

Produced For Personnel of KFOR Multi-National Brigade (East)

Guardian East

Volume 8, Issue 4

December 31, 2002

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BEHIND THE LINES

Battling Complacency

By Command Sgt. Maj. Edward McLane

I am sure everyone in Multi-National Brigade (East) has heard of the word "complacency." Complacency is more of a state of mind than a word in the dictionary. We as soldiers face complacency each and every day.

The Army has conducted extensive studies concerning complacency and its effect on soldiers. Complacency normally takes effect after soldiers feel comfortable with their jobs and environment. Many people are involved trying to devise ways of combating complacency. I will list a few easy ways and tips for us as soldiers and leaders to combat complacency.

First and foremost, you must remain focused on your daily activity. Whether you are performing guard duty in one of the towers or locked in your office 10 hours a day, you must maintain your focus. Concentrate on the mission at hand. Each time you are on duty, execute your task to the highest standard. Do not put off what can be completed now. Make efficient use of your time. Remember, we do not work to the clock. We work to ensure that standards are met or exceeded.

Make your duties challenging. There is nothing worse than doing the same, mundane task day after day. Use your ingenuity. Change the conditions and increase the standards. Do not get caught doing the same old thing because it is easy. Leaders: talk to your soldiers and let them have some ownership of their task or mission.

Everyone must establish individual goals for themselves. We are all good at setting collective goals for our units, but we often forget about ourselves. While stationed here in Kosovo, strive for a score of 300+ on the APFT. We have world-class gyms with 24/7 access. If you have not figured it out by now, physical fitness is a way of life in the military. It is each soldier's inherent duty to remain physically fit.

Weapons marksmanship is also a noteworthy goal. There are small arms ranges in operation each week at a minimum. Get to the range after preliminary marksmanship training, and shoot until you qualify as an expert on your assigned weapon. Now, if you require a HEMMT load of ammo to qualify, that is another subject.

Further your education while here in Kosovo. Whether it



is military or civilian schooling, it is available here. The education counselors can direct you to the right way of achieving your goals. There are a lot of military courses offered as well. Bottom line, the sky is the limit concerning education. Get out of your rooms, put down the Play Station control, and do something to help yourself while you are here.

Invest your money if you can afford to. The Thrift Savings Plan is a good way to get started. There are many other worthwhile ways to invest your money. I am not a financial advisor, but there are many qualified people here who can assist you in your financial endeavors.

If you have been paying attention to what I have written, the message is clear: Find a way to better yourself. Do not waste time while deployed. Physically we are all busy. Get your mind working on productive things. Set goals and complacency will be just another word in the dictionary.

On the cover: Photo by Spc. Matthew Lang
A firefighter from Brown & Root positions himself during a mass casualty training exercise held at Camp Bondsteel on Dec. 22.

SEE THE PHOTO OF THE DAY
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Spc. Matthew Lang
Spc. Whitney Hughes

EXECUTIVE OFFICER, 114TH MPAD
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CAMP MONTEITH TEAM NCOIC
Master Sgt. John Barr

About Guardian East

Guardian East is an official publication of KFOR Multi-National Brigade (East) produced to provide command information to service members in MNB(E).

Guardian East is produced by the 114th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, New Hampshire and Vermont Army National Guard.

Contents of Guardian East are not necessarily official views, nor endorsed by the U.S. government, the Department of Defense, the Department of the Army or the 1st Infantry Division. Guardian East is published weekly using offset press by the MNB(E) Public Affairs Office, Building 1320, Camp Bondsteel. 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. Printed circulation is 3,000.



2-2 Infantry captures suspects



Photo by Capt. David Matzel

From left, Staff Sgt. Corey McFadden, Pfc. Scott Bentley, Spc. Michael Curry, and 2nd Lt. James Patrick Durkin, all of Alpha Company, 2-2 Infantry Battalion, show their pride at Observation Post Power. The soldiers apprehended two murder suspects near Cernica on Dec. 22.

By Sgt. Matthew Hartke

OBSERVATION POST POWER, Kosovo— On the afternoon of Dec. 22, shots rang out from a hilltop near Cernica. It could have been a military exercise, hunters or even misguided fun. But it was something worse. A man had been shot.

Local villagers quickly notified a Multi-National Brigade (East) patrol in Cernica and Alpha Company, 2-2 Infantry Battalion rushed to the scene.

When Spc. Michael “Doc” Curry arrived, Trajan Trifunovic, a Kosovar Serb, was unconscious and lying on the ground with multiple gunshot wounds. Curry, a medic, immediately went to work stabilizing the victim.

Several days later, Curry said his most vivid image was the blood.

“There was lots of it,” he recalled. “It was the first gunshot victim I’ve had to deal with.”

Other members of the company had a similar impression. “That was an experience that I’ll never forget,” said Pfc. Scott Bentley, a combat lifesaver. “I just helped with what the Doc was doing. It was an experience.”

While Curry, Bentley and other soldiers from Alpha Company aided Trifunovic, the rest of the patrol cleared a landing zone for an air evacuation. Once the helicopter arrived and was on its way to Pristina Hospital, the patrol shifted into bloodhound mode.

“We had a description of possible suspects that were harassing Trifunovic earlier, before the shooting,” said Capt. Thomas Johnson, commander of Alpha Company. “The platoon... moved away from the shooting scene and began tracking.”

