

1st Armored Division

IRONSIDE

America's Tank Division

Welcome Home!

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Homecoming Issue

June - July



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In grateful remembrance
Brig. Gen. Dennis E. Hardy, 1st Armored Division assistant division commander for support, places a memorial wreath during the American Memorial Day ceremony at the Epinal American Cemetery, Dinoze, Vosges, France, May 27. "The 1 million men and women we honor today, including those who lie here in American Cemetery at Dinoze, will continue to live in our nation's memory but only for as long as we uphold their traditions of service and selfless sacrifice."

*Photo by Ellen A. Hart
3rd Corps Support Command PAO*

Cover: *Husbands and wives and parents and children were reunited as Task Force Falcon 2B soldiers returned home from a six-month deployment to Kosovo. The returning soldiers were greeted with hugs and kisses from their loved ones. Photos by Sgt. Gregory F. Withrow, 1AD PAO. Back Cover: Photos by Spc. Roderick A. Berry and Sgt. Gregory F. Withrow, 1AD PAO.*

Posters on pages 21 - 23 and pullout designed by Kerri Schools, 1AD PAO. Photos courtesy of USAREUR and 1AD PAO.

Maj. Gen. George W. Casey Jr. salutes 1AD



facilities as we relocate to Wiesbaden Army Airfield. For 50 years, the Army has maintained a headquarters in BK: first, with the 2nd Armored Division, then, for 35 years with the 8th Infantry Division, and finally the Old Ironsides Division. The friendships and bonds that were developed in that time are lifetime memories. During the closure ceremony conducted on May 25, we had more than 25 veterans of both the 8th ID and the 1st AD, including a former division commander, retired Gen. David M. Maddox. Thank you, to the city of Bad Kreuznach, and thank you, to the soldiers who have served in this great community.

No unit has been able to survive without the support of the families that remain behind to keep the home fires burning. Iron spouses rose to the challenge of not only maintaining the community with the absence of their soldiers, but they accomplished this here, in Germany, away from the comfortable stateside living conditions. You made our communities a great place for families. Shelia and I want to personally thank you for your support and "can do" approach to everything you've done for soldiers and families.

Finally, the 1st Armored Division has a very successful history and I feel proud that you have added, in a magnificent way, to that history over the past two years. We've built on our past with an eye toward the future. We continue to be a lethal unit, capable of defeating any enemy, and restoring peace wherever we are called on to do so. Godspeed.

Iron Soldiers!

It hardly seems that two years have passed already and that are mission in Kosovo is finished. Many thanks to all of the Division's soldiers who made the U.S. KFOR mission such a great success. Once again, you proved that when "Old Ironsides" goes on point for the nation, they succeed magnificently and with quiet confidence. Good luck to the great soldiers of KFOR 3A as they assume their duties in Kosovo.

When I arrived, I challenged the Division to become a fit, disciplined, cohesive team led by skilled and versatile leaders, focused on excellence, and capable of rapid deployment, and decisive victory. Without question, every task you've been

asked to perform has proven you to be the leader you were challenged to be. Iron leaders have proven to be savvy and skilled, and have shown a desire to win on any battlefield.

In the next 30 days, the Division leadership will change hands, but our junior leadership and NCO Corps will be the glue that maintains the standards of excellence that have already been established. Our senior NCO Corps has never been stronger; our small unit leadership was exercised during the Kosovo rotation and proved that the mission can't be accomplished without strong platoon, squad and section leaders. Upon returning to garrison, you maintained your edge by capturing the leadership spirit with tough, realistic Sergeant's Time Training. Well Done!

We say good-bye to Bad Krueznach

Iron Soldiers!

Commentary by
Sgt. Gregory E. Withrow
1st Armored Division PAO

Many Americans were still trying to find Bosnia on a map when the 1st Armored Division rolled across the Sava River, Dec. 31, 1995.

First Armored Division soldiers, who know about sacrifice and the importance of adhering to high standards, knew their mission and what it would take to complete it, but for much of the American public the purpose of the deployment remained unclear.

Balkan is a Turkish word meaning rocky or stony, and is a fitting description of former Yugoslavia. Would the deployment become another Vietnam only with a different terrain or would it be the first step on the rocky road to freedom for the people of the Balkans?

Heated debate raged across the United States. Should America really be involved in a problem that was clearly defined by many as a responsibility of Europe? What is our national interest in that big pile of rocks — formerly known as Yugoslavia, was a question often posed. Some argued that we were snuffing the same sparks that had led to two world wars. Some said we had no economic interest. Some claimed a humanitarian angle. Some were soldiers in the 1st Armored Division.

Iron Soldiers continued their peace keeping mission while critics waged campaigns of dissent and proponents argued dissenters — both examples of the 1st Amendment right to freedom of speech.

Freedom of speech was one of the rights not possessed by the people of the Balkans. Freedom of speech was one of the rights not possessed by American colonists 225 years ago.

American patriots shed blood,

sweat and tears during the American Revolution for principles which were later laid down in the Bill of Rights and the United States Constitution — the same rights denied the people of the Balkans.

I joined the U.S. Army as a tanker May 24, 1994 while the possibility of a major deployment to the Balkans loomed on the horizon. I had requested to be stationed in Europe, hoping to be involved in something big, but the Army sent me to Fort Stewart, Ga.

