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Americans and Swedes:
Training Together

page 12

Message to the troops

By Col. Steven Saunders, Deputy Commander Maneuver

From the start, leaders of Task Force Falcon recognized that the nature of our mission here in Kosovo meant that defining success would be difficult. After all, it is up to the people of the province to make key decisions about their future. Kosovars, whether Albanian, Serbian, Ashkali, Roma, or from some other ethnic origin, must choose how to respond to each other. They are the ones who decide to accept or hate, work or remain idle, cooperate or argue. Those are the decisions that, in the long run, will make the difference here. Given all of that, it would be easy for us to measure our success in terms of the number of patrols conducted or the number of miles driven rather than other, more important but less quantifiable metrics. We did not succumb to the temptation to measure only those things that are easy to count. The people of the region will be the better for it.

Success for us means helping the local population realize they are responsible for their own future. To do that, our soldiers work with community leaders to help them make difficult decisions every day. Examples are numerous and range from facilitating the return of K-Serb farmers in the Zegra area to bringing displaced K-Serbs back to Urosevac / Ferizaj. Our efforts include helping to spur the start of construction of the first 19 of an eventual 49 homes in Babljak. This sets the stage for the return of 47 K-Serb families. Who would have dreamed of seeing members of the mostly K-Albanian Kosovo Protection Corps agreeing to clean up damaged K-Serb homes or of the K-Serbs sitting down and having tea with them? Our efforts helped make that happen. Members of TF Med Falcon helped two K-Albanian boys who were nearly electrocuted. While both lost arms from their accidents, they are alive today because of our medical professionals. Success is sometimes measured in the eyes of the parents of kids like this. MEDCAPs across all task force sectors are designed to help people understand the importance of living and working together. Recently, our efforts helped jump-start one municipality's method of dealing with illegal woodcutting. As a result, it looks like the judicial, law enforcement, forestry administration and KPC will cooperate to put some teeth into resolving this challenging problem. Creating multi-ethnic youth programs, distributing school supplies and delivering clothing items donated from folks back home allow us to show the local population they can work together and they are not forgotten. The list of our true successes goes on and on.

A month ago an "old hand" in the Balkans and one of our trusted mentors and trainers, Ed McCarthy, made the comment that this has all the makings of a "break through" rotation. Ed's observation was that we are doing things he did not think possible, especially in light of the mid-March violence. In my book, Ed is right. This is a break through rotation in Kosovo. Our successes have been many and there are more to come. None of this comes as a surprise to the soldiers of this task force.

To all of you I say the mark of a true professional rests with how well they finish the mission. As we begin to wind down, helping the 6A soldiers prepare to assume our role will be an important success indicator. Our final mark of success is closing the book on this mission by getting all soldiers home to family and friends safe and sound. Remember to look out for each other. I am proud to have served with every one of you.

Finish the mission as true professionals. Attack!

Col. Steven Saunders

Submissions or story ideas related to the MNB(E) mission are encouraged. Send regular mail to MNB(E) PAO, Attn: Editor, Camp Bondsteel, APO AE 09340; send e-mail to guardianeast@bondsteel2.areur.army.mil.

SEE THE PHOTO OF THE DAY
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*COVER: **Staff Sgt. Bruce Conger, left, prepares to hoist a Swedish soldier during MEDEVAC training. Photo by Spc. Tim Grooms.***

See page 12 for the story

Guardian East

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School Donations

Employees of the Laura Bush Education Center and UMUC donate school and healthcare supplies to multi-ethnic residents. 4

Feature Photo

Soldiers of Charlie Company, 682nd Engineer Battalion, and the 1085th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) conduct phase two of medical evacuation training. 8

Cover Story

1085th Medical Company (AA) Soldiers provide extraction training for Swedish soldiers at Camp Victoria in MNB(C). 12

Suicide Prevention

As 5B passes the rotation's midpoint it becomes important to focus on suicide prevention. 16

Food Inspection

Members of the 422nd Medical Company (Veterinary Services) visit FYROM to inspect an egg production plant. 18

As Sgt. Robert Bergesch, simulates being a casualty on a stretcher, he is aided by Spc. Patrick Loch, left, and Spc. Matt Nixon during MEDEVAC training. Photo by Sgt. Jon Soucy. See page for the story.

Lawrence Buford, an education services specialist at the Laura Bush Education Center, helps a child named Lindita put on her new shoes the center donated in Letnice/ Letnica.

Beyond The Classroom

Story and photos by Spc. Rob Barker

For years, the staff of the Laura Bush Education center has been guiding, enrolling and teaching Soldiers of Camp Bondsteel. Recently the employees stepped outside of their offices and University of Maryland University College (European Division) classrooms and into Multi-national Brigade (East) communities hoping to help with the resident's education and well-being.

The staff visited schools and churches in the Letnice/ Letnica area armed with their donations and those from their friends and families back home, which included everything from toothpaste and brushes to shoes and computers.

