

MATTHEW LIEPKE, MD '00

Managing Military Medical Readiness

Matthew Liepke, MD '00, arrived at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, in March 2020 to spend eight months as Division Surgeon of the U.S. Army 42nd Infantry Division during its deployment in the Middle East. As a member of the New York Army National Guard, it was not Dr. Liepke's first deployment. He served in Iraq with the 466th Area Support Medical Company in 2007, providing medical care to soldiers at a small outpost, and in Afghanistan with the 402nd Military Police Battalion in 2011, where he provided medical care to detainees.

But nothing could have prepared him for the impact of a worldwide pandemic. "A week after I arrived, everything shut down," he recalls. The 42nd Division headquarters was tasked to command the Covid Response at Army Bases in the Middle East under Army Central Command. Liepke and his team, managed the medical aspect of the U.S. Army's COVID-19 response in six countries and 14 bases across the Middle East.

"Many of these places had only a small clinic with a single physician or a PA," he says. "When faced with a patient with COVID-19, our initial protocol was to send these patients to local facilities in these countries where they could be treated. But it didn't take long for those places to become overwhelmed."

In response, the Air Force developed airplanes that were outfitted with ICU level care, equipped to keep patients under quarantine while being evacuated out of theater. "They picked patients up from only a few locations and brought them to Germany, where they could be isolated and cared for," says Liepke. "The protocols to care and transport service members, families, and civilian employees until evacuation was our responsibility."

"It was my job to make sure everybody had the resources needed to fight COVID-19, make sure that the care was appropriate, and make sure everyone was following the proper protocols," he says.

Back home, Liepke's wife, Christina Liepke, MD '00, was also undergoing trial by fire as medical director of the Oswego County Health Department, while also managing the couple's medical practice, Port City Family Medicine, and the couple's two then-teenaged sons. "It was a rough time," Liepke says.

He signed up for the Army Reserves at 18 as a source of adventure and to earn money for college. He attended Clarkson University and then came to Upstate Medical University, where he met Christina. The couple did residencies at Wright State University; she in family medicine and he in combined medicine/pediatrics. After completing their training, they moved to Oswego, New York, where they opened their practice.

Concurrent with his education and medical training, Liepke served for 11 years as an enlisted soldier before earning a commis-



Matthew Liepke MD '00, with his wife, Christina Liepke, MD '00, and their sons



sion as a captain in the Individual Ready Reserve in 2003.

After returning to New York in 2005, Liepke transferred to the New York Army National Guard and served as the brigade surgeon for the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, and a surgeon assigned to the 466th Area Support Medical Company, and in various roles with the Medical Command. He served as the New York Army National Guard State Surgeon from 2016 to 2019, the organization's top medical advisor.

In July 2021, after his return from Kuwait, he took command of the New York Army National Guard's Medical Command, which oversees medical operations and healthcare issues for the 10,500 members of the New York Army National Guard across the state. "We make sure our soldiers are ready for deployment, or if there are medical issues, we come up with treatment solutions to fix it or else process orders for disability or separation," says Liepke, whose military awards include the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, War on Terror Expeditionary Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, the NATO Medal and the Overseas Service Ribbon. He is currently attending the Army War College and holds an MBA from Quinnipiac University.

"I like variety," says Liepke, who, in addition to his medical practice, is director of the Newborn Nursery at Oswego Hospital and a past president and vice president of the Oswego Hospital medical staff. "I get bored if I do the same thing all of the time. My military involvement has allowed me to serve while giving me experiences I'd never have had otherwise."

—Renée Gearhart Levy