I was greatly disappointed, but the craziest, most-wonderful thing happened to me. I received orders to be stationed in Europe only three weeks after I arrived at Fort Stewart. I arrived in Germany Oct. 12, 1995, only 80 days before 1AD crossed the Sava River. Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, I did not deploy and was part of the rear detachment. I say fortunately because I witnessed many wonderful things while the arguments about the deployment lingered.

I saw American patriotism and its export firsthand.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines patriot as one who loves his country and supports its authority and interests.

Soldiers from 1st Armored Division left their friends and families behind to support our nation's interest, which included laying the foundation for a safe and secure environment on which the pillars of democracy could stand fast.

After a year in the Balkans, 1st Armored Division soldiers returned home. Tears of pain that fell a year before were only a precursor to the torrential downpour of joyous tears flowing down mountains of hugs for those separated by the deployment, but we haven't stopped sacrificing. It's an ongoing process.

Six years later, the pace hasn't changed much in 1st Armored Division. I have been deployed, changed jobs and

have seen many soldiers come and go. I have been in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia and Kosovo. I have seen the effect of our noncommissioned officers instructing the Croatian army.

I listened on the phone with my Kosovar-friend, Bujar, as his family was ousted from their home by Serbs during the NATO bombing campaign.

I have seen the effect of our patriotic export in the smiles of Balkan-children, the laughter of toothless, old men and the attempt of many to adopt those superficial customs and styles often associated with Americans, but most importantly, the attempt to emulate our freedom.

There is no utopia in the Balkans, but neither was there a perfect society after the birth of our nation. Although the Declaration of Independence signaled the birth of a new sort of nation to the world, we had to learn much about ourselves, and others before independence and freedom were truly achieved.

Six years later, we are ending another of many deployments in the Balkans; however there is no complacency in dealing with deployments for the American soldier or the family and friends. Each minute away from loved ones and each tear shed, are great sacrifices laid on the altar of freedom.

If there is one principle that our American patriots and their families can bring to the Balkans, it is that freedom takes work. And when that freedom is achieved, share it. Make the sacrifices, shed those tears and give those hugs, but above all, share freedom.

I find the sweetest irony in the fact that I serve in the 1st Armored Division, nicknamed "Old Ironsides" after the U.S.S. Constitution, the ship named for the document, which is the foundation of our government — our way of life.

Old Ironsides

hands over Task Force Falcon

Story by Spc. Joe Thompson
Photo by Master Sgt. Lisa Hunter
1st Armored Division PAO



CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo — After a yearlong rotation in Kosovo, the 1st Armored Division relinquished command of the Multinational Brigade-East to the 101st Airborne Division June 1.

The transfer of authority ceremony held at Camp Bondsteel ended 1st Armored Division's year long deployment and 2nd Brigade's six-month tour in Kosovo, which was commanded by Brig. Gen. Kenneth Quinlan, Assistant Division Commander for Maneuver.

"Our multiple missions were accomplished with a quiet confidence, representative of the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines with the task force," said Quinlan. "A superb training program in Germany, and a demanding mission rehearsal exercise, created a fit, disciplined, cohesive team, led by skilled and versatile leaders,

focused on excellence, capable of rapid deployment and decisive victory."

Under the leadership of Quinlan, Task Force Falcon soldiers have successfully patrolled hundreds of thousands of miles and pilots have flown over 6,000 hours. Over 500 soldiers from the Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac, commonly known by the Albanian acronym UCPMB, have turned themselves in to Task Force Falcon. The Ground Security Zone, a border established by NATO in 1999 as a buffer zone between peacekeepers and Serb security forces, was returned to Serbian control. Tons of ammunition and weapons were confiscated, and thousands of pounds of clothing and food were distributed.

Brig. Gen. William David, 101st Airborne Division Assistant Division Commander for Maneuver, takes over the challenges of Task Force Falcon and MNB(E).

"I give you my solemn pledge that this team you see before you will do everything within its power to be

good teammates to everyone. Building upon the foundation so capably led by Brigadier General Ken Quinlan, Colonel Gene Kamena, and many others," said David at the transfer of authority ceremony. "We will do our best to advance the peace process and the rule of law, to make Kosovo a safe and secure environment for all its citizens."

The 1st Armored Division played a significant role in the changes in Kosovo.

"Ethnic intimidation has been drastically reduced, while grassroots interaction between Serbs and Albanians is occurring daily," said Quinlan. "We have also seen integration of Serbs into most municipal governments, as well as the strengthening bonds of trust between [United Nations Mission in Kosovo] and the Task Force. This sector is safer today because of the service members of Multinational Brigade-East."

1AD bids Bad Kreuznach auf wiedersehen



1951-2001

Story and photos by
Pvt. Benjamin Z. Etzioni
1st Armored Division PAO

BAD KREUZNACH, Germany — The United States Army established its community here in 1951. So began 50 years of partnership and friendship between the U.S. forces and members of the community that came to an end during a weekend of ceremonies, parades and celebrations, May 25 – 27.

“This marks a decisive turning point for the division, which is moving, but also a historical one for the city of Bad Kreuznach,” said Rolf Ebbeke, lord mayor of Bad Kreuznach. “The Army has become throughout these [past 50] years a part of the city. Now we lose this part. On behalf of the Bad Kreuznach citizens, I would like to thank all of the soldiers who have served for peace and accomplished their mission here over the past five decades.”

