first place, with the paint, if any, wearing off over time to reveal the tawny wood color underneath.



The Black Madonna

Like other such icons, the Black Madonna at the Church of the Madonna in Letnica, Kosovo, is held to have miraculous healing powers. Indeed, during the festival, pilgrims are allowed to approach the statue, where they reverently reach out and touch her outstretched hand, hoping it will impart some miraculous benefit to them.

But in addition, a young woman named Agnesa Bojaxhiu of nearby Skopje found her calling there. Later, she became known as Mother Teresa, which elevated the little church to international fame.

The gleaming white church, though an elegantly plain post-Byzantine cathedral of rather modest proportions and architecture, is a prominent landmark,

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nestled up against the green, forested hills at the edge of the rustic village of Letnica.

Every August, thousands of people from all over the region, indeed from all over the world, gather in the little village for a solemn procession to carry the statue from her chapel to a covered outdoor pavilion, where masses, vigils, and celebrations are conducted. They fill up the few inns and hotels in the area, or camp in the streets or on the outskirts of the village. With such a gathering of different ethnicities and denominations, there is a great potential for trouble, so Task Force Sabre was called upon to establish and maintain security for the event.

Chaplain (CPT) Castillo was amused to relate how a contingent of troopers were assigned to escort a procession into town, along what was supposed to be a two-mile path, but the trail wasn't well marked and they got disoriented, turning a one-hour procession into a two-and-a-half hour odyssey.

On another occasion, the priests at the church were confounded that someone with Castillo's Spanish surname and appearance wasn't a Catholic priest (He's actually a Protestant minister). One priest even went so far as to ask, "Are your parents still alive? Do they know you aren't a Catholic?" Chaplain Castillo assured him they were quite okay with it. It was a small lesson in American diversity, tolerance, and freedom of religion for these men of God.



**The Church of the Madonna
Letnica, Kosovo**

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Pilgrims to the festival followed white-robed priests and altar boys, bearing a Bible, crosses, candles, and censors ahead of the white-robed statue through the streets. Eventually, they arrived at a temporary pavilion by a hillside which provided a pastoral natural amphitheater. There, under a banner that read “The Virgin Mary, pray for us.” in three languages, the masses and vigils were held, with the crowd seated on the grass.



The Black Madonna procession



Providing security

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In the evening, the village was filled with a smorgasbord of aromas, sights, and sounds as villagers and visitors, Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and even Muslim alike, feasted and celebrated in peace.



Vigil site



Kosovars at the vigil site



Camping out at the vigil site

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Chapter Twelve

21st Century Knights

In the last century, when tanks and aircraft proved they could replace horses for mobility and effectiveness, modern cavalries hung up their saddles and put their horses out to pasture. Nevertheless, today's troopers hark back to the chivalry and traditions of yore.

Like other U.S. cavalry units, the 1-18th Cavalry boosts morale and esprit d'corps by awarding various symbolic honors to their troops, in the form of Stetsons, spurs, and medals from the U.S. Armor Association Honorable Order of Saint George. Though they were mobilized in Kosovo, the 1-18th Cavalry continued their traditions.

In June, Task Force Sabre hosted the year's most talked about social event—the Feast of St. George Dinner. The dinner's Guest of Honor was visiting MG John Harrel, the 40th Infantry Division Commander, with attendees BG Keith Jones, Task Force Falcon Commander, Mexhmedin Arifi, Mayor of Vitina, and many other U.S. and foreign civilian and military dignitaries. The dinner was an opportunity for the assembled leadership to celebrate the virtues of St. George in martial brotherhood and recognize contributions to the Cavalry community. LTC Staack and CSM Claude presented ceremonial Stetsons to COL Tom Loomis



The traditional Stetson “quaff”

and COL Mark Malanka, Deputy Commander and Operations Officer of Task Force Falcon, followed by the “Wetting Down” on their new headgear. After dinner, speeches and some lively entertainment by ethnic dancers in colorful traditional costumes, Order of St. George Bronze Medallions were presented to LTC Staack, CPT Philips, CPT Vo, CPT Hioco, and 1SG Woelhof, all whom

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Some ethnic entertainment

represented “the very best of those who lead our Cavalrymen and Tankers.” The Noble Patron of Honor Medallion was presented to SFC Beck in recognition for his many years of logistical support to the 1-18th Cavalry. MG Harrell did the honors of knighting the kneeling recipients with taps on the shoulder with his saber.



