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## John A. Nowacki (WOU Class of 2019)

John A. Nowacki  
*Western Oregon University*

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John A. Nowacki (WOU Class of 2019)

I am a 2019 alum of WOU (received my BS in Criminal Justice). The attached photo has tremendous meaning for me. The photo was taken in El Paso, TX prior to me leaving for the deployment in Kosovo I am just a few weeks from finishing. It was taken over Valentine's Day weekend this year when my wife and son came to visit me.



Prior to completing my training at Ft Bliss, TX, I was living at home in Monmouth with my family. I had officially graduated in mid December with my degree and was thankful they were able to come spend roughly 56 hours with me before I left for Europe (more training in Germany, then arriving in Kosovo in early March).

This photo was taken by a buddy in my unit as we were overlooking El Paso into Juarez, Mexico. As anyone can see it was a beautiful day out as we were about 10 hrs or so from completing our visit.

Little did any of us know that in just a few short weeks, lives in the states would be altered for what appears to be the remainder of the year, due to COVID. Over here in Kosovo, it still has some effects but from what I understand, nothing like the United States, due to the sheer number of people who live at home, in comparison to Kosovo (which is geographically about the size of Connecticut). Yes folks have died here, as well from complications of COVID, or other health

related issues. This pandemic will change some of what I have been accustomed to doing, but quite honestly, it might not change too much. I refuse to live my life in fear because of the pandemic. I will use my best judgment in how I interact with people.

As far as BLM, since I am stationed on a small US operated base here, we don't see the up close and personal issues like folks back home (especially Portland). As a unit, monthly we are required to have open discussions about how we see BLM, but I have had no personal experiences with it.

The same could be said about the wildfires. It has not had any direct effect on me, but I pray for those who it has lost either life or property due to them.

This year has made me more aware of the things I have not directly seen. It has opened my eyes to what exists in the communities back home. I know I will be coming home in December to a much different Oregon than what I left in mid January. I am truly saddened by it, and that my son has to see it. He is only 5 so he doesn't understand what is going on around him. I have my first grandchild due in early December. She will grow up knowing how her papa, grammy and her parents grew up and how times constantly change whether it be for the better or as we all have seen (some of us more closely literally than others like myself) for the worse.

Because of my experience this year overseas being deployed I am thankful I live in the United States (even during times such as this). The people here don't have the same accessibility to things some Americans might take for granted (such as healthcare, adequate housing, etc).

I consider myself blessed because of the things I have, not worse off because of what I do not.

I look forward to getting back stateside sometime in November, and home to my loved ones hopefully early December. My wife, son, and I have so much to catch up on and even more time to make up for. I love them with everything I have and am so thankful they allowed "daddy" to be gone with his buddies serving others less fortunate than us.

Go Wolves!!