Maj. Gen. George W. Casey Jr., commander of the 1st Armored Division discussed the differences between the Bad Kreuznach of today and that of 50 years ago.

“I personally, as well as the members of my division, are gathered here today, to say farewell to a city which has become a second home for us,” said Casey. “When I attended the opening of the exhibition at the Sparkasse [Bank] about our 50-year



Maj. Gen. George W. Casey Jr., commander of the 1st Armored Division, presents Rolf Ebbeke, lord mayor of Bad Kreuznach, an American flag on behalf of the three division headquarters that have been stationed in Bad Kreuznach over the last 50 years, during the Closure Ceremony at Moebus Stadium in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, May 25. The ceremony was followed by a parade through the city and a weekend full of German-American events.

presence here in Bad Kreuznach, I was impressed and amazed how much has changed in 50 years. In March 1945, American tanks rolled in and occupied the city. Then after the war ended, we were no longer the enemy, but we still had a long way to go to get to know and trust one another.”

Over the last 50 years three different units have called Bad Kreuznach home. The 2nd Armored Division was stationed in Bad Kreuznach in 1951. The 8th Infantry Division arrived in 1957 and stayed until 1992. Finally, the 1st Armored Division took over Jan. 17, 1992.

“All those years, Americans and Germans built a strong partnership and many strong friendships,” said Casey. “We came as strangers and are leaving as friends. Bad Kreuznachers opened their homes and their hearts for nearly 100,000 American soldiers who have been stationed here over the years.”

Ebbeke remarked on the impact the American soldiers have had on Bad Kreuznach.

“Today, when the soldiers leave, because of global political changes that also influence the stationing issues in Germany, the sol-



Brig. Gen. Dennis Hardy leads Iron Soldiers who carry the colors of the three divisions that were headquartered in Bad Kreuznach, cross over the Nabe River during the parade that took them from Moebus Stadium all the way to Rose Barracks in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, following the Closure Ceremony, May 25.

diers and their families leave as friends, friends who have become a part of the city, during their 50-year presence. Friends, [who] we don't see leave easily,” said Ebbeke. “Soldiers from three different divisions have served in Bad Kreuznach and because of their tremendous contribution, democracy, peace and prosperity have developed throughout Central Europe.”

Both Germans and Americans

joined together to celebrate those 50 years of accomplishments during a weekend full of activities that included everything from a parade by the 1st Armored Division through Bad Kreuznach, to a German-American half-marathon race, to a German-American basketball game.

“It is a difficult farewell because we must say good bye to friends,” said Casey. “Thank you to all

of you for making Bad Kreuznach a special place to live. We may part geographically, but the friendship will remain. So after all, this is not good bye, but Auf Wiedersehen. We will be back to visit. Thank you Bad Kreuznach for 50 wonderful years.”

Auf Wiedersehen!

Story by Spc. Lara M. Martinez
Photos by Sgt. Gregory E. Withrow
1st Armored Division PAO

BAUMHOLDER, Germany —
The 1st Armored Division welcomed troops home from the division's rotation in Kosovo and Macedonia.

Over 3,400 soldiers have returned since May 17 after spending six months deployed in support of KFOR. The homecoming marks the end of a one-year rotation by 1AD supporting the United Nations' efforts to stabilize the region and promote a more peaceful Kosovo.

Old Ironsides' soldiers began deploying in support of rotation KFOR 2B in November, relieving 1AD's first rotation, KFOR 2A, in Kosovo and Macedonia. According to V Corps Commander Gen. James Riley, 2B's rotation was a great success.

"These soldiers, the soldiers of Task Force 2B, as we call them, have had a great rotation, in many ways the most dynamic Falcon rotation to date. On their watch...we saw Falcon soldiers as they re-established the border, turned over weapons, and fighters turned back to Serbian control...and in the midst of all this turmoil, Task Force Falcon has never lost sight of its primary mission, enforcing a safe and secure environment in its area of responsibility."

Iron soldiers from 141st Signal Battalion, 501st Military Intelligence Battalion, 123rd Main Support Battalion, HHC, 1st Armored Division, 4th Brigade's 1-501st Aviation Battalion, 2-501st Aviation Battalion, 127th Aviation Support Battalion, 1-1 Cavalry and 2nd Brigade's 1-6th Infantry Battalion, 2-6th Infantry Battalion, 1-35th Armor Battalion,



Iron Soldiers from 2-6th Infantry Battalion march into Baumholder's Mountaineer Gymnasium after returning from six months in Kosovo. Family and friends wait inside to receive their loved ones.

Photo by Spc. Roderick A. Berry

47th Forward Support Battalion, 40th Engineer Battalion, 4-27th Field Artillery Battalion were received with open arms by friends and loved ones waiting in Germany.

During their deployment, 1AD soldiers conducted thousands of patrols and participated in various humanitarian aid projects.

"We ran bus-escort missions, went to local villages, met some of the kids, pulled security at Camp Monteith and Bondsteel, and generally made a better place for these people to live in," said SPC Robert Brown from HHC 1-35 Armor Battalion.

"I liked knowing I was doing something good," Brown continued.

"We set goals that we attained and it went well...no injuries, just an overall great feeling."