"I collected supplies," said Thomas Sasko, the operator of the Army Learning Center, the computer resource room at Camp Bondsteel's Education Center. "I had a hundred pairs of shoes sent from the states along with book bags, as well as other school supplies, and I received donations of toothpaste and brushes."

There were three computers donated by UMUC on this day.

"So far I've helped arrange with the University of Maryland to donate approximately $3,000 worth of text books for higher learning and about ten complete computer units along with notebooks, pens and etcetera," said Helmuth Radig, a field representative with UMUC, speaking of this and past donations.

Besa Sadiku, also a field representative with UMUC was on hand to give out the donations and said she was moved by the offerings, and being a life-long Ferizaj/ Urosevac resident helped her put it into perspective.

"There is something that can't be described," she said. "Americans gave us freedom and life, and despite the missions that you have to accomplish, then being away from your loved ones, and still having time for the kids, it just tells a lot."

The children receiving the donations also emotionally touched the staff members.

"We had the privilege to make contact with the children and adults who supervised them at a deeply human level and relate to them in a fundamental and meaningful way," said Deborah Arangno, an associate professor of mathematics with UMUC. "They were enthusiastic, appreciative, earnestly and dignified with respectful restraint in their delight and innocent acceptance."

Sgt. Eric Sufka, left, an infantryman with Alpha Company, 2-135th Infantry, and Thomas Sasko, the Army Learning Center operator at the Laura Bush Education Center, sort through donations before distributing them in Letnice/ Letnica.

The education center members were not the only Camp Bondsteel workers on the mission. A few Soldiers from Alpha Company, 2-135th Infantry, accompanied the group to the villages eager to help with handing out the supplies.

"It's great," said Sgt. Eric Sufka, the command post noncommissioned officer in charge with Alpha Company. "Anytime you can add something useful to a child's educational opportunity, it can only make you feel good."

Although the Soldiers had to take a break from the children to conduct a patrol, they said they were happy to be a part of the trip to deliver the donations, but realized their mission had priority.

"The mission is always first and 'Attack Company' never faults in the area of responsibility," added Sufka, a teacher from Bloomington, Minn. "Taking care of Kosovo's future through its children is also an important mission and sometimes room needs to be made for it too."

DESPERADO'S

Final Exam

Story and photos by Spc. Sean McCollum

Spc. Robert Koons, an OH-58 Kiowa Helicopter crew chief with Tango Troop, 4-278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, records daily helicopter maintenance information in a logbook.

Anyone who has known the agony of studying for a high-school or college final exam can sympathize with the hard work, attention to detail, and long nights that the members of Task Force Desperado endured in a recent inspection by the United States Army Europe Safety and Standardization Detachment.

"Any inspection raises the anxiety level. It's just like in high school and the teacher says 'test,'" said Warrant Officer Michael Cole, the production control officer in charge for Task Force Desperado. "But when you get into the meat of it, when you start looking at what's required of you, and then going back and actually check it, it relieves some of the stress."

In the National Guard, Cole said, such an inspection would happen about every two years. In a forward base like Camp Bondsteel, every six-month rotation receives a visit from USAREUR. The abbreviated window is further complicated by Desperado's diverse makeup of five states, each with differing interpretations of regulations and ways of doing things.

"For the first month it was like childbirth. It's hurting, but you know you're going to get there," said Cole.

According to Maj. Shawn Manke, the executive officer for the Task Force, the inspection involved every aspect of their mission.

"There's a lot of academics, a lot of records, a lot of people meticulously going through aircraft historical records, ensuring they're correct and if they find something, fixing it on the spot." Sometimes the more work-related aspects of the inspection caused some to pull a late shift or miss a day of flying.

"Rather than going to a movie, someone may be working on records or something like that," said Manke. "Rather than going out and flying today these people are staying in to do academics."

The four months of hard work and sacrifice culminated in a passing grade with honors.

"The comment from the team was, 'We have never seen anything like this before out of any rotation,'" said Cole. Eighty-five percent of the deficiencies found were fixed within twenty four hours, and three categories received commendable honors, according to Manke.

Spc. Daniel Adrian, an aircraft power plant repair specialist with the 1-207th Aviation Battalion, works on a Kiowa's engine as part of scheduled maintenance.

When the inspectors left, the members of Desperado met to go over what the inspectors found and how to fix it.

"Normally something like that would take a couple of hours," said Cole. "Ours took 30 minutes."

To make sure that things go as smoothly as possible with the next rotation's inspection, Cole and his team are producing a continuity binder with the already-inspected records ready to be combed through meticulously by another crew of eager students wanting an A+ on their exam.

PHASE II

STORY AND PHOTO BY SGT. JON SOUCY

Playing the role of a minestrike victim, Sgt. Robert Bergesch, on stretcher, is aided by Spc. Patrick Loch, left, and Spc. Matt Nixon during training on medevac procedures in an area near Kosovo's Administrative Boundary Line with Serbia.