“We followed trails,” said Staff Sgt. Corey McFadden. “We followed foot steps and we looked for any broken foliage on the trees, seeing if someone was trying to run, to get away from the area.”

Eventually, after following footprints in the snow and other signs for about an hour and a half, the patrol spotted two men fitting the description. They were taken into custody without incident. The suspects were transported back to OP Power and turned over to the Kosovo Police Service and United Nations Civilian Police.

Trifunovic died that evening at Pristina Hospital.

“The soldiers did outstanding,” Johnson said. “They were really on the spot when it came to administering first aid. They tried their best to keep him alive but unfortunately he was too badly wounded. He just couldn’t hold on, but it’s not from my soldiers not trying their hardest. They did some really good work down there.”

The suspects remain in police custody as the investigation into Trifunovic’s murder continues.

Peacekeeper profile



Robert Garcia

Age: 35

Rank: 1st Lt.

MOS: 73A, social work officer

Unit: 254th Medical Detachment

Camp: Monteith

Hometown: Santa Fe, New Mexico

What do you like to do when you’re off duty? Run, read weight train and watch movies.

Why did you join the Army? For the adventure, to travel and professional development opportunities

What advice would you give to soldiers coming to Kosovo? Regardless of your frame of mind, come here and do everything, like it’s part of your mission.



Maj. Eric McDonald, a doctor with Task Force Medical Falcon, gives Premtim (left) and Betim Vokshi gifts from the TFMF staff members on Dec. 18 at Pristina University Hospital. The twins were injured in an explosion in Policka on Dec. 6.

236th, Med Falcon saviors lift spirits of twins

Eight-year-olds are recovering after Policka grenade accident

Story and photo by Spc. Whitney Hughes

PRISTINA, Kosovo – Cpl. Ron Martel, a flight medic with the 236th Medical Company, could relate to the special bond between twin brothers Premtim and Betim Vokshi.

Martel, 36, is a twin and keeps in regular contact with his brother. One knows when the other is hurt, he said. It's as if the other can sense it.

On Dec. 6, the Vokshi twins were injured in a horrible grenade accident near their home in Policka. Their older brother was killed along with another child, when one of them accidentally detonated the grenade.

Nearly two weeks later, the boys were recovering in Pristina Hospital where Martel and other members of Task Force Medical Falcon, who helped transport and stabilize the boys, visited for a part of a day.

They stopped in Betim's room first. Within minutes, Premtim barged in and pushed his way through the group to sit with his brother.

"When (Betim) was in there by himself he looked really anxious and uncomfortable," Martel said. "But when (Premtim) walked in both of them seemed to relax a little bit."

Premtim sustained far worse injuries and was unconscious while being transported by the 236th and treated at

Camp Bondsteel. This was the first time the TFMF team had seen him conscious.

"I was stunned to see him just walk in by himself," Martel said. "He just pushed his way through the people to his brother's bed."

The soldiers brought stuffed animals, candy and other presents for the boys. They were able to speak to them through a translator.

"Everybody in (TFMF) was involved in some way with those two children," said Maj. Eric McDonald, an emergency room doctor with TFMF.

It became a very personal case for the staff, McDonald added.

"To see a child that was close to actually dying and was so fortunate and blessed to be alive was really amazing," McDonald said.

The first thing Martel told the boys was that he was a twin.

"That's when both of them looked at me," Martel said. "We were going to take a picture and I put my hand on one of the child's knee and he grabbed my hand. I don't know what the feeling was, but there was definitely something that transpired there."



Acting their age

Photos by Capt. Gregory Heilshorn

STRPCE, Kosovo – Unless you knew them by name, it was impossible to tell one from the other, which was exactly the point.

Two hundred Albanian and Serb children, all wearing bright orange shirts inscribed with “Kids For Peace,” gathered at the Hotel Narcis on Dec. 14 to celebrate their diversity by sharing what they had in common.

World Vision International, a Christian relief organization, sponsored the festival. It was the first of its kind since the NATO peacekeeping mission began in 1999.

“This is a chance for the kids to have fun together,” said Marija Denda, the festival organizer.

The girls and boys, ages nine through 13, were bused in from all over the province. They sang, danced and performed comedy skits for each other. After, they shared a meal.

For a day, they were simply a group of children acting like children. Their ability to poke fun at themselves and cheer for each other transcended ethnic grudges.

Organizers hoped it was a historic step toward a unified Kosovo.



Faces of Kosovo

A behind the scenes look at how the KFOR mission impacts the people of Kosovo.

Playing the hand you're dealt

What counts most in creating a successful team is not how compatible its players are, but how they deal with incompatibility -- Sports Illustrated

Story and photos by Master Sgt. Thomas Hayes

President Sladan Ilic sits in the third floor office of the Strpce Municipal Building. It is the office he occupies on a rotational basis with his two deputy presidents. Office space is limited, but hope for a better future is not, and these three newly elected officials say they have the passion to bring it to fruition.

The November municipality elections catapulted the former Olympic skier, and two academics, to their respective offices. Ilic, a 33-year-old Serb, and his deputy presidents, Albanian Hamdi Aliu, 31, and Serbian Slavisa Staletovic', 37, form an ad hoc government founded on a common cause.

In an inverse of the rest of Kosovo, Strpce municipality is a predominantly Serbian and a minority Albanian constituency.

During the last election two years ago, the Serbs boycotted, which put Albanians in power, with Serbs positioned in a parallel government to strike the balance. The boycott began an era of indecision and, both sides agree, was a strategic flaw.

