

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness show where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I am Katie Johnson, your host and my guest today is Kory Nordick. He's a physician assistant at our orthopedics department and sports medicine, a service at Lake Region Healthcare, and he has recently returned from a four month military deployment that we're going to learn more about today. Thanks for joining me Kory.

Kory Nordick,PA: Thank you.

Katie Johnson: I first of all want to say I am very grateful for your service and I'm grateful for you taking some time. We like to use this show to help our listeners get to know our team better. This is really an interesting story that I think probably has an interesting backstory too. So let's start early on. What initially inspired you to join the military and what has your military career looked like so far?

Kory Nordick,PA: My family has a rich history of military service. Great-grandfather in the Marines in World War One and grandfather, Army, Air Corps, World War II, several uncles that served in Vietnam. I joined the military right out of high school. I went to Barnesville and joined the Air National Guard in Fargo right out of high school, 119th Fighter Wing. I was initially a traditional guardsman for the weekend or just a weekend warrior, so to speak. Thought I would get my college paid for and ended up being a full career now.

Kory Nordick,PA: I've served 22 years. I've been a full time federal technician. I've done some active duty time as well. Switched over to the Army National Guard after about 10 years, was commissioned as a what's called a Medical Service Corps officer. Joined their civil support team in North Dakota where I worked with a small unit of 22 members where our primary goal was for chemical, biological, or radiological hazards, so both manmade and natural disasters. Ended up doing a couple interesting things there. I went down to the Houston area after hurricane Ike and we did a lot of recovery operations and cleanup with all the petroleum industry down there. There was a lot of issues that we had to deal with.

Kory Nordick,PA: I've also served as a physician assistant now for the last eight years in the military and most recent deployment was to Jordan where I served as the Chief Medical Officer for the country of Jordan as well as the Aid Station Officer in Charge. The aid station served a population of about 500 people within two facilities. One was co-located. Essentially you just had a fence between the two. Then the country itself of Jordan, there was eight different facilities in total, including Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, so an interesting time for four months.

Katie Johnson: Oh for sure. When you talk about your early military career, all of that while going to school and having a medical career as well?

Kory Nordick,PA: Well, the medical career came later. Initially it worked out well being in Fargo. I was going to MDSU and the Air National Guard facility was just a few blocks north of campus. I was full time pretty early on. I got full time after about a year in the Air National Guard. I was working a full time job, was a federal technician and going to school. It worked out that my job was manned 24 hours, so I ended up taking a lot of night shifts. I would go to class for a few hours in the morning until I had to go to sleep. I actually always had a digital recorder with me, so if I fell asleep I could still record the notes and then get caught up on that. But I did that. It took me a little bit longer to finish my four year degree because of that. But yeah, I was a full time military and full time student for about five years.

Katie Johnson: Gosh, that's dedication. Did this time in the military shape your decision to pursue medicine or where did that fall in?

Kory Nordick,PA: So interestingly enough, I was premed at MDSU, so I had kind of decided early on I was going to go into medicine. I was premed, I was actually scheduled to take the the MCAT, the medical entrance exam essentially. Scheduled to take that October 2001. Well, September 11th got in the way of that. After September 11th, the Air National Guard, I was activated for about a year and a half. I was really busy full time, and everything else school-wise took a back seat. Took a year off of school. My first child was born in February 2002, which also pushed everything further on the back burner as far as pursuing a career in medicine.

Kory Nordick,PA: Then as things developed and I got a job with a civil support team, I decided that, you know what, maybe medical school isn't the best career option right now. But one of my mentors on that team was also a physician assistant by the name of Roger [Pressler 00:04:58] and he actually knew that I was premed in college. He was actually the one that hired me. He was one of the selecting individuals for the job that I was hired for. I was their Medical Operations Officer. He talked to me about the physician assistant career field more, which I wasn't really familiar with at the time, as well as the military physician assistant program, which is why I ended up attending. Which is the inner service physician assistant program, which actually all military PAs, which is Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard all go through the same program. It's a very highly selective program, very highly competitive program. But that's the program I attended.

Katie Johnson: So how did you end up in Fergus Falls? What brought your family here?