PHASE II

Soldiers of Charlie Company, 682nd Engineer Battalion, evaluate a simulated casuality before evacuating him with the use of a UH-60 Blackhawk during medical evacuation training,

Soldiers from Charlie Company, 682nd Engineer Battalion recently were given hands-on experience with providing emergency medical care. As a way to gain confidence in combat lifesaver skills, as well as calling in a request for medical evacuation by helicopter, the Soldiers of Charlie Company trained with those of the 1085th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) in evaluating, caring for and evacuating casualties.

Using a scenario that involved a vehicle striking a mine, the Soldiers had to extricate themselves from the vehicle, transport a casualty to a known safe area and call in a 9-line medical evacuation request. After the request was called in, a helicopter was sent to the area and the casualties were loaded aboard.

The goal of the event was to strengthen the skills of the combat lifesavers within the unit as well as for the squad leaders to gain experience calling in evacuation requests, said Sgt. 1st Class. Richard Johnson, a platoon sergeant with Charlie Company.

"I believe [this event] helps keep my troops safe," said Johnson, a Buffalo, Minn., native. "It gives them confidence in their leaders and the combat lifesavers."

And the Soldiers in the unit agreed.

"I think it increases our comfort level in our abilities," said Staff Sgt. Sean Stafford, a squad leader from Atwater, Minn., with Charlie Company. "We now know we are fully capable of doing this, whereas before we just assumed we could."

The Soldiers also agreed that the event went smoothly.

"I think it went very smoothly," said Stafford. "The marking [of the landing zone] went very well, the helicopter came in right where it was supposed to, and the patient was wrapped up and ready to go."

Though having to load a patient on a helicopter that has just landed was a first for the Soldiers, it had been practiced on stationary helicopters. The Soldiers said that practice and other training leading up to the event allowed the engineers to go through the steps smoothly and quickly.

"We've rehearsed this drill plenty of times," said Spc. Patrick Loch, a Charlie Company combat engineer from Litchfield, Minn., who was one of the combat lifesavers in the scenario. "I felt pretty confident bandaging him up and getting him ready for the medevac."

And while the event strengthened the Soldiers skills, many also enjoyed the training.

"It was exciting," said Spc. Matt Nixon, a combat engineer from Rosemont, Minn., with Charlie Company. "It was fun."

Many agreed that the role of the helicopter played a big part in adding to the realism and excitement of the training.

"It was exciting running up there with the litter and feeling the backdraft off the rotors," said Loch.

"I liked the helicopter," said Nixon in agreement. "You don't get to be in front of it that often in my MOS."

The exercise also reinforced skills in areas other than medevac procedures.

"If we get into a situation like this there's a lot of confusion, a lot of things going on in the same moment in time," said Nixon. "Just being able to do it helps us organize and understand working as a squad to carryout a mission."

And that, said the Soldiers, is something that can be applied throughout their time in Kosovo.

Tra

Story an

Staff Sgt. Bruce Conger, a flight medic with the 1085th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), is lowered on a hoist from a UH-60 Blackhawk Helicopter during a recent training mission with the Swedish Battalion demonstrating how to use a helicopter to extract casualities.

Cross
aining

d photos by Spc. Tim Grooms

Cross Training

In an open field near Camp Victoria, home of the Swedish soldiers of Multi-national Brigade (Central), everything was quiet and nothing moved except a gentle summer breeze and a few Swedes who were standing next to their vehicles. The quiet of the day was broken and the breeze was whipped into a gale when a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter flew across the field to hover over the Swedish vehicles. The soldiers on the ground fought the wind as they watched a Soldier drift toward them as he was lowered from the helicopter in a hoist, swinging slightly in the rotor wash. When he touched down, a Swedish soldier joined him on the hoist and the two started a return trip to the aircraft.

The display of multinational aerial acrobatics was the final step in the medical evacuation training members of the Swedish Battalion and the American 1085th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) were conducting to help both groups become familiar with equipment and procedures they might use in an emergency.

The first phase of the training involved teaching the Swedes the

Swedish soldiers drive a SISU into an open field near Camp Victoria to wait for American Soldiers to conduct air extractions with a UH-60 Blackhawk Helicopter.

basics of entering a Blackhawk safely and the capabilities of the aircraft. The second phase included actually flying in the helicopter, properly requesting medical evacuation using a nine-line MEDEVAC report, and loading litter-borne patients into the aircraft. Employing the hoist to extract casualties was an extra bit of training to give the Swedes some familiarization with the procedure and provide them with training they don't normally receive, said Capt. Mike Moranti, an Air Ambulance platoon leader with the company and Rapid City, S.D., resident.

"We learn a lot from this training because we don't do this at home," said Spc. Peter Skraddar, a medic with the Swedish Battalion. "At home we just load and unload from a Swedish helicopter."

The training was designed to ensure the Swedes and Americans can effectively work together in an emergency.

"Training like this allows them to know what capabilities we have if we come to help them and also know what our resources are," said Staff Sgt. Kurt Gross also of Rapid City, S.D., and a crew chief with the company.

Working with the Swedes also gave the Americans a chance to learn about Swedish equipment.