"An empty seat cannot vote for you," United Nations Mission in Kosovo's Charles Messier said. Messier, who has been a political advisor to the municipality, said that he had advised the Serbs not to boycott the previous election, but the hardliners did not want to yield power. Messier said he has high hopes for the new democratic government.

Ilic, Aliu and Staletovic' are unanimous in describing the situations they face: Unemployment is high and what employment there is is skewed to the Serbs; Serbs do not feel safe traveling outside the Strpce municipality; Albanians are cautious about returning to their homes in Strpce and the frequent electrical blackouts are problematic.

All say they are in agreement that KFOR has done wonders to stabilize a volatile situation. And from that stabilization the hope is a foundation can be built that will revitalize their tourism industry, provide more jobs and a safe and secure environment. That goal drives those governing Strpce.

Five months ago Ilic, the entrepreneur and seven time Yugoslavian national alpine skiing champion who competed in the 1992 Winter Olympics, entered the realm of politics.

"I wasn't satisfied with the changes that happened in our community," Ilic said. "It didn't reflect enough good changes and my expectations were much more than what happened. Because of this my friends, who were also not involved in politics – they were doctors and professors – and I decided to establish one local movement, a democratic movement, with local aims and goals to achieve better for our community of Strpce."

Ilic, known as "Borzan" to his friends, said he doesn't like to lose and wants the Strpce municipality to win as well. It is the same competitive spirit that carried him through ski gymnasium (secondary school), through university with a degree in economics, a one-year stint in the Yugoslavian Army, through forming his own ski school and starting a ski rental business. That same spirit propelled him into the political arena.

"I am fighter; this is from sport," Ilic said in English. "I don't want only to be part of competition, I want to win always. I believe in God and myself and with faith in myself and my team, I know we can achieve."

The list of achievements is long, but it focuses on the revitalization of the tourism industry and infrastructure that must precede such revitalization.

"My team and I expect more safety," Ilic said. "Not only physical, but economic as well. More jobs for the community. To use our competitive advantages in our community, by which I mean our ski resorts and our natural advantages to promote tourism in both winter and summer. Of course we have another potential in small factories. We will push the private initiative — small family businesses.

"History teaches that big social and state enterprises are the way to develop society," Ilic said. "We need more private institutions and enterprises. Our goals are to cooperate together. Those aims are not possible to achieve without cooperation with international communities, especially KFOR."

The key, according to Ilic, is to put aside the differences of the past, determine common interests, and pursue them together.

"We need a more stable political situation with Albanian



Hamdi Aliu

Sladen Ilic

Slavisa Staletovic'

and Serbs without any tension," Ilic said. "At the same time we need to build our infrastructure to help both sides."

Infrastructure such as improved roads, water, schools, electricity and telephones, he said, reinforces the common interests between Albanian and Serbian communities.

"We are neighbors and the interests will be common for both sides and this is enough," Ilic said.

"I am trying to play open cards with the Albanians," Ilic said. "We don't need to love each other, but we need to respect each other.

"Now we establish a strong base for the future," Ilic said. "The war was three years ago and both sides need time to solve the problems of the past. I want to be president for both sides."

However, Ilic said not to expect him to be something he is not. He is Serbian. In Strpce, Serbs are the majority and Albanians are the minority.

"Now, here I want to show Albanians how it looks to lead by democracy," Ilic said. "To show them that we will not abuse the fact that we are in majority."

And Ilic is a realist, he said, and embraces reality.

"I will not allow discussion of the future of Kosovo within our municipality," he said. "It is not our question, not our problem. We were elected to solve local problems not waste time discussing the future of Kosovo."

Vice President Hamdi Aliu, an Albanian, agreed.

"President Ilic said that we are an example to the rest of

Kosovo, and I support that recommendation," Aliu said.

"Kosovo can only advance if people are considerate and have respect," Aliu said through a translator. "But, the

solution is very complex. Everything is connected to everything; for instance, electricity is connected to the economy. People need to depend on each other.

"From my position, I am a person who loves nature and loves people," Aliu said. "I am a young person and I do not have prejudices. I will work for the interests of the people in the municipality of Strpce."

Serbian Deputy President Slavisa Staletovic' is also on

board.

"Both sides, the Albanians and the Serbs, need to be open and honest about what happened in the past and then work to overcome the things that happened in the past," Staletovic' said through an interpreter. "Without this discussion we'll never have a future."

Both Staletovic' and Aliu have such discussions.

"I think he and I have a good relationship," Staletovic' said of Aliu. "It is good we are both younger and we are concerned about the same things. For both sides, the main concerns are unemployment and better living conditions."

So, the three unite for success with the common goal being the common good.

"The only way to go to the future is to accept the reality," Aliu said. "So we live in Kosovo, we work in Kosovo and we wish all the best for Kosovo."

"I am trying to play open cards with the Albanians. We don't need to love each other, but we need to respect each other."

Sladen Ilic
President of Strpce Municipality



Long time plant manager struggles toward a brighter future

M Milan Stojcetovic stands before the now silent machines in the factory he manages in Strpce.

Story and photo by Master Sgt. Thomas Hayes

STRPCE, Kosovo — Milan Stojcetovic, dressed in layers, his hands buried in his blue down jacket, offers no apologies for the temperature of his office. It is see-your-breath cold. While the presence of KFOR has stabilized the Strpce area and allowed greater freedom of movement, the winters since 2000 have been fraught with inconsistent electricity leading to freezing cold offices, he explained.