Kory Nordick,PA: I grew up in Barnesville. I'm from the area. My first job out of the military was in Duluth. That was as close to home as I could find a job. But funnily enough, my father is the one who found the job posting here in Fergus Falls. He said, "Hey, did you know there's a job open in Fergus in orthopedics?" Because I had been working in orthopedics and Duluth. I said, "No, but I'll have to take a look." So I took a look and applied and was selected and got to move closer to home, which was the goal all along.

Katie Johnson: That's perfect. Let's talk a little bit more about this recent deployment you just returned from. When did you find out that you would be deployed and how did you prepare for that being away, both in your family perspective and professionally here at Lake Region?

Kory Nordick,PA: Yeah, so I knew about nine months in advance of departure, actually probably closer to a year in advance. I let the staff here at Lake Region know that, "Hey, I'm going to be deployed." Initially the thought was I was going to be gone for six months. For medical providers on deployment, they have a maximum of what's called a 180 days boots on ground. So essentially six months that you can be deployed into a theater of combat. It ended up being only four months because the entire deployment for the 34th ID went from 12 months down to 10 months. There was somebody who went before me that did the first six months and I covered the last four months to round out the deployment.

Kory Nordick,PA: It was probably a lot harder for my family than it was for me. I was always busy. My shift down there as the OIC was six days a week. It was basically 7:00 AM till the day was done, which ended up getting close to 10:00 PM a lot of nights. It's interesting in the fact that we had regular clinic hours, but we also had to do... My job was both clinical as well as operational, as the surgeon. We worked directly with what's called Army Central Command, which covers a lot of the Middle East command structure, but they're located out of the East Coast of the United States.

Kory Nordick,PA: I would do my regular duty day. Then I would end up getting calls and emails that I'd have to answer that would come in around five, six, seven o'clock at night Jordan time. Have to respond to those and reply and get answers to their questions pretty quickly. So a lot of long days, which kept me occupied. But life still moved on at home. My wife dealing with six kids running around for activities and school and everything else. It really put a lot of stress on at home.

Katie Johnson: Absolutely. What did an average day look like for you? What were you doing?

Kory Nordick,PA: We had regular clinic hours in the morning from eight to 10, again, the local Jordan time. Then we would see some follow-ups between our clinic hours. So it was eight to 10, and then again from three to five. Those were our regular clinic hours, were just walk in, no appointment needed. If we wanted to see somebody as a scheduled follow-up, we'd see them between those two times.

Kory Nordick,PA: The rest of it was either doing training with the medics. The primary mission in Jordan was working with the Jordanian armed forces doing training. We had units that were stationed at the joint training center where I was at that would work with the Jordanian armed forces, both in special tactics and different warfare things essentially as well as security missions. We also had medics that were training some of their medics on the different techniques and procedures that we were implementing in U.S. military medicine. I would provide some

additional depth in their training as well as subject matter expertise in a number of things.

Katie Johnson: What was the most difficult part of the deployment, and maybe on the contrast to that the most rewarding part?

Kory Nordick,PA: As far as rewarding, it was interesting that... Jordan, it's an area that's very rich in history. There's a lot of historical places in Jordan, not to mention the Jordan River, the traditional baptism site. I did have a little bit of time on some weekends here and there to see some of these sites. I got to visit the Jordan River, as I said, and was baptized there again. Got to go to a place called Mount Nebo. That's the site that, at least biblically, Moses was introduced to the Holy Land. He stood on top of Mt. Nebo and that's where the Holy Land was revealed. Got to do a lot of interesting things along those lines, so that was quite rewarding.

Kory Nordick,PA: As far as challenging goes, I think a lot of it was just the operational piece. As the surgeon, I had weekly teleconferences with the command structure for CENTCOM, which included multiple colonels as well as a couple of three star generals, on a regular basis.

Kory Nordick,PA: We did at one point have a minor gastrointestinal outbreak, which I had to deal with, which was quite stressful for about a week. Sick call was flooded with folks that had some GI upset, so dealing with that. It actually got some attention at the very high levels in the military because there was concern about the norovirus, which can spread pretty rapidly and cause basically an entire facility to go on lockdown. Ultimately it wasn't that. It was just some poor hygiene practices that were taking place. We got that under control within a few days and everything smoothed over, but had the after effects for about a week.

