

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

Guardian East

Special Edition

May 14, 2003



Reporters' notebooks - a look back

Message to the troops



An honor to serve with you

By Maj. David Durling

Welcome to the 114th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment's final issue of the Guardian East. Our replacements, the 203rd MPAD, a USAR unit out of Wichita, Kansas, will be here soon, and they will stamp their own unique character onto Multi-National Brigade (East)'s magazine.

By my calculations, not that I've been counting, we have been in-country 198 days. And while we feel like we're just getting to know our jobs, the great people of the task force, and this world of contrasts called Kosovo, we've also been here long enough to amass a wealth of fascinating material. So much so that we couldn't use it all in our regular issues of the Guardian East. But how to get those stories out to the soldiers in MNB(E)?

We started thinking about our final issue about two months ago. Even though it was the end of our unit's rotation, and we wanted to create something special, the final issue couldn't be a wrap-up of the 4B task force, because they still had time left on their watch. So the 114th's journalists came up with the idea of publishing a reporter's notebook, both as a way to thank the soldiers of MNB(E) for letting us write their stories, and as a way to include the gems that didn't make it into the Guardian East for one reason or another.

What's a reporter's notebook? The easy definition is that

it's the pad of paper in which a reporter writes his or her observations. But, as any journalist will tell you, much of what they see in the course of their assignments doesn't

make it into a particular finished piece. And often, the most powerful moments might have no relevance to a story, but still resonate deeply. For example, Master Sgt. John Barr writes about how the sight of black-birds will forever remind him of his time spent at Camp Monteith. "I suppose whenever I do see one, no matter where I am, I will recall Gnjilane and the names I came to know like Vera, Teuta, Ekrum, Gazmed, Valon, Zhavera, and Booki," he notes.

We tried to capture overall impressions, too, in this issue. Many of us in MNB(E) are so focused on the mission that we forget to step back and appreciate Kosovo for what it is. Spc. Catherine Caruso, who spent much of her time covering 2-63 Armor, says that "from the moment I got off the plane in Pristina and my eyes soaked in the expanse of blue sky and purple mountains, red, pink, and orange sunsets, russet bricks and stone walls and adobe hamlets, I

loved it. Couldn't help but love it."

We hope you enjoy this unique look at MNB(E). It's been a pleasure and an honor to serve with you all, and this is our way of saying thanks.



Maj. David Durling

SEE THE PHOTO OF THE DAY
www.mnbe.hqusareur.army.mil

On the cover: Photo by Spc. Ryan Creel, Combat Camera.
From left, Pfc. Wesley Ging and Spc. Alex Delefuente, both mortarmen with HHC, 2-2 Infantry Battalion, fire a 120mm high explosive round at a designated target on range Falcon 4, April 30.

Guardian East

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501st lends a helping hand



Sgt. Tomas Holtluthanasion
Infantryman with the 501st

Jordan Mitrovitch
Serbian citizen

Sgt. Nicolaos Achoneftos
Track vehicle technician with the 501st

Story by Spc. Whitney Hughes
Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Landry

UROSEVAC/FERIZAJ, Kosovo – It is hard to imagine that the mere presence of a soldier can change the course of a citizen's life. However, the soldiers of the 501st Mechanized Battalion (Greek) can attest to this.

The soldiers patrol and guard the homes of 14 Kosovo Serbs that live in the prominently Albanian city of Urosevac/Ferizaj.

The 501st soldiers are responsible for guarding many areas in Urosevac/Ferizaj.

There are only two homes guarded 24 hours a day, which were by request of the Kosovo Serbs. They also guard the St. Uros church. The rest of the Serb homes in the city are guarded by mounted and dismounted patrols.

The soldiers patrol every day from anywhere from four to six hours, said Sgt. Andraes Giapalis, a team leader with the 501st.

Their continued presence is a security measure.

"We really have no problems," said Giapalis.