Stojcetovic is director of the Lola Systems metal fabrication plant in Strpce. He has been with Lola through its heyday in the late 1980s through the ethnic conflict and the resultant NATO bombing campaign in 1999. While he has developed a thick skin, he said it is frustrating for him to watch his skilled workers and expensive machinery sit idle in the cold stillness of the power outages. What few workers remain, huddle around small wood stoves for warmth.

Without electricity there is no heat and no way to power the drill presses, band saws, lathes and other machinery necessary for production, Stojcetovic said. The machine tool plant was named for Ivo Lola Ribar, a writer and fallen comrade of Yugoslavian dictator Josip Broz Tito. In its day, the plant manufactured components for metal forming machines, miles and miles of piano hinges to customers from all over the world. The former USSR was one of its largest customers, Stojcetovic said.

“After the Soviet Union collapsed, the market dropped,” Stojcetovic said. “We had problems finding buyers, but we managed somehow; finding customers mainly in Kosovo. Right now, we’re making anything from metal that buyers order.”

Buyers order sleds, chairs and tables, steel fences and gates, production of “boot washing buckets” for Multi Na-

tional Brigade East soldiers, and signs for KFOR, Stojcetovic said. There are also specific one time refurbishing projects like sealing kilns or welding a piece of metal.

But that’s not enough, Stojcetovic said.

In the 19 years he has been with the company — the last six as director — Stojcetovic has built strong relationships with suppliers and clients by paying on time and delivering on time. Because of that relationship, he said he has buyers lined up to purchase from him. But there’s the rub. Because of the lack of consistency in electricity, and therefore, a lack of production capability, he said he is hesitant to enter into contracts where circumstances may prevent him from delivering.

And, knowing the current situation, potential buyers are reluctant to engage in mass production contracts.

There is also the issue of privatization. Lola Institution is the holding company, but in 1993, the company began privatization plans and employees purchased stock in the company. With the downfall of business, the debt became insurmountable, so the creditors now claim ownership. The question hangs over Stojcetovic of who actually owns the company. He would like to see the company sold and turned around.

A further complication is bureaucracy. Stojcetovic said, on behalf of the company, that months ago he submitted documents which would allow him to sell to Serbia. These documents have not been approved or rejected; they wait on someone’s desk.

At the moment, all Stojcetovic can do is wait. He waits for the power grid to be reliable, waits for the documents to be signed, waits for business to boom.

“You can always make something,” he shrugged.

Interoperability is key to military success

Army, Marine Command Sergeant Majors discuss the value of working together

By Spc. Christopher Gookin

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo — On a daily basis Maj. Keith Hugo, of the 7th Expeditionary Squadron, U.S. Air Force updates the all-Army command staff of Multi-National Brigade (East) on the weather. It's short and sweet and

one," said McLane. "I'm amazed that our allies band together so quickly working towards a common goal. The methods may be different, but we reach it together. The interoperability piece is evident here."



always a key consideration in the day-to-day operations of MNB(E).

It's also a perfect example of interoperability, a term used to describe any cooperative effort between different branches of the military or allied country's military.

As common as it is in a time of war, interoperability has become almost doctrine in the face of today's ever-changing global environment, military personnel say.

With the U.S. military involved in so many different operations on so many different fronts, requirements on man-power alone necessitate a multiple-branch approach, they add.

"Looking around at all the operations currently going on, no one service can do it all by themselves," said Command Sgt. Maj. of Marine Forces Europe Carlton Kent.

"There will be more joint operations. All the services will have to work together."

Kent recently visited MNB(E) for the promotion ceremony of one of his Marines. The value of interoperability, he explained, was the exposure and the mutual learning.

"It's working really well, seeing the way (the U.S. Army) operates," Kent said. "Once you connect, there are a lot of positives with the Army and Marine Corps learning from each other and seeing how each other train."

MNB(E) Command Sgt. Maj. Edward R. McLane pointed out that interoperability has always been in practice, but awareness of it has heightened with the advent of additional missions.

"We've been working together for some time," he said. "I don't think it's as publicized to the extent that it is now. In my years of service, I've worked with the Marines at Fort Stewart and the Air Force whenever we were shipped out to the National Training Center or Kuwait."

But in Kosovo McLane said, "I don't think we've worked in close quarters like this for a sustained length of time."

In addition to the various U.S. military branches, Russian, Greek, Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian units are also part of the MNB(E) mission in KFOR.

"Our relationship with the international forces is a good

Interoperability in MNB(E) translates into security and lasting peace, McLane said.

"The key or paramount issue with interoperability here is not just because of the combined arms team with infantry, armor, and artillery, but having other services such as the Navy SEALs and Marines out here working with us in the sector. It is important as it ties in all services into one common goal that is to maintain peace and civility in MNB(E)."

The same can be said for the reserve forces, McLane added.

"It is very important that all branches of the service and the Reserve and National Guard work hand in hand toward the common goal," McLane said. "Having done this in Bosnia and now in Kosovo, it works. You can't tell the difference between the active component and the reserve component."

Peacekeeper profile



Monika Lamb

Age: 25

Rank: Sgt.

MOS: 73C, Finance Clerk

Unit: 106th Finance Battalion

Camp: Monteith

Hometown: Opelousas, La.

What are you good at? Finance for the military, all sports and poetry.

Why did you join the Army? For the military experience.

