

# Dept. of Military Affairs: Despite pandemic and mission changes, 829th continues soldiering on overseas

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by Spc. Nathan Metz

The Wisconsin Army National Guard's 829th Engineer Company, spread across the Middle East and Southwest Asia, remains hard at work on a vast array of projects for coalition forces.

The Ashland and Spooner, Wisconsin-based unit mobilized for deployment in October 2019 and began its construction mission in support of an Army National Guard engineering battalion from Indiana.

The approximately 150 Soldiers have been spread across multiple locations across the region and work on an array of projects where Soldiers are either improving existing facilities or completing construction projects.

The unit's Soldiers have served in seven countries spread across 21 bases ranging from Afghanistan and Iraq, to Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait.

The Soldiers still work and complete missions during the COVID-19 epidemic. The members of the 829th are implementing health and safety precautions to avoid the spread of the virus. They've even assisted with the construction of a COVID hospital in Afghanistan in addition to deconstructing facilities, building command posts, and completing other horizontal and vertical projects.

“The 829th will continue to take on any mission given with optimism and professionalism moving into the later months of this mobilization,” said company 1st Sgt. Sean Ringer, a Wisconsin Rapids resident. “All the command staff throughout the Indiana attached 113th Engineer Battalion have been thoroughly impressed with the eagerness of the 829th EVCC as well as the toughness that the Wisconsinites bring to Task Force Ironman Engineers.”

“I am most proud of the troops’ ability to remain resilient in an environment that has been restricted of simple conveniences,” Ringer said. “The gym’s shut down, bazaar’s closed up, and physical distancing makes maintenance of morale a difficult challenge.”

But as the overseas deployments nears its conclusion, Capt. Joe Tadisich, commander of the 829th Engineer Company, said that the Soldiers have persevered and remained steadfast in completing their mission despite the challenges presented by COVID-19.

“COVID 19 has restricted a lot personnel and equipment, but we have made it work,” he said. “Even with this major constraint the morale has still remained high.”

The command team emphasized the importance of communicating back home, ensuring that Soldiers are keeping in touch as much as possible with their families.

The 829th Engineer Company is one of several Wisconsin Army National Guard units deployed overseas in support of its federal mission as the Army’s primary combat reserve right now.

The 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team’s Headquarters and approximately 160 Soldiers deployed to Ukraine last fall as part of Joint Multinational Training Group – Ukraine, where it served as the headquarters element for the training group at the International Peacekeeping and Security Center in western Ukraine. That unit returned to the U.S. in recent weeks.

The 400 Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry returned after a 13-month mobilization to Afghanistan, where they are serving as the security element for an Army Security Force Assistance Brigade.

Meanwhile, the 924th Engineer Facilities Detachment and the 1967th Contracting Team also mobilized for deployments to Kuwait and the Horn of Africa respectively

in January and continue their missions overseas.

The Wisconsin National Guard simultaneously remains busy at home. More than 1,000 Citizen Soldiers and Airmen continue serving the state in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Guard teams have established mobile testing sites all across Wisconsin in recent months in addition to other support missions.

More than 2,400 troops helped staff polling stations during April's general election, while another 160 did so again in May during the 7th Congressional District special election. Another group of nearly 700 staffed polling sites last week across the state in the primary election.

In May and June, additional troops responded to requests for assistance from cities across the state in the midst of civil unrest.