"From a medical standpoint, most of the equipment we use is supposed to be to NATO standard but there are differences," said Staff Sgt. Bruce Conger, a flight medic with the 1085th and resident of Rapid City, S.D. "Some of their equipment is different than ours so working and becoming familiar with it will take away the confusion if there is a real life situation."

The day ended with further assaults on the quiet of the field as the Swedish soldiers provided some familiarization training for the Americans on the six-wheeled armored ambulances they use called SISUs.

By the time the two groups separated, the Swedish and American soldiers had spent the day being hoisted into helicopters and rolling through fields in armored ambulances, learning valuable lessons along the way that could one day save soldiers' lives. Perhaps the most valuable lessons they learned, however, were about their similarities and differences.

"This gives us an opportunity to get out and deal with people we don't normally deal with and experience different things and perspectives," said Moranti.

Staying

the Course

story by 1st Sgt. David Stevenson

through rotation's midpoint and beyond

If the history of Task Force Falcon rotations has taught us anything, it's that right now you, one of your Soldiers, or one of your friends is more likely to be contemplating suicide. You've been away from home for several months, there may have been significant changes in your family life, or the repetitive nature many Soldiers mention regarding the work they do here may be wearing you down; whatever the reason, this is the time of the rotation the chaplains and counselors say is when Soldiers need to look after each other the most.

"The majority of previous suicides with other rotations happened at around the midpoint of the rotation," said Maj. Joel Severson, a chaplain with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 34th Aviation Brigade, and a resident of Princeton, Minn. "It is not something where we can say we have made it midway so we can rest on our laurels. We have to carry this thing all the way through until we are back home"

Some of the most common reasons Soldiers contemplate suicide are loss of an important person as a result of divorce or death, loss of position or rank, financial loss, anxiety about the future, and a lack of coping skills and loneliness.

"If you, yourself, feel kind of overwhelmed or stressed or anxious about anything, first of all it is a very normal, natural reaction," Severson said. "We are deployed, we are away from our loved ones, and we are away from our familiar surroundings. Don't just keep it in. Find someone to talk to, a friend, roommate or a battle buddy. We have chaplains here available to talk to, we have doctors to talk to; we are trained, but not only that, we are people that care," he said.

"For many people, this is their first deployment. They did not know what a deployment felt like, what it looks like," said Severson. "We are not in Iraq, but it has a different type of stress and anxiety. With separation from families it begins to take its toll."

To help reduce the risk of a Multinational Brigade (East) Soldier committing suicide, all Soldiers assigned to the task force attended two suicide prevention classes.

The first class was taught at Fort Stewart, Ga., and covered the basics such as the

signs and symptoms of suicide as well as statistics in relation to suicide. The second suicide prevention class was taught at Camps Bondsteel and Monteith in Kosovo and went more into detail with such topics as the conditions contributing to suicide, suicide risk profiles, recognizing warning signs and symptoms of suicide and identifying resources for help.

In addition, approximately 120 Soldiers have attended the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training course, taught by Severson and Staff Sgt. Adam Johnson, a resident of Monticello, Minn., and the non-commissioned officer in charge of the Unit Ministry Team for HHC, 34th Infantry Division.

Soldiers who attended the ASIST course were given the tools necessary to manage and assist in stopping an individual who has chosen to commit suicide.

"Don't be afraid to ask the question," said Johnson, adding that most people are afraid to ask if someone is suicidal because they are not sure what to do when the person says "yes."

If you believe someone you know may be suicidal, it is important to remember to take suicide threats seriously, answer cries for help, confront their problem, tell them you care, and get professional help.

"Don't keep this inside. That's what we are here for," Severson said. "We are here to get you home; that's the bottom line."

Grading Eggs

Story and photo by Spc. Tim Gr

You may take them sunny side up, hard, over easy, or numerous other ways, and you probably take the safety of the eggs you eat at the dining facility for granted. It's the job of one group of Soldiers to make sure you can.

Members of the 422nd Medical Detachment (Veterinary Services) inspect the Salamuk egg production plant in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia every three months to make sure the facility and the eggs it produces are up to American health standards. The Soldiers most recently inspected the plant in May.

"We are here to inspect the overall health of the animals, cleanliness, and management," said Staff Sgt. Sherry Hargraves of Germantown, Md., and food inspector with the unit.

According to Maj. Marta Acha, commander of the 422nd and Arlington, Va., resident, the FYROM facility is comparable to those found in the United States, and it stands as one of the cleanest seen by the 422nd Soldiers.

One difference between the eggs served at the dining facilities at Camps Monteith and Bondsteel and those Soldiers may eat at home is that when the product arrives at the American bases it is less than a day old.

"The eggs are not even twenty-four hours old before they are shipped out," said Dane Delovski, owner of the factory.

The bases have been receiving eggs from Salamuk since 1999. The facility was built in 1997 and is still expanding. Delovski said Salamuk houses over 70,000 chickens and they live in a high-tech facility.