What advice would you give soldiers of MNB(E)? Kosovo is a very good deployment. You will be taken care of.



Photo by Spc. Christopher Gookin

Spc. Svetlana Gelman, an automated logistical specialist assigned to Bravo Company, 201st Logistics Task Force acts as a simulated casualty.

Black *Hawk* **DOWN**

A call comes in that a Black Hawk helicopter has crashed. It's your job to respond. How would you handle the situation?

By Spc. Matthew Lang

We just got a call from the fire department that a Black Hawk helicopter crashed on the Supply Support Activity pad in South Town and there are a lot of casualties," said Capt. Brandon Trevino, battle captain for Headquarters, Headquarters Company 3rd Brigade.



Photo by Spc. Chris Gookin

Chief Warrant Officer Adam Reid, of the 236th (Air Ambulance) Medical Company, Task Force Med Falcon lays on the tarmac awaiting medical attention during a mass casualty exercise at Camp Bondsteel on Dec. 22.



Photo by Spc. Matthew Lang

MNB(E) soldiers and Brown & Root firemen respond to a simulated Black Hawk helicopter crash during a mass casualty training exercise at Camp Bondsteel on Dec. 22.

The accident was actually a mass casualty exercise held here on Dec. 22. In the scenario, a UH-60A medevac helicopter was conducting sling-load training operations with a piece of Ukrainian equipment at the SSA helipad. While hovering over the equipment and ground personnel, the transmission seized and the helicopter fell from the sky on top of the equipment and sling-load crew, injuring eight soldiers.

Medics and firemen rushed to help get the casualties to safety and put the fire out. Two ambulance crews hurried to put the wounded soldiers on litters and load them into the ambulance, which brought them to the Camp Bondsteel hospital.

“Where’s my crew? Are they alive? I need my crew,” moaned one of the casualties while in the ambulance.

Once at the hospital doctors and medics treated the casualties for injuries ranging from broken legs to burned flesh.

“The last thing anybody is thinking on a Sunday afternoon is a mass casualty exercise. What we are trying to do is keep the hospital always ready for these kind of activities,” said Capt. Victor Suarez, the MNB(E) medical operation officer at Camp Bondsteel.

“And at the same time test their ability to respond to these actions in an unknown situation. These types of exercises help us prepare for the extreme level, which is an accident off base where we are more than 10 minutes away,” said Suarez.

The goal was to make the exercise as realistic as possible, Suarez said, and to test members to their full capacities.

Sgt. Tony Devine, a medical specialist with Task Force Medical Falcon, said, they were caught off guard, but they train one day a week for events like this.

“This type of event helps train everybody as a whole even those that played parts as victims. It benefits them by giving them the knowledge that we actually do know what we are doing when such a scenario happens,” said Devine.

Devine said the exercise gives soldiers trust in the medics because they see them performing their job as realistically as possible and by following their standard operating procedures.

“One thing that we are finding out each time we do this is that we are becoming a better team. The hardest thing about small teams is communication. And each time we perform these exercises communication improves, which improves how quickly we can help the injured,” said Spc. Coleman Gray, also a medical specialist with TFMF.

“The more you do something the more confidence you have in it. And confidence alone helps you make sure you that you’re making the right decision and helps take some of the stress out of it,” said Gray.

“Basically the more we train for this, the more we know each others patterns, the better we work together, and the smoother things run,” said Gray. “And what that translates into is better health care.”

Hoop Dreams

Photos by Spc. Whitney Hughes

The Moral Welfare and Recreation Department sponsored a Christmas basketball tournament Dec. 21 and 22. The tournament was single elimination and eight teams participated. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd place teams were awarded trophies and medals.

The winners were:

- 1st place: 67th Combat Support Hospital
- 2nd place: 212th Military Police Company
- 3rd place: 201st Logistical Task Force



You can't stop him: Staff Sgt. Lester Ruiz, a platoon sergeant with Task Force Dragon, 2-1 Aviation, drives to the basket.



1st place: the 67th CSH poses with their trophy.



Thread the needle: Spc. Jose Salazar, an administrative specialist with 212th Military Police Company, throws a pass into the post.



Double team: Spc. Maurice Washington, a cable system operator with the 72nd Signal Battalion, and Spc. Joe Sanchez, a mechanic with the 212th MPs, apply the defense.

On patrol

with 212th Military Police Company



Pfc. James Vanhorn, a member of the 212th Military Company, drives through Kacanik during a recent patrol in MNB(E).

Story and photos by Capt. Gregory Heilshorn

STRPCE, Kosovo – It was a foggy, wet Saturday and the roads were quiet except for an occasional military rig, farm tractor, and European luxury car that would speed by, passing on blind curves without hesitation. There was not much to patrol along this stretch of Route Lion.

“There are no big events to speak of,” said Staff Sgt. Nicanor Mendez, a team leader with the 212th Military Police Company stationed at Camp Bondsteel as part of Task Force 793rd Military Police Battalion.

The latest complaints have regarded wild animals attacking livestock.

“They are coming down from the mountains,” Mendez said. “Wolves and bears. People are asking for permits to kill them.”

In the two months the 212th has been patrolling Multi-National Brigade (East), it has dealt with the same kind of incidents it would respond to at its home station in Kitzingen, Germany: vehicle breakdowns, fender benders and minor traffic violations. Reports of unexploded ordnance and illegal weapons caches have become infrequent.