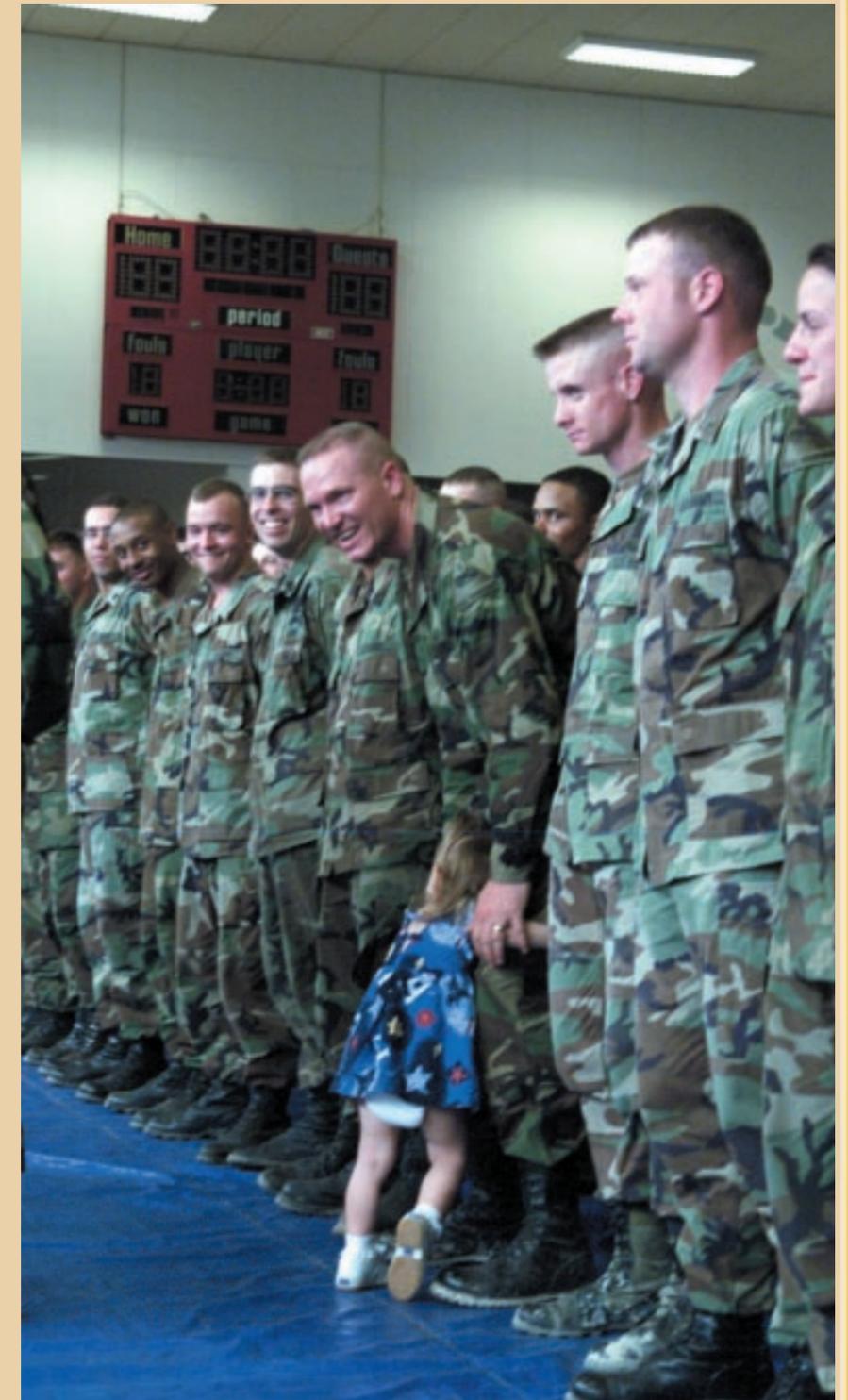
While soldiers were away, their family members relied on individuals such as the 2nd Brigade Family Readiness Liaison, SFC Anthony DeLong to keep them informed and to better prepare them for deployment.

"We briefed the families on the current situation in Kosovo and kept them up-to-date on what the soldiers were doing on the day to day missions without compromising the mission and we also kept them informed of what was going on back in the community that they could participate in," explained DeLong.

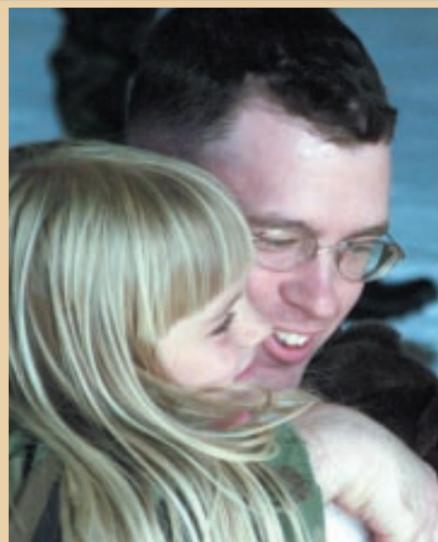
DeLong went on to thank the USO, AAFES and the Commissary for support in preparing homecoming receptions for the soldiers returning from Kosovo.

The 101st Airborne Division stationed at Fort Campbell, Ky., relieved 1AD.