Although this is obviously a positive sign, the lack of activity can sometimes make the mission tedious, said Sgt. Tomas Holtluthanasion, an infantryman with the 501st. Holtluthanasion was standing guard on a small enclosed landing on a stairway in the apartment of the one of the homes that is guarded 24-hours a day.

"Sometimes we feel bored here because it (the outpost) is closed off and there is no view," said Holtluthanasion. "But we always have each other to keep us company."

Although their mission is to provide security, the soldiers have built a rapport with the community and know most citizens on a first name basis.

Especially those soldiers like Sgt. Ioannis Kemelidis, an infantryman with the 501st who was guarding Lillian Nikolic's home on March 27.

Nikolic, who is in a wheelchair, lives with her mother, who is blind, and a sister who has severe arthritis. When the three women have problems or need assistance the soldiers

help them, said Kemelidis.

"Sometimes they have problems with water or their electricity. They tell me when they need a doctor," Kemelidis said through a translator.

The soldiers do what they can to help the citizens.

When citizens inform the soldiers of their problems the soldiers coordinate assistance through representatives from UNMIK or other non-government organizations.

"We are a kind of a liaison for them," said Sgt. Andreas Giapalis, a team leader with the 501st.

The soldiers' concern and presence does not go unnoticed by the citizens.

"If the soldiers were not here we would not have electricity, water, or food," said Jordan Mitrovitch, as she demonstrated by turning on a spigot in her front yard and running her hand underneath the water.

Although their mission is not traditional for the Greek soldiers, they seem to be adapting well and building relationships along the way.

Correction

The photo of two German soldiers at a Schutzenchnur, which appeared in the April 16, 2003 edition of the Guardian East, was incorrectly attributed. The photo was taken by Sgt. Andre Reynolds, of Combat Camera.



Boy's life improves thanks to a spit shine

Story and photo by Spc. Matthew Lang

FERIZAJ/UROSEVAC, Kosovo - Since the arrival of KFOR four years ago, 12-year-old Minur Latifi said life continues to change for the better.

For the past two years, the Roma boy has been shining soldiers' boots outside an UNMIK building in Ferizaj. He has become somewhat of a fixture in the day-to-day routine of U.S. and multinational soldiers who operate out of Ferizaj, including the 415th Civil Affairs Battalion, which has an office in the same vicinity.

"Soldiers come and they go," said Latifi through a translator. "But it seems like it gets a little better each day because of the soldiers. For that I like shining their boots because it's my way of giving them back what they give us."

Plus, Latifi added, he makes a few dollars to help his family.

Latifi lives in downtown Ferizaj/Urosevac with his family. He is one of six children. Being from the Roma community, Latifi faces a different set of cultural barriers than Albanians and Serbs, said Drita Perezic, the cultural advisor for Multi-National Brigade (East).

"There are numerous issues that impact the Roma community - education level, poverty, housing, level of incorporation and acceptance in the larger community, as well as the ability and desire to integrate or be integrated into those communities," Perezic explained.

When he is not shining boots, Latifi likes to play his favorite sport, soccer.

"Soccer in Kosovo is like football in America. It's huge," said Latifi.

But such an involved sport would not be possible without the help of KFOR, he said.

"Since the air strike in '99, life has been different for me and my family and friends. We can now go out and enjoy what is left of our country," he said. "During the war, we had to stay in our homes. They even made it so we could only go to school one hour a day. When we were given permission to play outside we always had to be aware of our surroundings because we never knew what was going to happen. It was a really scary time for me."

A year after KFOR arrived, Latifi came up with the idea to shine soldiers' boots because "there were so many," he said.

He then gathered whatever tools he could get his hands on to do the job.

His shoeshine kit now consists of a handmade wooden toolbox filled with several different types of shoe polish, worn

rags and brushes.

Over time, Latifi developed his own technique. After polishing thousands of boots, he has become adept at producing a quick shine.