A few years ago, at this time in December, there might be a stream of traffic with vacationers headed toward the ski slopes in Brezovica. The Hotel Narcis might be full, its bar noisy and the indoor pool splashing with children.

But today the hotel was lifeless except for a few guests

and the United Nations police who have made it a temporary home. Its grand lobby was cold and dark and there was a strong odor of diesel from a generator. The shelves behind the bar were bare and the indoor pool was drained. The fallout from the Albanian and Serb conflict was obvious.

“The cars used to be parked all the way down the hill,” a hotel employee said.

With relative security established by KFOR, focus has shifted to freedom of movement. Patrols are less of a law enforcement presence and more of an exercise in information gathering, Mendez said.

As winter tightens its grip on these mountain communities, the 212th concentrates on individual needs as well as road conditions.

“We ask people if they know of families having trouble with food and clothing or getting wood,” Mendez said. “We pass on the information to the municipalities who contact the Red Cross and NGOs (non-government organizations).”

The previous week a villager called the Strpce substation where the 212th, U.N. and KPS maintain offices. The man complained about his electricity going out, Mendez recalled. He had just slaughtered a pig and said that his meat was going to waste because his refrigeration unit kept shutting off.

Some of the meat might be a source of income for the man or used to barter for other supplies, Mendez said.

On this particular day, there would be less of the usual along Routes Lion and Hawk – a Volkswagen stalled on a bridge north of Kacanik and a small pile of fallen rock near Strpce. Neither would require direct assistance.

The two highlights of the patrol involved a phenomenon that has become somewhat of a norm for U.S. soldiers maintaining peace in Kosovo: children flock to them. It starts with one or two, and then the rest eventually overcome their shyness. They holler and wave, which alerts more. At the Hotel Narcis and on a sidewalk in Kacanik, children embraced the individual patrol members like movie stars.

“Can I have your picture taken with me?” asked one girl in perfect English. She was one of 200 Albanian and Serb children who were bused to the Narcis from all around the province for a multiethnic festival.

The children, from ages nine to 13, sang, danced and performed comedy routines for each other in a function room. They wore bright orange shirts inscribed with “Kids For Peace,” and for one afternoon they were a single, giggling entity. Their youthful energy helped take the edge off the ghost-like interior of the hotel.

It was not long before they noticed the four members of the 212th, who stopped in to see the show. Instead, they almost became part of it. One by one, children slipped between the soldiers for a photograph. For some, it was a chance to practice their English.

“Hello,” said a boy. “Thank you for helping us. Thank you for being here.”



Spc. Natalie Dains, a member of the 212th Military Police Company, engages a group of curious boys in Kacanik during a recent patrol in MNB(E).

www.mnbe.hqusareur.army.mil

They were particularly taken with Spc. Natalie Dains, the one female member of the patrol team. Originally from Kansas City, Dains extended her deployment another three months.

“I like the people here,” Dains said. “It’s exciting to learn a different part of my job as an MP. I will go back to the states with a different feeling and perspective.”

The other soldiers expressed a similar attitude.

“We try to interact with people as much as we can,” said Pfc. John Wilkerson, an Oklahoman who joined the army two and half years ago. “Just by talking to them and saying hello we get a lot useful information we can pass to higher.”

Later in the day, the team was mobbed a second time by a group of children outside the Kacanik substation. Their curiosity was infectious.

“This is what it’s all about,” said Pfc. James Vanhorn, a quiet Texan fresh out of basic and advanced individual training. “When they said Kosovo, this isn’t what I really pictured. I thought there would be more poverty and people on the street.”

Mendez acknowledged his team is young to be handling a mission that emphasizes street diplomacy as much as it does security. But his soldiers have accepted the responsibilities and are beginning to thrive with the help of quality translators.

“I impress on the kids to learn, learn as much as you can,” said Mendez, who with 14 years of military service tries to mentor the younger troops. “There are more expectations. They are going to be out there talking to the people.”

Vanhorn kept a picture of his sweetheart clipped to the visor of his humvee. Wilkerson inhaled a blueberry cake offered up by Mendez, and Dains expressed the slightest displeasure about not crossing into Macedonia to get a cappuccino.

The most impressive display came from Mendez, who during the longest stretch of the patrol, set up a portable CD player and speakers. “Keep awake music,” justified the 37-year-old father of two.

At 30 mph, the speed limit for 212th military vehicles in MNB(E), a two-humvee convoy to the Macedonian border and back could have been akin to trolling for tires along the Mississippi.

But on this dreary Saturday, the children and Led Zepplin made it bearable.

Peacekeeper profile



Raunie Adair

Age: 25

Rank: Spc.

MOS: 95B, military police

Unit: 1st Military Police Company

Camp: Monteith

Hometown: Nashville, Tenn.

What is role in MNB(E)? Military police team leader.

What are you good at? Weightlifting.

Why did you join the Army? To serve my country.

What advice would you give to soldiers coming into Kosovo? Stay motivated, and make the best of the situation.

Ashkalis: A minority lost in the shuffle

Story and photos by Spc. Christopher Gookin



A barricade of gutted automobiles erected by Albanians divides the village of Dubrava from newer Albanian homes and the city of Ferizaj.

DUBRAVA, Kosovo—Under the bright lights of Ferizaj, within view of the city's hustle and bustle, is a small community of people who have been somewhat of an afterthought when it comes to discussions of a unified Kosovo.

The Ashkali, a minority often grouped with Romas and Kosovo Egyptians, are suffering from some of the worst living conditions in the province, according to Maj. John Pope, a team leader with the 415th Civil Affairs Battalion.