"I am absolutely confident in the training and abilities of the next American contingent Task Force Falcon 3A. They come to you from the 18th Airborne Corps and they represent the very best America has to offer," said Gen. Riley in his speech during the transfer of authority ceremony at Camp Bondsteel.



Top left: Family and friends await the arrival of the 1-35 AR. Bottom left: Mother and son are reunited during 47th FSB's homecoming. Middle bottom: A big smile and a waving flag awaits 1-35 AR. Above: Laughter erupts as a little girl breaks from the crowd to welcome home her daddy a little bit early, during 47th FSB's homecoming.



Above: A double helping of hugs is what this dad from 47th FSB gets. Top middle: Cheek to cheek hugs abound during 141 SB's homecoming. Middle: A 1-35 AR soldier feels his expectant wife's belly. Bottom left: Dad loses his hat to a happy son during 47th FSB's homecoming. Bottom middle: Kisses and smiles brighten the hangar during 4th Brigade's homecoming. Bottom right: A baby girl's sweet kisses greet this 47th FSB mom. Top right: Tears stream down as the anticipation is over and a 1-35 AR couple are reunited.



Making strides in the

Balkans

Story by Master Sgt. Lisa Hunter
1st Armored Division PAO
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.

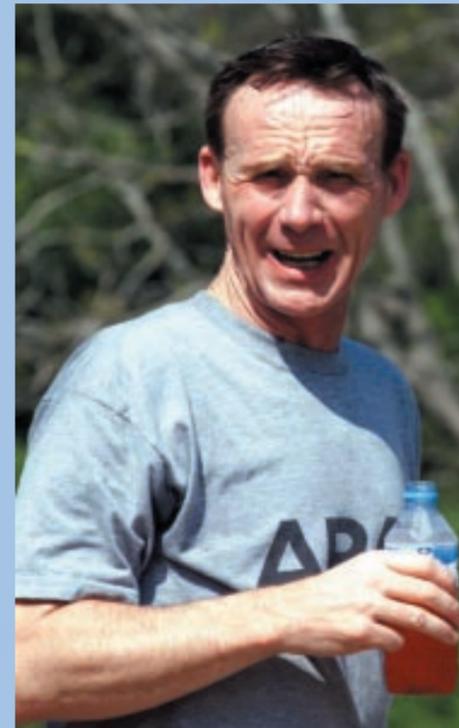
"They all endorsed it," Howerton said, "The general and a couple of others were concerned about whether I could make it or not. I told them that I've done this distance before."

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.



January or February. Then I set up the original date to do this on April 1, sort of as an April Fool's joke, but the mission wouldn't allow it," Howerton explained. "Then we set it up for Tax Day, April 15. Again, the mission wouldn't let that happen. So, then we set it up for May Day [May 1]. We wanted it to be in conjunction with a day that a lot of people would remember."

Howerton and nine other soldiers set out on the run. They took with them water, fruit and Howerton's special drink; watered-down Gatorade. The soldiers served as the sergeant major's support crew, running team and force protection escorts. Along the way, six of the soldiers took turns running with him, but at times, Howerton ran alone.

Howerton, who is used to running mostly on tracks or rural roads, kept a good pace until he reached the one city along his route, Skopje, Macedonia.

"I had never run through a city before for this distance," he explained. "Most of my runs are on a quarter-mile track, half-mile track or on a trail. I couldn't figure out why we were running really good until I hit Skopje. When we hit Skopje, for some reason, I felt the pain. I felt like we weren't going anywhere; I wasn't getting anyplace. I was kind of cranky with my crew. I was thinking, 'Will we ever get through this city?'"

"Looking back on it, I realize this was the first time I had run through a major city. At that point in a distance run, you've got to concentrate on your running. I couldn't concentrate because

of the traffic and the people and the different noises. I just lost the concentration of running. It was very, very difficult. I lost a lot of time on the run because of that."

Along the way, Howerton only stopped for "potty breaks" and to drink. "I don't check my feet or change my socks when I'm running. The only time I change my shoes is when I'm on a 24-hour run on a quarter-mile track. My feet swell, so I go to a shoe that's a half size larger.

Howerton and his crew ran through the gates of Camp Able Sentry, Macedonia, eight hours and 45 minutes after leaving Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo.

The Camp Bondsteel to Camp

listens to music, but most of the time he meditates and focuses on the run; but running solely on Camp Bondsteel has been monotonous.

"The thing that really bothers me is when I'm running on Bondsteel and right outside the perimeter, I'll see a road going off into nowhere. I just want to see where that road goes."

Howerton keeps a log of how many miles he's run. While deployed, he ran 546 miles. To date, his personal best is running 100 miles in 17 hours, 25 minutes. His record distance for 24 hours is 115 miles.

Although Howerton has qualified several times for the Boston Marathon, missions have always kept him from actually running in the race. His most famous race thus far was a three-day run across Tennessee.

"I thoroughly enjoyed that. I had done it one year and fell

out due to heat and stomach cramps," Howerton said. "So, when I went back to do it the second year, I had overcome that." Howerton ran 263 miles in three days, his longest distance for one race.

Since March 1989, when he began competing in ultra-marathons, Howerton has logged 17,516 miles.

