

South Dakota National Guard

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3 Soldiers return to Kuwait 14 years later with same SD unit

By Staff Sgt. Tiphany Dvorak – 155th Engineer Company

CAMP BUEHRING, Kuwait - Three South Dakota Army National Guard Soldiers are back in Kuwait for a second time, serving with the same unit they deployed with more than 14 years ago.

The Soldiers are part of the Rapid City and Wagner-based 155th Engineer Company, the first South Dakota National Guard unit to deploy after 9/11 in support of the global war on terror.

The vertical engineer company deployed in 2002-2003 in support of Operation Noble Eagle where they were stationed at Camp Doha, Kuwait, building up base infrastructure in the lead up to the war in Iraq.

From that deployment, Sgt. 1st Class Allan Baker of Rapid City, Sgt. Joseph Cross of Pine Ridge, and Sgt. Michael Dodge of Rapid City, are back in Kuwait serving with the unit for a second time.

The 155th deployed Aug. 13, 2015 and are now stationed at Camp Buehring, where they are providing construction, repair and maintenance of vertical infrastructures and facilities.

Baker joined the SDNG in 2001 as a plumber/pipefitter in the 155th. He deployed with the unit in 2002 as a private first class and stayed with the unit until accepting a promotion to staff sergeant in the 153rd Engineer Battalion as a construction engineering supervisor. He later accepted a position with the Recruit Sustainment Program at Fort Meade where he served for one year before returning to the 155th as the 1st platoon squad leader.

Between deployments Baker went on overseas training missions to Korea, twice to Nicaragua, and twice to Suriname. He also went to New Mexico for the Southwest Border Mission where he helped build a vehicle barrier fence.

Baker also answered his state's call for state active duty during the 2004 Red Point Fire, the 2006 East Ridge Fire, and the 2008 snow removal mission in the Sturgis area.

“It is a lot different being a private first class then and now a platoon sergeant,” Baker said, reflecting on some of the differences between the deployments. “Instead of spending the day out working, I’m now responsible for tasking all of the jobs and making sure everyone is busy.”

Having a wife and child makes him appreciate home more now than when he was single and deployed, he said.

Cross joined the SDNG in 1996 as a carpenter in the 155th and has spent nearly 20 years with the unit. He's deployed three times, twice now with the 155th and in 2007 with the 235th Military Police Company.

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In order to deploy to Afghanistan with the 235th, he trained and became MOS qualified as a 31B (military police).

He went with the 155th on overseas training to Japan, twice to Nicaragua, to Suriname, where he spent six months as a project noncommissioned officer in charge, to Haiti, and Italy.

He served on state active duty during the Missouri River flood in Pierre and Dakota Dunes.

Cross is thankful that the unit has better tools and equipment now verses in 2002.

“We are better equipped to preform and accomplish our assigned projects with the tools the unit was able to bring over this time,” said Cross.

Dodge joined the SDNG in 1996 as a plumber/pipefitter when he was a 17-year-old junior in high school.

He went on overseas training missions with the 155th to Japan, Italy, Nicaragua, and Suriname as a plumber.

During the 155’s first deployment, he was one of seven Soldiers selected to go to Camp Lemonier, Djibouti to upgrade the water supplies, bathroom and shower facilities, and electrical systems.

After returning from deployment he got out of the National Guard for a year-and-a-half until he was admitted to the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology and reenlisted. During college he was assigned to the 189th Aviation Regiment in Rapid City and successfully completed the Army Air Assault School at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

After graduating he returned to the 155th, accepted the Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear and Explosives NCO position and attended a military occupational skills course at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

During his career he’s been called to state active duty for airport security after 9/11 and for Winter Storm Atlas to help line crews restore power near Faith.

Dodge is surprised by how much technology has made this deployment easier to keep in touch with family members.

“Last time if the family missed a phone call because they were not home it was tough,” he said. “This time you can call and talk to them wherever they might be.”

In preparation for this deployment, Dodge was sent to the Department of Defense Hazardous Materials Certifying Official Course at the Professional Education Center in Little Rock, Arkansas, to certify the unit’s equipment for shipment to Kuwait. He is currently serving as the unit CBRNE, assistant training/operations NCO, unit public affairs representative, retention NCO, DoD hazardous materials certifying official, and trip ticket NCO.

The 155th is supporting Operation Spartan Shield in Kuwait, Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq, and operations in Jordan.

Projects include finishing the flooring of Kuwaiti Energy Efficiency Program housing, building a Joint Operation Center, new construction of multiple sun shades, emergency phone installation, Civilian Housing Units remodel, and many others.



160207-Z-ZZ999-002: From left to right: Sgt. Michael Dodge, Sgt. First Class Allan Baker, and Sgt. Joseph Cross, members of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 155th Engineer Company, stand behind a barrier on Camp Buehring, Kuwait that was painted and placed on Camp Doha, Kuwait on their first deployment and later moved to Buehring. The three Soldiers deployed with the 155th in 2002-2003 and are now serving with the unit in Kuwait again where the engineer company is providing construction, repair and maintenance of vertical infrastructures and facilities. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Tiphany Dvorak /Released)

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