Katie Johnson: Oh gosh. How about the adjustment coming back home and work? You've been home for a few weeks now. Has that gone well?

Kory Nordick,PA: Yeah, it actually has. The way the military handles their deployments, whenever you're coming back from a combat theater, you have at least a week minimum in what's called a demobilization site. I went through Fort Hood in Texas. I was there for about a week, which is a good time to decompress and transition. But otherwise, things went pretty smoothly. It was like riding a bike, you just kind of pick up things. I had a couple of weeks off after returning before transitioning back to work. But back to work has been a good welcome change essentially. It's good to get back into a rhythm. It's good to get back into a regular consistent schedule, so that's been helpful.

Katie Johnson: Sure. I'm sure they're happy to have you back here as well. Anything that you can point to that you learned during your deployment, or things that maybe just became more clear to you about how you may or may not change your practice here at home daily based on your service?

Kory Nordick,PA: You know, one thing that's required for all medical providers before deployment is they have a couple of advanced trauma courses. I deployed in March. In January, I went down to Fort Sam Houston in Texas and did the advanced trauma course down there. That was very rewarding. You get probably some of the best training you can have in the world on trauma, whether it be combat trauma or even something as simple as a motor vehicle accident. That was very beneficial. I really got a lot out of that training and it's something that I definitely feel a lot more comfortable dealing with trauma now. Not that I wasn't before, but the additional training definitely helps to put you at ease.

Kory Nordick,PA: They try to do what they call sympathetic nervous system overload. They really do a lot of different things to try and stress you essentially during the training so that if you are in a stressful situation in combat you can react and not have to kind of revert back to being stressed. It's more muscle memory with certain things. That was very beneficial. The military has some of the best training you can offer with a lot of different things, but especially trauma.

Katie Johnson: Neat. What about the future? Do you know what your military future will look like as far as future assignments?

Kory Nordick,PA: Typically with the deployments, they have a five year cycle. So if I were to be deployed again, it wouldn't be for another five years unless for some reason I got really crazy and volunteered for something. But typically, it's a five year cycle. They want to retrain and make sure that you have what's called dwell time at home, where you spend time with your family before returning for a repeat deployment.

Kory Nordick,PA: As far as right now, I don't... A lot of people will ask me, "Well, you going to get out now that you've deployed?" I don't think that way. I don't get concerned about that type of thing. Like I said, I've been in for 22 years. Initially, I thought I was going to be in for six years and get my college paid for and get out. Thus far, I've had two Bachelor's degrees and Master's degrees in Physician Assistant Studies covered by the military. It's been one of the best decisions I ever made. I don't see myself getting out unless for some reason I really stop enjoying what I do. It's a good change of pace for me. Working in orthopedics here and then going my one weekend a month, and doing physicals, and getting to use different skill sets that I don't always use in orthopedics, so it's beneficial in multiple ways.

Katie Johnson: That's great. Anything else you'd like to share with our listeners about your practice here or about your deployment?

Kory Nordick,PA: I'm glad to be back. I'm glad to get back to my patient base. I know there were several folks who were waiting for me to return knowing that it wasn't going to be too long. It's good to get back in the swing of things. It's good to see patients. I really like orthopedics and the fact that in orthopedics we could really provide a lot of benefit in a short period of time. People come in with a lot of pain,

whether it's knees or hips or shoulders. Through a simple office procedure, we can provide them a lot of pain relief. Or ultimately, some people need a significant surgery. We can provide that as well and get them back on their feet. I'm glad we can do that here in Fergus Falls without having to have somebody go to the Twin Cities or Fargo Moorhead. I'm glad that we can provide this service right here in Fergus Falls.

Katie Johnson: I couldn't agree more. We are so fortunate to have you, and the caliber of training that you have through your military deployment, as part of our team as well. I know the team is glad to have you back here in the orthopedics and sports medicine department at Lake Region Healthcare. Thank you again for your service. Thanks for sharing a little bit of insight into what that deployment was like. We welcome you back to Lake Region Healthcare in Fergus Falls.

Kory Nordick,PA: Thank you very much, Katie.

Katie Johnson: Kory Nordick, Physician Assistant at Lake Region Healthcare sharing with us some details of his recent deployment to Jordan on Apple a Day this morning. Kory and Katie do remind you, there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.