

Making strides in the

Balkans

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Photos courtesy
Staff Sgt. Clinton Evans
C-TAC Combat Camera

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo — As most of 2nd Brigade soldiers were counting down the days until their KFOR rotation ended, Sgt. Maj. Billy Howerton was counting up the miles.

On May 1, Howerton accomplished an something no other KFOR soldier has: He ran the 52.3 miles from Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, to Camp Able Sentry, Macedonia, in eight hours and 45 minutes.

Howerton's run was a labor of love — love of both running and soldiers. "It was a motivational tool for the young soldiers," the 47-year-old runner explained. "If I told them I had run 30 or 40 laps around Bondsteel, they wouldn't visualize it. But, all of them have [driven] several times from [Camp Able Sentry] to Bondsteel, so they understand that distance."

Most of the deployed 2nd Brigade soldiers have found creative ways to occupy their off-duty hours, from working out at the gym to taking college classes. Howerton, the Task Force Falcon G-3 sergeant major, has used his free time to get back into shape for distance running.

From 1984 to 1989, Howerton was on the marathon circuit — running a mere 26.2 miles per event. In 1989, Howerton started running ultra-marathons.

"I started long-distance running

around the '89-'90 time period. I was stationed at Fort Benning, Ga., I was on the marathon circuit. I had a good friend that was a doctor. He asked me if I wanted to go to Alabama to run a 50-miler," explained the Middleboro, Ky., native. "I didn't even know that distance existed for running. I ran it with him and thought I was going to die — nausea, pain and I've been hooked on it ever since."

Ultra-marathons are any race that is 50 kilometers or longer. Some of the ultra-marathons Howerton has run spanned three days and covered hundreds of miles.

Howerton had been benched, so to speak, since last year. He became seriously dehydrated after a run last year; he suffered internal bleeding and had to have surgery. His May Day trek

across the Balkans marked his return to distance running.

Howerton began training for his uber-trek Jan. 1.

"My goal was to run daily, but I haven't been able to do that because of the weather and the mission. My main goal was the make this run from Bondsteel to CAS. When we came down here (December 2000), I wanted to do some kind of run. I talked over a 12-hour run or a 48-hour run around Bondsteel with my wife. After going back and forth to CAS a few times, I looked at the scenery, I noticed the road and thought this would be a perfect run route."

Training and choosing the route weren't the only challenges Howerton faced in planning his run. Because of force protection concerns outside of the base camps, Howerton had to request permis-

sion from the Task Force Falcon leadership. Howerton explained that he wanted to do the run in lieu of taking the usual four-day pass that deployed soldiers receive.

Howerton's request was staffed through the 2nd Brigade commander, Col. Gene Kamena; the Task Force Falcon chief of staff, Col Dan Nolan; and the Task Force Falcon commander, Brig. Gen. Kenneth Quinlan.

"They all endorsed it," Howerton said, "The general and a couple of others were concerned about whether I could make it or not. I told them that I've done this distance before."

The next hurdle Howerton faced was choosing the date for the run.

"I started to plan it around



Above: Locals keep pace with Sgt. Maj. Billy Howerton during his run from Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo to Camp Able Sentry, Macedonia. Right: Howerton takes a break to rehydrate. Far right: Howerton waves to locals as he plods along his 52.3 mile route between Camp Bondsteel and CAS.