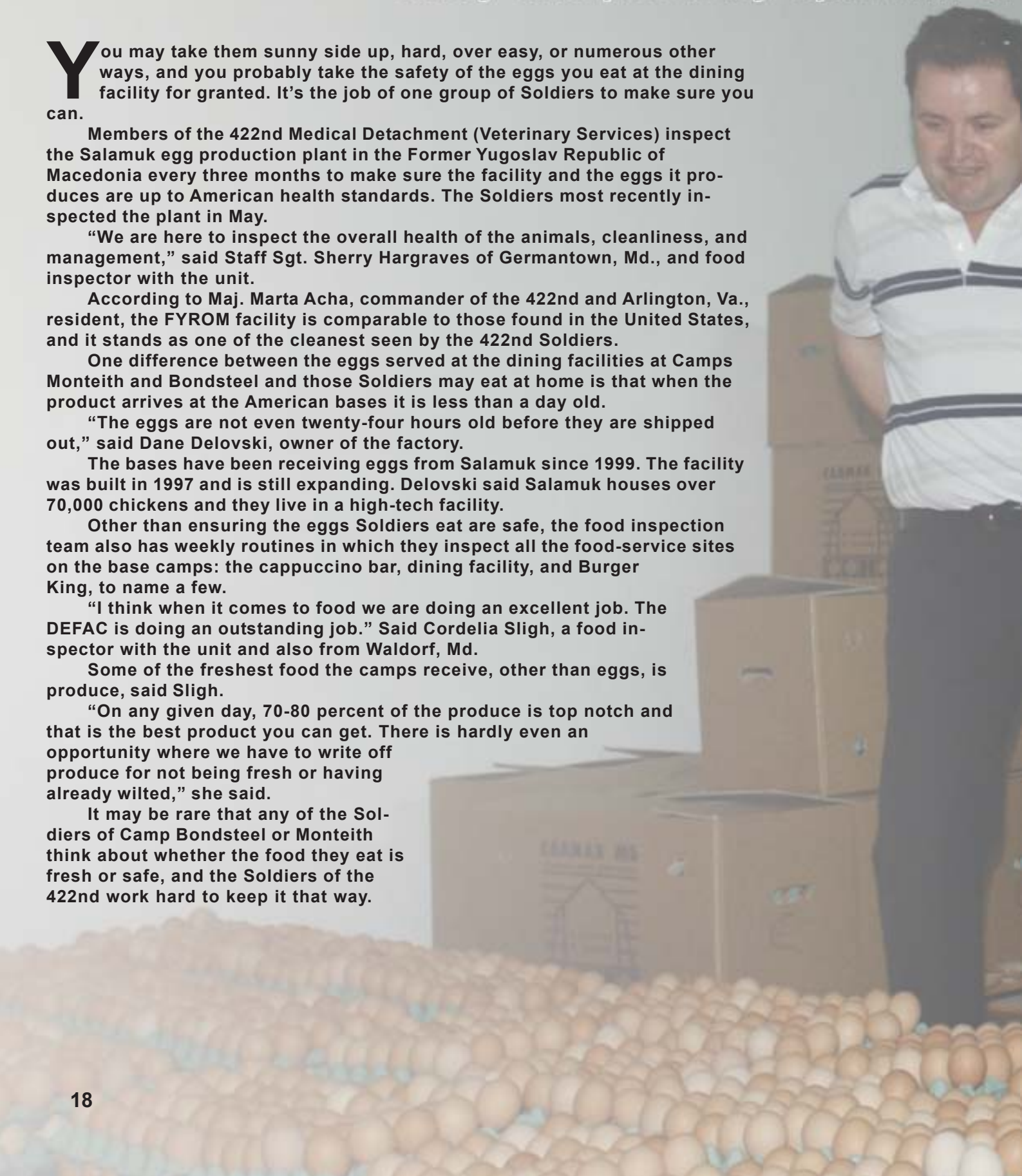
Other than ensuring the eggs Soldiers eat are safe, the food inspection team also has weekly routines in which they inspect all the food-service sites on the base camps: the cappuccino bar, dining facility, and Burger King, to name a few.

"I think when it comes to food we are doing an excellent job. The DEFAC is doing an outstanding job." Said Cordelia Sligh, a food inspector with the unit and also from Waldorf, Md.

Some of the freshest food the camps receive, other than eggs, is produce, said Sligh.

"On any given day, 70-80 percent of the produce is top notch and that is the best product you can get. There is hardly even an opportunity where we have to write off produce for not being fresh or having already wilted," she said.

It may be rare that any of the Soldiers of Camp Bondsteel or Monteith think about whether the food they eat is fresh or safe, and the Soldiers of the 422nd work hard to keep it that way.



Staff Sgt. Cordelia Sligh, right, and Staff Sgt. Sherry Hargraves, both food inspectors with the 422nd Medical Detachment (Veterinary Services), inspect eggs produced by the Salmak Company, the main supplier to Camps Monteith and Bondsteel, as the owner looks on.