Unlike marathon running, there is no training program for the ultras. Each runner must train his or her own way. For Howerton, no matter how much he trains, every run is a challenge, a struggle between body and mind.

"When I'm getting ready for a run, I tell a lot of people before this run that I'm going to do this run. Then as I'm running and the pain sets in — when the pain sets in, you're tired, you get weary, you want to quit and the brain's fighting the body — I remember that I told this person, this person and this person that I'm going to do this. If I don't make it, I have to go back and face those guys and I don't like that embarrassment."

Even before Howerton returned to Baumholder, he had already set his next goal. "My goal now is to do an ultra-run in Germany and to be able to win an ultra-run in Germany.

"As a Christian, God has given me a great ability to run. I couldn't do it without the support of the military, the chain of command, God and my wife — not necessarily in that order."

Unlike shorter races, the ultra-marathon runners are not divided into categories. Howerton will be competing against some runners half his age. Nonetheless, Howerton plans to compete and win.

"In ultra-marathons there are no age categories, it's first place or loser."

For Howerton, setting the example for soldiers is just as important as the competition.

"The soldiers that went with me said they had never known this distance before. I showed them that with the proper training and the dedication, you can do whatever you want to with God's will, Howerton said.

"Some of those guys set their own personal records by running 10 or 12 miles, more than they've ever run before. They are really pumped up about it now. They see that 'Yes, you can do this if you train for it.' They are pretty eager now. Some of them are really getting into running, because of it."

"In ultra-marathons, there are no age categories, it's first place or loser."

Sgt. Maj. Billy Howerton

Able Sentry run marked Howerton's return to ultra running, it also served as a teaching point for several of his soldiers.

To train for his run, Howerton ran five times a week, running 15 miles at least two times a week. His only cross training is bicycling.

"A lot of soldiers don't comprehend that to get this, you're putting in 10 to 15 miles daily. You're getting up early every morning to run. You're running late of a night, rather than watching TV. There's a lot of dedication, training and work that goes into it," he explained. When running, Howerton sometimes

Camp Able Sentry, Macedonia - 52.3 miles

Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo to



Sgt. Maj. Billy Howerton and escort maintain a steady pace and high spirits during the grueling 52.3 mile run from Camp Bondsteel to CAS.

Remembering 1945's victory bells A WWII veteran's journey there and back

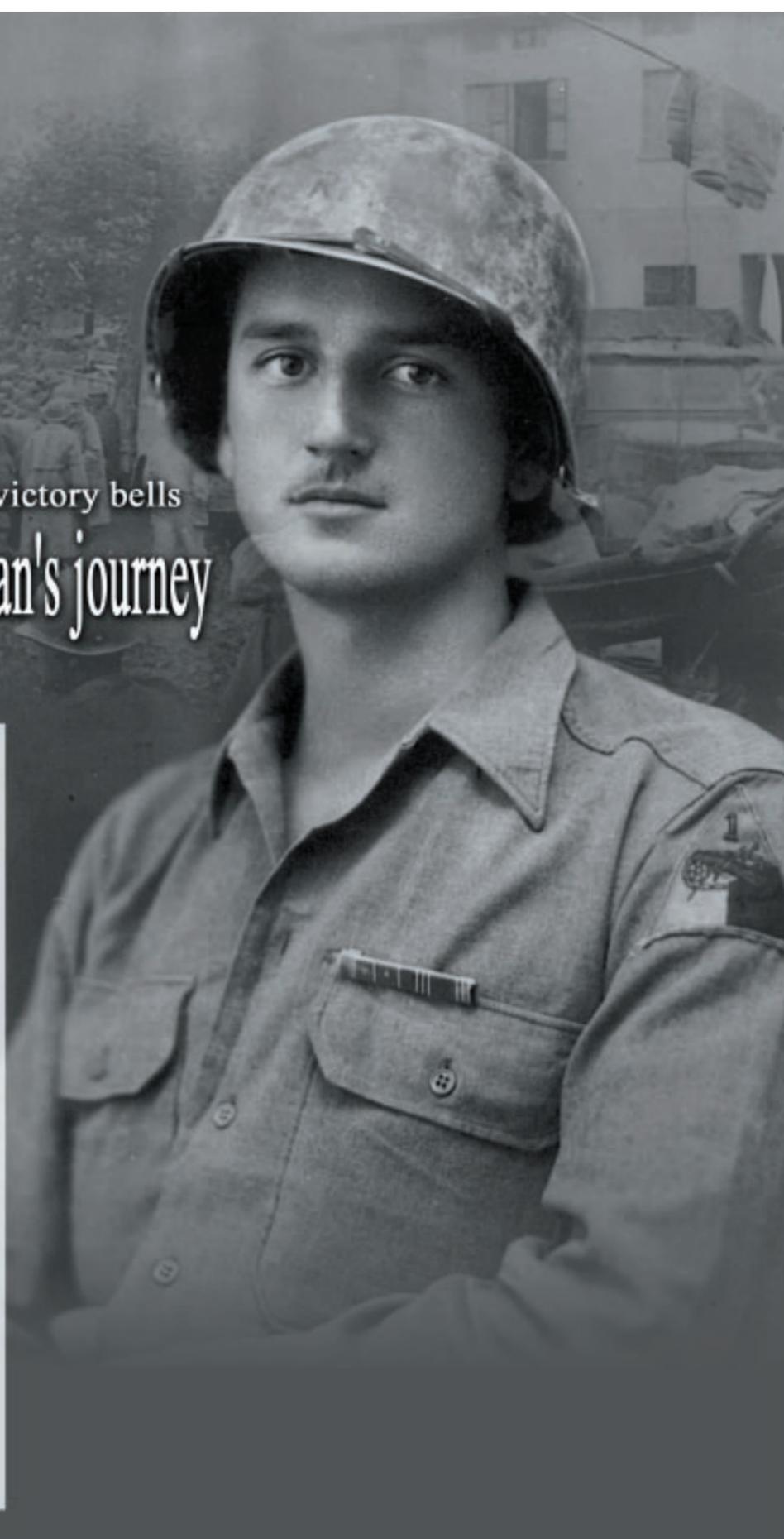
Story by Sgt. Gregory F. Withrow
1st Armored Division PAO
Photos courtesy Robert M. Johnson