Together, they number roughly 10,000, according to a Web site on the World Conference Against Racism.

On Dec. 4, Pope led a team from the 415th to Dubrava to assess the village and bring the Ashkali's dire situation to the attention of local and international authorities.

"Overall public health is abominable," Pope said. "There are active cases of tuberculosis here, a disease that most of the developed world considers to be virtually eradicated."

Pope said his unit has received numerous requests for the most basic kinds of help. But because the Army is not a social service agency, his team can only pass on the needs to municipal authorities and non-government agencies.

The origin of the Ashkali is a point of conjecture. Some believe the Ashkali are Roma who assimilated into the Albanian population. The Roma are thought to have their roots in India, but the Ashkali maintain that they came from Egypt between 300 A.D. and 600 A.D. They speak Albanian, not Romany (the language of the Roma), and have different dress, music and marriage customs.

The street leading into Dubrava is edged with the back walls of homes that form the compounds characteristic of the Ashkali community.

Sheet metal walls surround the homes. Some have sections of stone. Looking closer, the walls are actually 50-

gallon drums that have been pounded flat. They are attached to the frames with baling wire.

As the 415th approached the entrance to the village, a well-dressed man standing against a wall and smoking a cigarette offered a traditional greeting.

"Miremengjes, hello" said the man, who introduced himself as Mr. Danush (he preferred not give his first name.) Danush was the village leader.

Danush introduced the team to several residents, one of whom, Zem Dosci, showed how his home was in need of repair. A back wall had collapsed, forcing his family to live among relatives in an adjacent compound.

The team surveyed the damage and asked if Dosci's family was prepared for winter with clothing, food and heating materials.

A new stove would be helpful, Dosci replied. Smoke was leaking out of the old one.

"No promises, of course, but we'll try to get you some help," said Sgt. Steve Mudd, the 415th team sergeant.

Through an interpreter, Dosci thanked the team for their time. Sharing the problems he and his family are dealing with helps, he said.

The conditions in the village are dismal. Some homes are without electricity. Roofs leak and dirt floors are covered with old carpets. Many families sleep in one room.

In the corner of the lot, the latrine is nothing more than a hole in a cement slab with walls that resemble doors from gym lockers.

As the team proceeded through the village, a chestnut brown pony appeared. Its bridle was decorated with brass bells and large red tassels, which stood out brightly against the mud-brick walls.

The abject poverty is compounded with high rates of unemployment and illiteracy, Pope said.

But there has been some progress. A recent agreement between the village leaders of Dubrava and the Albanian community of Zazkok allows Ashkali children to attend a nearby primary school.

For the adults, an educational initiative called "Catch Up" is having success. Developed by the United Nation's Local Communities Office (LCO) in Ferizaj, the program stems from the large percentage of Ashkali adults who do not possess a primary school level education.

It is a comprehensive education plan that covers subject matter from grades one through eight. Every six months two grades are covered.

The success of this initiative, coupled with Ashkali children being able to attend school in Zazkok, could have long-reaching effects for the Ashkali people, said Pope.

For health concerns, the villagers occasionally visit the Health House in Ferizaj, a government-sponsored health agency. But even with the subsidized prescriptions, villagers are reluctant to spend what little money they have on medications, Pope said.

Later in its visit, the team approached three young men. They were cordial and offered the soldiers cigarettes.

"What are your main concerns in the village? What do you see as the biggest problem?" Mudd asked.

"Jobs," replied one of them.

"We need work," added another, who introduced himself as Hamid. "But winter is coming and no one needs workers until spring."

The rate of unemployment in Dubrava is estimated at more than 90 percent, Pope said.

"Since people lack an income and basic earning potential, they have no means to pull themselves up," Pope added.

One of the men said he worked at a local market on the

weekends, delivering goods in his wheelbarrow. What little he earned helped support his two elderly parents and younger sister.

Halit Danqi, an Ashkali community leader, recently initiated a project for some of the villagers to secure firewood.

The plan was for the villagers to cut 200 cubic meters of their own wood from the town of Rahovic in the northeastern section of the municipality. The cost, or taxes levied by the municipality, would be covered by the LCO.

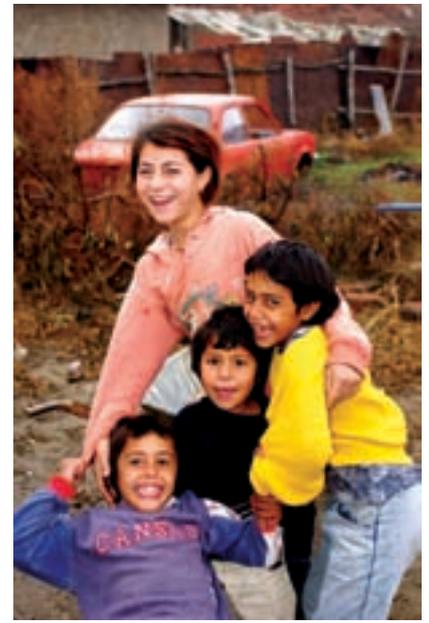
The rate was 5.40

Euros per cubic meter. If the Ashkali had to pay for the firewood on their own, they would have been forced to pay upwards of 25 Euros for the same amount, according to Danqi.

The cause was further helped by The World Association of Muslim Youth, which donated a vehicle to transport the wood.