Soul Food: Message from the Chaplain

By Chaplain (Maj.) William Klavetter

I would like to begin this article with a cute story. Little Johnny rushes into the kitchen where his Mom and Dad were sitting at the table, talking over a cup of coffee. In his hand, Johnny has a piece of paper. He runs over to the table and shows his parents the picture of a car that he had drawn. He puts the paper on the table and just stands next to his Mom. They look at the paper and comment on the picture, "Johnny this is very nice picture of a car. You have done a great job. We are so proud of you." Little Johnny says," Mom, Dad this picture is for you" and turns and walks out of the kitchen feeling so good about himself. One could say that Little Johnny feels a sense of pride.

I related this story because I want all of us to have a sense of pride for the mission we are called to do and all that we have accomplished and will accomplish in the MNB(E) sector. Over the time we have been in sector and until we leave a safe and secure environment has been provided to the people. Many members of the local population have expressed their appreciation for our presence and work in the area. Soldiers visiting the schools and interacting with the students plant seeds in their minds for future growth. The young people of Kosovo are the future. We may not see the results of this planting effort but we can take pride in our actions. We can go home to our families and communities feeling good for we did make a difference.

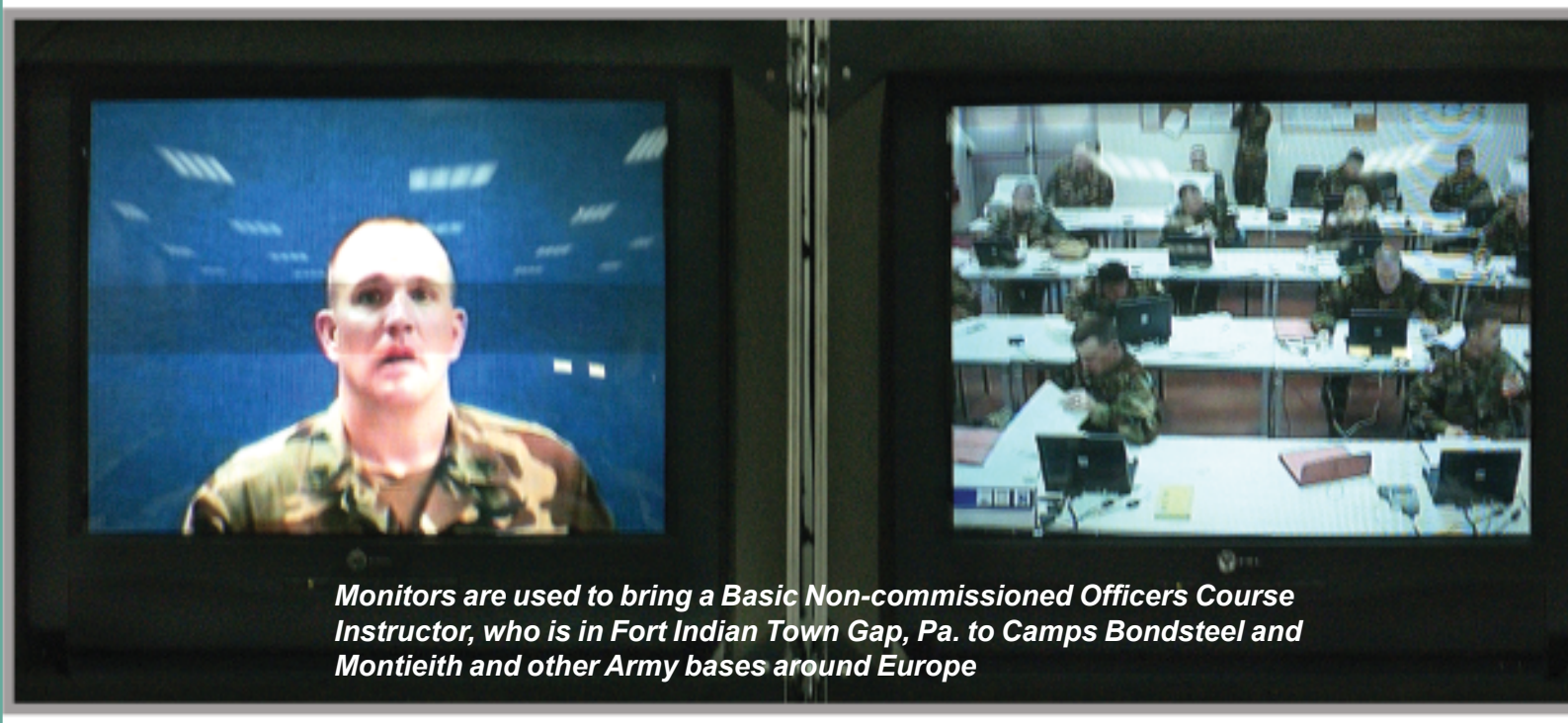
I truly believe that our presence in Kosovo is following that commandment of Jesus Christ, "Love one another as I have loved you." We are a people who see a need in the lives of others and want to help. This is so obvious as the patrols go into the schools to teach the children, as soldiers talk with municipal leaders, shop owners, and the local people on the street. Yes, we may feel frustrated at certain times on this mission but the caring for our neighbor, which includes the people of Kosovo, is seen in our actions of kindness and assistance. Going on a MEDCAP is just one example of such an action. Christ calls us to help our neighbor and that is being accomplished as we do the mission. Christ calls us to make a difference. We can and will complete this mission and walk away, like Little Johnny, with a positive sense of pride because we have made a difference.