Robert M. Johnson gets a far away look in his eye when he travels back in time to the early 1940s and WWII. He is much older now but the years seem to fade away when he remembers.

He was born July 26, 1924 in King of Prussia, Pa., but please don't tell anyone.

Like many young men at that time, he told a fib about his age to enlist in the U.S. Army at the age of 17. He smiles and doesn't seem to worry about it anymore because he saw the chaplain at Fort Knox, Ky., and had the whole thing cleared up.

The old pictures of Johnson show a young kid, not some crusty, old tanker. He was certainly young then, like many of the other soldiers. He was just a little older than the 1st Armored Division, which was activated July 15, 1940.



Johnson enlisted in May 1942 and received armored crewman training at Fort Knox.

"I was having a ball during training – driving tanks all over the damned place," remembers Johnson. "But those 13 or 14 weeks of training didn't last long, and soon after that I received orders taking me from the 8th Armored Division to the 1st Armored Division."

Johnson soon moved to a deployment staging area in New Brunswick, N.J. to sail to North Africa.

"We sailed on the S.S. Christobel which had been used as a banana boat between New York and South America, but had been refitted to support the war effort," explained Johnson. The ship sailed on Jan. 13, 1943, taking Johnson on a journey he would never forget.

"We landed in North Africa outside Oran. I called it the Repo Depot (replacement depot) and it was a mess – all kinds of equipment everywhere," said Johnson. He was a long way from home, but he was not alone.

Johnson reported to his unit, Company D, 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division.

"'Hey Johnson! When the hell did you get here?' is one of the first things I heard," explained Johnson. "I turned and saw my friend Becker, from back at Knox." A familiar face set Johnson a little more at ease, but it would not be long before Johnson would form other fast friendships.

"That's the thing about a tank outfit, you get close because everyone is vulnerable. When we were in the Po Valley in Italy, Burshad, a Jew, and Hamlin, a Catholic, both got killed. Shells don't distinguish between people," explained Johnson. "We were all out there – a long way from home – but all together."

Johnson soon saw combat in North Africa.

"I was originally an M3 medium tank driver which was 18 tons under feet," reflected Johnson. "We soon had the M5 and M5A1 Stuarts as the Brits called them. We called them s___ boxes because half the time they scared the s___ out of us," Johnson said with a big

grin. Johnson can recount his war experiences with lightheartedness that belies the grim sights he witnessed and the hard lessons learned by the newborn 1st Armored Division.

"In the Battle of Mousetrapp we had five mediums with a forward observer and nine light tanks knocked out by an 88mm cannon. That was something to see. I tried to go around. I went left and got stuck in a swamp and threw track," explained Johnson.

"But 1st Lieutenant Downs got us through it. He was an ace. He was a real man. We got that 88mm cannon knocked out, but that was a terrible loss," said Johnson.

Johnson can tell many stories and verify obscure details of the war in North Africa with a clarity that makes one think he was there just yesterday, but his experiences weren't limited to 1st Armored Division's first desert conflict.

The good, the bad and the ugly of North Africa soon moved into Italy after the completion of Operation Torch. For Johnson, the war had even taken a turn for the better in some instances.

"While we were just outside Naples we got a barn and had a party with the local [ladies]," explained Johnson smiling all the while.

"Our company bugler was John V. Kelly. He had made bomb racks before he was in the army," explained Johnson. "One day, we found a lost string of bombs. I said, 'This must have been one you made Kelly.' Everyone got a laugh out of that." That moment and many others like it formed a long-lasting friendship between Kelly and Johnson.

"I told Kelly I was going to dance at his wedding. Well, I surprised him at his wedding and



Robert M. Johnson's peaceful rest would soon be over as he was awakened to the news of his promotion to sergeant just before moving into Italy's Po Valley.

asked him if he remembered my promise. Kelly said, 'Jesus Christ! That's right!' And so we danced," said Johnson, laughing.

Years later, Kelly returned Johnson's favor — the dancing continued and so did the friendship. Johnson made other friends in Italy — the four-legged kind — the barking kind.

Johnson's outfit, as he often refers to his unit, picked up a dog while in Italy. "Fleke went everywhere we went. He wasn't afraid of anything," said Johnson.

"In those days, just before the Po Valley, things were serious. Friends were serious," said Johnson. "They woke me up to tell me I was a sergeant just before the Po Valley. We lost some good guys there."