Pope commended the volunteers and the Muslim Youth organization, noting the village needs more of that kind of collaboration.

"Life should be about something more than just survival," he said.



Brothers and sisters horse around in the village of Dubrava.



An Ashkali boy strikes a confident pose in the village of Dubrava during a visit by the 415th Civil Affairs Battalion on Dec. 4.

ASG Falcon takes care of its nest

Commander liken his job to being mayor of large city.

By Master Sgt. Thomas Hayes

Up until August of this year, the mayor of one of the largest "cities" in Kosovo resided in Salem, Ore. George D. Lanning, the 53-year-old Area Support Group (Falcon) commander, knew this assignment would be big, but he never expected it to be this big.

Still, the Oregon Army National Guard colonel has no regrets.

"This is a lot larger job than I envisioned coming over here," he said of his constituency. "I was pleasantly surprised and pleased with the infrastructure in place. This is the best forward deployed situation a person could ever imagine."

ASG Falcon has oversight on Camps Able Sentry, Bondsteel, Magrath, Monteith, and base operations support for NATO Headquarters in Pristina.

"If you are living on Bondsteel, Magrath, Monteith and CAS you are supported by the ASG," he said, adding that his job is the military equivalent of a mayor's job. "Now, did they elect me? No."

In reality, Lanning said he volunteered for this mission, as did his portable "Eyes and Ears," Command Sgt. Major Donald J. Robinson of Montrose, Pa.

The two met at the CONUS (Continental U.S.) Replacement Center at Fort Benning, Ga. at the end of July of this year. By Aug. 10 they were at the helm of this behemoth. "This is a large animal," Lanning said.

This animal's paw print transcends Multi-National Brigade (East) proper, and ASG Falcon has logistical responsibility for Albania, Bulgaria, FYROM, Greece, Kosovo and Romania.

The ASG's role is logistical support, covering everything from improving force protection to managing facility maintenance and construction. It is management of the mundane. If personnel can take it for granted in a base camp, it's a compliment to the staff of Area Support Group Falcon.

On Thanksgiving, for instance, Lanning said more than 12,000 meals were served in this area of operation. The four base camps alone comprise a total of 1,301 acres, 332 Southeast Asia Huts (SEAHUTS), and numerous other support facilities. This is urban management.

There is an old wives' tale or in this case a soldiers' tale, that Bondsteel is the third largest city in Kosovo.

"I cannot provide any documentation to back up the 'third largest city' claim," Robinson said. "One thing is for certain; Camp Bondsteel is by far the most modern city in Kosovo. We always have electricity and water. Our roads will always

be plowed and repaired, the grass is always cut and the litter is always picked up."

Such is the purview of ASG Falcon.

To accomplish this, Lanning and Robinson said a good staff and long hours are what it takes.

"A good day for me is from six in the morning to 10 at night when I am able to accomplish all of the taskings and support requirements," Lanning said. "There's no such word as challenge; it's merely an opportunity to excel."

Excellence does not equal popularity, but according to Lanning tough decisions come with the territory.

"You can't make everyone happy and do your job too," he said. "I've got to look out for USAREUR's (United States Army Europe) interest and be a good steward for the limited resources available and when you have to say 'No,' it is not easily accepted by all. It can be a bitter pill."

But a smooth running ASG with competent Area Support Teams helps wash down that pill.

1st Lt. Gregory M. Tomlin, information operations officer

for Task Force 2-63 Armor says the soldiers he's spoken with appreciate the services provided by the AST.

"At Camp

Magrath we

recognize the extra

efforts taken by AST

soldiers, DA civilians

and Brown and Root

employees to improve

our quality of life during

this deployment," Tomlin

said. "From the myriad of

activities coordinated by the

MWR staff to the finishing

touches at Thanksgiving dinner

provided by the food service

workers, the AST's commitment to

excellence makes soldiers' off-duty

time much more enjoyable."

That validating feedback makes volun-

teering for this tour worthwhile, Lanning said.

"As a citizen soldier there is a responsibility and patriotic duty to respond and assist in the War on Terrorism," Lanning said. "(This) is another opportunity to command a forward deployed unit. The Adjutant General for the State of Oregon was willing to release me to fulfill this mission. I left command of the Rilea Armed Forces Training Center to command the ASG and will return to the Oregon Army National Guard. It is the best of both worlds."

Robinson, a Vietnam veteran, is "Doing it for Danny." Danny is the son of his wife's best friend who was killed in the World Trade Center attack.

"I felt as though it was my duty as a soldier and an American citizen to do my part at this time in our history" Robinson said.





Jingle Bell Jog

The annual 5K Jingle Bell Jog at Camp Bondsteel on Dec. 22 drew more than 90 runners, including three, five-person teams. (Photos by Spc. Matthew Lang, 114th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment.



The "Spin Doctors" started the race as a team and finished as a team. From left are Capt. Gregory Heilshorn, Capt. Michael Bush, Sgt. Brent Wucher, Spc. Christopher Gookin and Master Sgt. Thomas Hayes, all from MNB(E) Public Affairs Office.



More than 90 participants sprint off the start line of the Jingle Bell Jog.



Spc. Gary Krese, a personnel clerk with the 38th Personnel Services Battalion at Camp Bondsteel, stretches for the 5K Jingle Bell Jog held by the MWR.



The Force Providers finished in third place. They were the only female team to participate.

Scenes of Kosovo



Farm houses in the village of Izance stand shrouded in mist on Dec. 24.