Chaplain (Maj.) William Klavetter

I am so honored to have the opportunity to serve with you, my brothers and sisters in uniform, to follow Christ's commandment to "Love one another as I have loved you". As we read these words we understand the great love that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ has for us. The great sacrifice Christ made for us on the cross.

As we think about leaving and going home I want all of us to go with that sense of positive pride that we have made a difference. We have represented our country with honor; we wear the uniform with pride, and stand together in our sense of mission.

Teaching in the 21st Century



Monitors are used to bring a Basic Non-commissioned Officers Course Instructor, who is in Fort Indian Town Gap, Pa. to Camps Bondsteel and Montieith and other Army bases around Europe

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Carmen Lee
Photo by Sgt. Jon Soucy

How do deployed Soldiers from all over the world attend the same Basic Non-commissioned Officers Course without leaving their duty stations? Easy – use technology to bring the training to them.

With the help of on-site assistant instructors, a recent BNCOC course taught by instructors in Fort Indiantown Gap, Penn., used video teleconferencing technology to interact with and teach students in Bosnia, Germany, and here in Kosovo.

Though students interact with the instructors there are some differences from a traditional classroom environment.

"This is pretty interactive," said Staff Sgt. Jeff Robinson, an assistant instructor at Camp Monteith. "It's just not as personal as if the instructor were here."

For many of the Soldiers, it was their first time participating in a class being taught from across the ocean.

"It's a new experience," said Staff Sgt. Tony Boring, an OH-58D Kiowa helicopter crew chief with Oscar Troop, 4-278th Armored Cavalry Regiment. "It's the first time I ever took a class like this. So far it's working out pretty well," said the Louisville, Tenn., native.

Other Soldiers felt similarly.
"It was a different experience for me," said Sgt. Grant Ogle a squad leader with Alpha Troop, 1-113th Cavalry. "I've never had a televised teacher."

Some of the Soldiers commented that the classroom instruction, although presented differently, was similar to any other Army class.

"It's pretty much just like [the instructor at Fort Indiantown Gap] is here because we interact with him, we're talking to him over the speakers, we joke. It's pretty much like he's here," said Sgt. William Turner, a light-wheeled vehicle mechanic from Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 4-278th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

Since the VTC classroom environment was not something they were used to, some of the Soldiers were happily surprised with how easily they adapted to the new experience.

"It's a lot better than I anticipated," said Boring. "I wasn't expecting it to be this well designed."

Besides using video teleconferencing technology, another of the enhanced features of this class was the use of computer-based instruction modules.

"Being able to work on computers makes finding the references quicker than in a book," said Turner, a Fairview, Tenn., native.

Although the classroom set-up and instruction were a bit unique, most things remained tried and true to Army leadership training.

"I learned a lot about the counseling process," said Ogle, a Reinbeck, Iowa, resident. "I feel I'm better able to counsel my Soldiers and lead them in the right direction. It better prepared me overall for the position of squad leader."

Deployments can be tough enough without Soldiers worrying about missing out on training they need for promotion. With a little ingenuity and the right technology, the BNCOC students here had one less thing to worry about.

New MRE drink pouches to be fielded

NATICK, Mass. (Army News Service) — Pouches that can be resealed may soon change the way troops drink in the field.

Drink pouches developed at the U.S. Army Soldier Systems Center in Natick, Mass., in partnership with packaging companies, allow warfighters to pour water into a package holding a powder mix, shake and consume the beverage from the opening. If they want to save some for a little later, the plastic zipper seal holds it in.

Often they didn't bother preparing a beverage in a separate container. Field data showed that about half of the Soldiers are not consuming the Meal, Ready-to-Eat or MRE beverage base mix because of the inconvenience of using and cleaning the canteen cup, said Lauren Milch, a physical scientist at Combat Feeding who managed package development. Pouring the mix into a canteen full of water is prohibited according to Army doctrine, so the packages are frequently thrown away unopened.

The 12-ounce beverage pouch is the first project of the Individual Combat Ration Team's Improved Packaging for Combat Rations program aimed at reducing packaging and increasing consumption, said Vicki Loveridge, a senior food technologist and project officer for improved packaging.

She said including a resealable plastic bag was a partial solution, but the drink pouch takes care of everything by replacing the current dry mix package with a disposable drinking vessel.

Originally intended to replace the MRE beverage base mix, the beverage pouches could be used for any of the military ration beverages or liquid foods, such as dairy shakes. For hot cappuccino or cocoa, the pouch was designed to fit into the flameless ration heater.

A rectangular drink pouch with a plastic zipper was evaluated in 1991, but it was shelved because the cost was considered "extravagant" at 25 cents apiece, Loveridge said.