**Presenting the Purple Heart to
SFC McKindley**

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Later in the month, BG Jones and two Congressional Medal of Honor recipients— one a WWII veteran, the other a Vietnam veteran—honored SFC Andrew McKindley by awarding him a belated Purple Heart Medal he had earned in a previous deployment to Iraq.

After a grueling forced march around the perimeter of Camp Bondsteel, followed by several tests of mental and physical abilities, seven troopers were inducted into The Order of The Spur, attested by the award of real silver spurs and a certificate that read:

“Let it be known that (name), with carbine, colt, and saber in hand, having followed the Cavalry guidon to Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, and having demonstrated skill, fitness, dash, discipline, and cunning of a United States Cavalry Trooper is hereby entered on the roles of The Order of The Spur. Given under my hand at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, on this 22nd day of October, 2009. Lars Staack, LTC, Cavalry Squadron Commander.”

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Chapter Thirteen

On Pegasus' Wings

To quote Sergeant Manuel Campos of the 140th Engineering Battalion, *“The hardest parts of deployment are leaving home and coming back! The actual travel is the easy part, but clearing customs, etc., is frustrating. When you know you are going to come home, your brain has to start getting ready for it.”*

In ancient times, the land we now call Kosovo was part of greater Macedonia, home to Alexander the Great, who conquered most of the known world by the age of thirty and spread classical Greek culture wherever he went. Indeed, Kosovo is peppered with ancient ruins and gravesites, with Greek or Latin legends carved into their stones. This was a land of heroes, and befitting heroes, the 1-18th Cavalry was carried home on the swift wings of a giant, roaring beast. No, it was not the great winged horse, Pegasus, though he would be appropriate for this modern Cavalry Squadron, but a thundering jumbo jet.

It was early November 2009, and the time had finally come—the 1-18th Cavalry had again cased their Colors and were going home. Home, to Thanksgiving and the holidays; home, to friends and families; home to the U.S.A.! They had known for weeks that the time was coming, and were filled with anticipation.

At Camp Bondsteel, they had been “out-processed” and divided into “chalks,” a military term harking back to World War II, when airborne troops’ flight numbers for the invasion of Europe were written on their backs in chalk, i.e. “Chalk 1, Chalk 2, Chalk 3,” etc. and “locked down.” In this case, a chalk consisted of more or less the number of men in a cavalry troop (about a hundred), though the actual “Troops” were often broken up and separated into different chalks.

After the traditional Army “hurry-up and wait” time, each chalk was loaded on buses and transported to the airport at Prishtina, where they again waited until

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they were loaded onto a military transport and flown to the Deployment Transition Center at Ramstein Air Base, Germany. There, they underwent a three-day program “designed to prepare them to return to their families and everyday lives back home,” and were again loaded onto charter flights to take them to the United States.

After a long flight over the arctic, they landed in Bangor, Maine for refueling and were surprised and gratified by the warm reception the USO and some locals gave them, even when they arrived in the wee hours of the morning. *“They are the greatest,”* said Campos, *“that’s how we knew we were home! The USO is very special because they were there for us when we came home—the USO is part of the military family!”*

There were warm hugs and thanks from grateful veterans and volunteers who had gathered there to greet them, along with hot coffee and fresh doughnuts. Then it was time to get back on the plane for the last leg of the flight to Ft. Lewis, Washington. Ft. Lewis would be their venue for processing out of the active Army and back into the National Guard. Now, they would be “civilian soldiers” again.

“De-Mobilization” at Ft. Lewis would take an agonizing seven days while physical and mental exams were taken, debriefings and counseling were attended, numerous inventories, reports and forms were signed and filed, and head-counts completed. Home was just a few hours away, in sunny California, and it was hard to be patient. When the week was up, it was time to get on yet another jet for the last flight home.

Of course, the families had been alerted that their loved ones were finally on their way home and many had gathered to meet them at the terminal at John Wayne International Airport. Unfortunately, the plane landed at the obscure military terminal at another part of the airport, so there was some initial confusion. Finally, the word got out, and all the happy reunions took place.