Johnson made it through the Po Valley and started his journey home in 1945, bringing the dog Fleke with him.

"I had all the papers done up on Fleke to get him back with me. It was a comical time. I flew from Pisa to Port Liodi in North Africa on B-17 Bomber.

"That's the thing about a tank outfit, you get close because everyone is vulnerable."

Robert M. Johnson

I then took a DC6 down to Dakar and then to Natel, Brazil during what was know as Green Project. I had Fleke in a little bag all the way until I had to show him and his papers to a major who said

to me, 'No animals get past me unauthorized,' " explained Johnson. "Fleke and I made it to Miami, where I had to show Fleke and his papers to customs. The funny thing about it is that the customs guy showed me a whole room of unauthorized animals that had made it past the major in Brazil."

"I was discharged on VJ Day. When I got home bells were ringing and whistles were blowing," said Johnson. "I thought, 'Man, they are glad to see me.' " Considering everything Johnson went through he has not soured. He still has his sense of humor and his love of God.

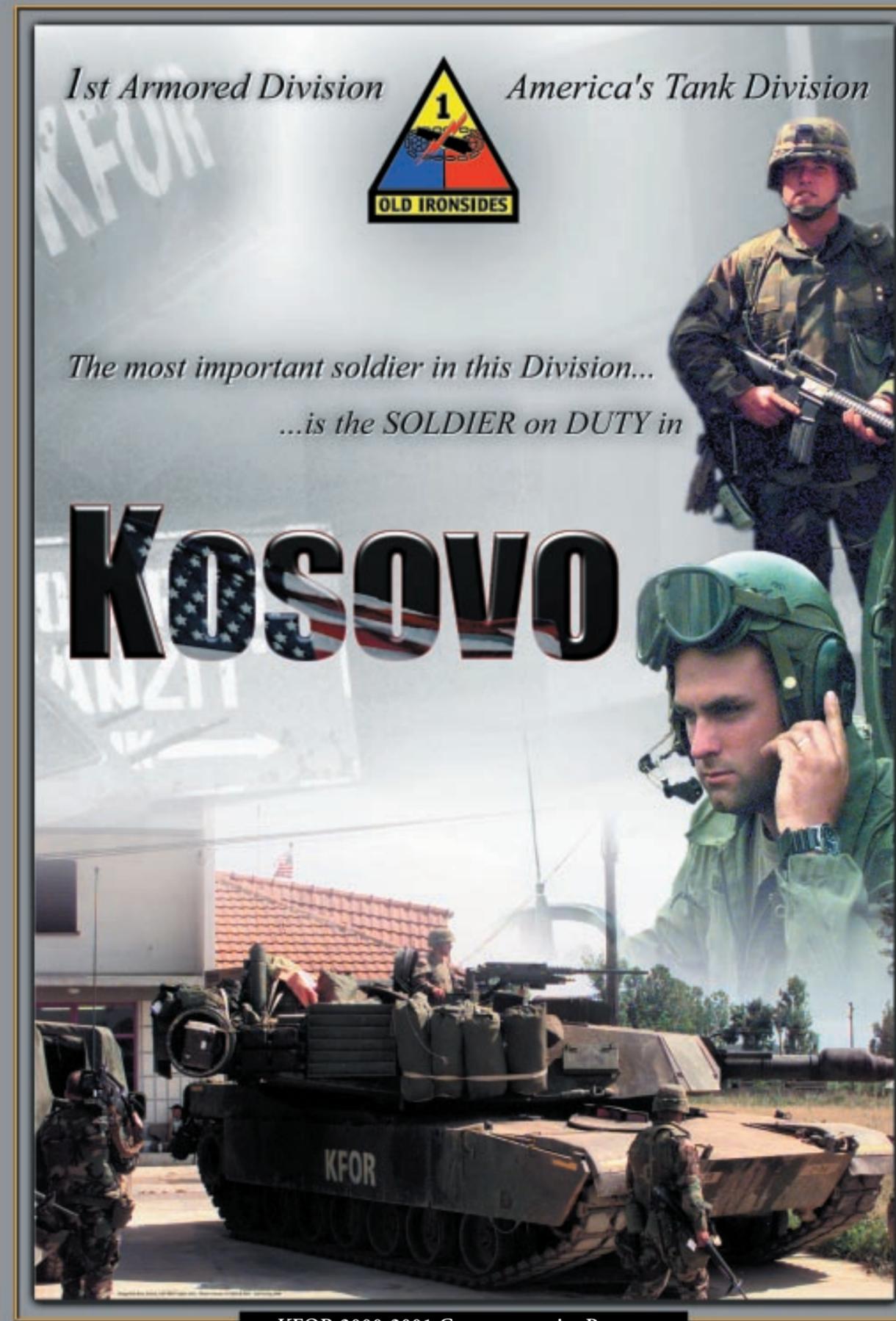
"I walked straight to church with Fleke. We went inside and sat down. I thanked the good Lord I had made it," finished Johnson with tears in his eyes and a crack in his voice.



Robert M. Johnson attends the 1st Armored Division Association Reunion Aug. 2000.



Left to right: (Unknown first name) Rodriguez, Robert M. Johnson, Jack Franks, Charlie Stewart — members of the 4th Tank Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, display a captured Nazi flag.



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