In the last three years researchers developed prototype pouches with a non-reclosable tear-off spout, reclosable sports-type pull cap and a twist-off cap that were studied along with the final package design.

"We wanted something reusable, and they didn't want or need (a pouch) to stand up, just a way to set it down," Loveridge said. "The extra expense of a stand-up pouch was unnecessary, and it's a harder pouch to keep from cracking."

In the first evaluation with a twist-off cap pouch in 2001, 91 percent of the troops consumed their beverages, but the twist-off cap was too bulky and expensive. The latest prototype has a tear-off portion just above a resealable interlocking plastic zipper on top and slight hourglass shape for easy holding.

"What's very different from what you see at the grocery store is the zipper with a multi-laminate foil and three-year shelf life requirement," Loveridge said. "It's difficult to incorporate a zipper without compromising the foil."

With four studies already showing substantial percentage increases in the number of troops using the beverage pouch, another field test is scheduled to determine how warfighter performance improves with increased hydration.

An order of 7,000 beverage pouches has been placed for two Combat Feeding developmental products, the Remote Unit Self Heated Meal and First Strike Ration, according to Loveridge. An electrolyte-based drink powder beverage pouch was approved for four varieties of the 2004 MRE menu and could be fielded as soon as September.

"The drink pouch is something they really need, and it's designed to add minimal cost," Milch said. "We hope it takes off in popularity like the mini bottles of Tabasco sauce and flameless ration heater."

(Editor's note: Information provided by the Soldier Systems Center public affairs. More information is available at http://www.natick.army.mil. .)

DA staff runs to observe Army birthday

By Dennis Ryan

FORT MYER, Va.— More than 1,000 Soldiers from the Pentagon ran three miles through Fort Myer and Arlington National Cemetery June 17 as one of many events to commemorate the Army's 229th birthday.

The Army started with 10 companies of infantry in 1775, Director of the Army Staff Lt. Gen. James J. Lovelace told the troops before the run.

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth Preston kicked the proceedings off with a roll call of more than 10 organizations and ordered pushups, depending on how loud units answered.

"It keeps people in touch with what we do as Soldiers," Preston said about the run, adding that the Pentagon is so big that the Army staff doesn't get a chance to do a lot together.

The Soldiers stopped in the cemetery to render honors to those who have gone before them as the plaintive 21 notes of Taps wafted through the silent sentinels of stone.

Lovelace led the run and greeted the returning Soldiers with a handshake or a friendly jibe.

"We have got the best Army in the world," Lovelace told the sweaty Soldiers after the run. "Everybody wants to kick the Super Bowl winners butts. You all have to realize what a great difference you make to the Soldiers in Iraq, Afghanistan or Bosnia. We pull the rope in the same direction."

Drake Anderson, 11, ran with his dad, Col. Steve Anderson and hardly broke a sweat.

"It's the first time he did this run," the elder Anderson said. "But he used to run with me at Camp Casey, Korea. I'm very proud of him..."

"When we stopped in the cemetery, it was a moment of pride," said, Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Leonard of the National Guard Bureau. "It made me proud to serve in the military. I wished my kids could be here to see this."

Maj. Michelle Black fought through the heat and humidity to finish.

"It just about killed me, but I made it," she said. "I tried to prepare with a lot of water drinking. The cemetery was pretty neat, imaging what those guys went through, this was nothing."

SOLDIER SECTION Q N' A:

Who is your favorite athlete? Why?

Spc. Ted Jackson

"Kevin Garnett, of the Minnesota Timberwolves, is by far my favorite athlete. I vote Kevin Garnett for president!"

Photo by Spc. Sean McCollum

Spc. Ted Jackson, the strength manager for the personnel section of HHC, 34th ID, attempts to block a shot thrown by a student at the Ramadan Rexhpi Primary school in Sojeve/ Sojevo.

Spc. Troy Goenner

"Kevin Garnett. He took the Timberwolves to the playoffs."

Photo by Spc. Tim Grooms

Spc. Troy Goenner, a driver with Alpha Company, 2-135th Infantry, does his daily routine at the South Town Gym.

Chaplain (Maj.) Joel Severson

"Ben Hur. He was a great equestrian."

Photo by Spc. Tim Grooms

Maj. Joel Severson, the Task Force Desperado Chaplain, runs on a treadmill during his cardio workout.

Spc. Thomas Peck

"Kirk Hinrich is my favorite athlete. He plays for the Chicago Bulls. I grew up with him and from sixth grade through twelfth grade played basketball with him. He's one of my good friends."

Photo by Sgt. Jon Soucy

Spc. Thomas Peck, right, from Bravo Troop, 1-113th Cavalry, scans the field for an open teammate as Staff Sgt. Russell Steffen, from Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-113th Cavalry, moves in for the tackle during a flag football tournament at Camp Monteith.

Scenes of Kosovo

Photo by Spc. Sean McCollum

A resident of Kabas/ Kabash uses his hatchback to transport goats