What was it like to be home again? With few exceptions, the greetings were

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warm and loving, the homes were familiar, but somehow felt strange from the long absences. The kids had grown, and new ones were born. Some friends were still there, in the familiar places, but others had moved on. CPT Castillo noted that his family had moved while he was away, and he had a whole new home to get used to!

Not all of the families had been supportive, however. There were breakups or divorces to contend with, or financial problems to reconcile. A couple of Troopers had families or friends that didn't see eye-to-eye with them and their choice to be in the National Guard, and faced a more indifferent home coming. But for the most part, the men and women of Task Force Sabre were given the warm welcomes befitting the heroes they were; not as conquerors, but as enforcers of the peace.

Kosovo's past had been filled with conquest, religious strife, Fascism, Communism, bloodshed, and ethnic cleansing. Task Force Sabre had helped bring stability to the region. In CPT Castillo's words, "*The mission was successful, we had helped rebuild the infrastructure of a nation! It was a good mission, but there is still work to do...* "

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Chapter Fourteen

In Retrospect...

But what of the mission? Had it been a success? The answer would almost unanimously be “Yes!” Ask any trooper of the 1-18th Cavalry who was a part of Task Force Sabre and they’d say so. No, they had not seen victory, but something far more universal and lasting—success!

They had seen it in the faces of the old men sitting down together in the pubs and restaurants in the villages and the towns they patrolled, inviting them to have a drink with them, which they were compelled by General Order Number One to politely refuse. They had seen it in the smiles of the youth and children who made friends at English Camp and in the schools and public institutions they had helped rebuild. They had seen it in the faces of the people who lined up for the medical clinics or who made the religious processions without fear of reprisals or terrorist attacks. They had felt it in the more cordial relations and mutual respect they had engendered among divergent clerics, in the warm friendships they had developed with their colleagues and allies in KFOR 11.

Not a shot had been fired. Not an objective, a hill, a parcel of land, or enemy prisoner had been taken, but they were still heroes. Theirs had not been a display of valorous courage, but a greater kind—the moral courage of their convictions to be disciplined soldiers and archetypal Americans: tolerant, democratic, moral, and kind.

On Monday, July 2, 2012, the world’s news services reported that—just four years after Kosovo had achieved it—Western powers had agreed to stop overseeing Kosovo independence. Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister of the new nation, called it an “historic day” for Kosovo. However, the peace wasn’t perfect; it seldom is. A Serbian minority, supported by Russia, China, and Serbia to the north, still rejected Kosovo’s independence. In addition, there were still clashes between Serbs and Kosovo police at the border. But more and more

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Serbs in Kosovo were asking for the services of the government of Kosovo which was taken as “a sign of increasing engagement” by authorities. All-in-all, we can at least say, it was “Mission Accomplished!” They had successfully enforced the peace.

“Nothing endures but change.”
-Heraclitus, Greek philosopher, (540 BC - 480 BC)

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Acknowledgement

This historical summary is the result of the collaborative efforts of the California Center for Military History (CCMH) and the officers and men of the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry Regiment.

In early 2010, the California Center for Military History – Southern Area of Operations, was tasked by the Commanding General, 40th Infantry Division, California Army National Guard, to formally document the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry Regiment's participation in the Kosovo Campaign, from pre-deployment through post-deployment—a daunting task by any definition.

The initial groundwork on this project was begun soon thereafter by a team of professional military historians from the California Center for Military History. This team was initially under the aegis of CW2 Bruce O. Solheim, Ph.D. and assisted by CW3 Richard Ringwald. Professor Solheim is currently on the staff and faculty of the History Department at Citrus College in Glendora, California. His professional expertise made him my logical choice to chair the team.

Subsequently, the team made initial contact with senior command and staff personnel from the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry at their headquarters in Azusa, California, and began to coordinate their efforts. It was decided that the best approach towards accomplishing this task would be to simultaneously review and research all after-action reports and historical data that the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry had accumulated during their deployment and to couple it with actual one-on-one interviews with selected personnel who deployed with the unit.

After many months, the team managed to obtain sufficient data from the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry and combined with the personal interviews, began the task of assembling the data and writing the summary. This then, represents the fruits of their labor.

I would be remiss if I did not take the time to personally acknowledge and thank the following members who participated on this project. Without their combined dedication, enthusiasm, and tenacity, this project would never have been completed.

Enforcing The Peace

Chief Writer and Editor - SSG Richard D. White

Wrote and compiled the preponderance of this publication's text. Integrated all written records, reports, and personal interviews into the final document. Thanks, Richard, you did a great job as our wordsmith!

Lead Reporter - 1LT Guy V. Coulombe

Obtained all source data for the team to use in researching and writing this publication as well as conducted numerous personal interviews.

Reporter - SSG Thomas J. Schuchman

Assisted 1LT Coulombe in conducting many of the personal interviews.

Historical Analyst - SSG Sharon R. Rickerts

Researched and organized unit historical data and converted the same into usable formats for use by the team.

LTC Lars K. Staack

Former Commander of the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry, California Army National Guard. Provided invaluable assistance to the team by making available needed records and reports, having his personnel available for interviewing, and doing a bang-up job editing this document for historical accuracy.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not personally thank and recognize COL Kenneth Nielsen, Commander for the Center for Military History, and COL Fred Rutledge, Deputy Commander for the Center for Military History whose continued support and encouragement made this project possible.

**LTC John F. Goodnight
California Center for Military History
California State Military Reserve
January, 2013**



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Glossary

ACU	Army Combat Uniform
AO	Area of Operation
AT	Annual Training
AWT	Army Warrior Training
BG	Brigadier General
CCMH	California Center for Military History
CCMH-SR	California Center for Military History - Southern Region
CCO	Coupled Channel Optical
CMO	Civil Military Operations
CMTC	Combat Maneuver Training Center
COL	Colonel
COMKFOR	Commander Kosovo Force
CPT	Captain
CSLO	Camp San Luis Obispo
CSM	Command Sergeant Major
CW2	Chief Warrant Officer 2
CW3	Chief Warrant Officer 3
DENTCAP	Dental Civic Action Program
ENGR	Engineer
ESC	Engineer Support Company
EULEX	European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
FOM	Freedom of Maneuver
FRG	Family Readiness Group
FTX	Field Training Exercise
FYROM	Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia
HHT	Headquarters & Headquarters Troop
HMMWV	High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle
Hz	Hertz
IBCT	Infantry Brigade Combat Team
IDT	Individual Duty Training
IED	Improvised Explosive Device

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Glossary

IRAS	Infrared Acquisition Sight
ITAS	Improved Target Acquisition Sight
JMRC	Joint Multinational Readiness Center
KEK	Kosovo Electric Company
KFOR II	Kosovo Force 11 (International Kosovo Peacekeeping Force)
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
L.A.	Los Angeles
LMT	Liaison Monitor Team
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel
MAJ	Major
MEDCAP	Medical Civic Action Program
MG	Major General
MNTF-E	Multinational Task Force - East
MOB	Mobilization
MRE	Meals, Ready to Eat
MRX	Mission Readiness Exercise
MSG	Master Sergeant
MTA	Military Technical Agreement
MWR	Morale, Welfare, and Recreation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	Noncommissioned Officer
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
POLUKR	Polish-Ukrainian
RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade
RSTA	Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition
S-1	Personnel and Administration
S-2	Intelligence and Security
S-3	Operations and Training
S-4	Logistics
S-6	Communications
S-7	Information Operations

Enforcing The Peace

Glossary

S-9	Civil / Military Operations
SAF	Serbian Armed Forces
SASE	Secure and Safe Environment
SEA	Southeast Asia
SFC	Sergeant First Class
SGT	Sergeant
SOCCE	Special Operations Command and Control Element
SOI	Sphere of Influence
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SPC	Specialist
SSG	Staff Sergeant
STX	Situational Training Exercise
TF	Task Force
TOA	Transfer of Authority
TOC	Tactical Operations Center
TSIRT	Theater Specific Individual Readiness Training
U.N.	United Nations
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USO	United Service Organization
VETCAP	Veterinary Civic Action Program
WT&BD	Warrior Training & Battle Drills
1LT	First Lieutenant
1SG	First Sergeant
2LT	Second Lieutenant

NOTE 1: The comments cited herein are those of LTC Lars Staack and represent his personal views and opinions and do not necessarily represent the official position of KFOR, the California National Guard, the federal government, nor any of its organizations and agencies.