His style seems simple enough. He applies shoe polish to a brush and brutally rubs it onto each boot. Next, he grabs his preferred rags out of the many he has to remove the wax while he shakes and twist his body to add more friction to the surface of the boot. Finally he takes the cleanest of his rags and spits on it. Within minutes, he has the proper shine.

"I had my boots shined by him once. I noticed that he put a lot of effort into it," said Sgt. Travis Try, a civil affairs specialist with the 415th.

Latifi charges one euro for a shoeshine. He averages about 10 pairs of boots a week.

You can find him outside the UNMIK building from 9 to 11 a.m, except Thursday and Fridays when he spends his mornings with the 415th.

On this particular April morning, Latifi is not alone. With him are 9-year-old Suzana Zeka and her 6-year-old brother Bavram Zeka.

"They are like a part of our office," said Capt. William Lawson, a team chief with the 415th. "When we got here they were there waiting for us."

"They are the little businessmen of Kosovo," Try said. "We like to call them the 'Shoeshine Mafia.' But I'm glad to see that they have so much motivation and incentive."

Latifi and other children his age in Kosovo don't have much of a choice, Perezic said. Sometimes, it's a matter of survival for their families. Each member does what he or she can to contribute.

"I think that unlike the society we as Americans come from, where our children are offered the opportunities and possibilities of better lives, children in this part of the world are unfortunately forced to grow up faster, take on greater responsibilities and miss out on the wonder, excitement and discovery of childhood that we assume every child is entitled to," Perezic said.

Perezic advises soldiers that when they come across children like Latifi "to stop and think about their own children, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews and how lucky they are as compared to the kids around here."

They are not better or worse – just luckier, Perezic said.



**Bavram Zeka (center) displays the tools of the trade in downtown Ferizaj/
Urosevac. He is flanked by his sister Suzana and friend, Minur Latifi.**

Honor In Being A Soldier

By Sgt. Samantha Best

Editor's note: This letter appeared in the March 31 edition of Stars and Stripes. It is reprinted here with Sgt. Best's permission.

I feel compelled to express my pride of serving in the United States Army. I wake every morning proud to put on my uniform. I want every soldier who has not sat down to think about what it means to be an American soldier; take 10 minutes to realize the honor. We have soldiers around the world who are protecting the great country that most of us call home – and can't wait to return. Whether you are a National Guardsmen, reservist or active duty, or whether you are on a peacekeeping mission, fighting the war on terrorism, or back in the rear supporting those going off to war, we all play a vital role.

I can only speak for myself when I say that I feel protected and also relieved that soldiers are out there sacrificing their lives to make a better place for my 3-year-old daughter.

Nothing says it better than the first article of the Code of Conduct: "I am an American, fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense."

I ask that everyone continue to pray for the lives of our soldiers in the Middle East.



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Dan Landry

Sgt. Samantha Best, a supply NCO with the 38th Personnel Support Battalion, Camp Bondsteel.

A Soldier's Story

By Spc. Christopher Homuth, 106th Finance Battalion



Spc. Christopher Homuth, a processing clerk with the 106th Finance Battalion.

A group of soldiers placed far from home
 Protecting the people and lands of places unknown
 Away from family and friends they love so much
 Sent to live in SEA huts, with cots, and a ruck
 United they stand, under our flag so tall
 It represents freedom, that which is greatest of all
 And they are here to protect and serve
 To give their lives to those who deserve
 They fight for our country and that which is right
 And they go without sleep for many a night
 Between missions and duties their time grows thin
 But for our country they would give it all up and do it again
 For these are the soldiers of the United States
 Sacrificing their lives for all that is great

A Canadian steps over to the red, white and blue

By Spc. Matthew Lang

Over and over again, we as soldiers continue to prove that we are the best. We represent what is best about America, from a cook keeping his soldiers well-fed to a doctor performing a double bypass to save a life.

I've been in the military for almost two years now, but it's in the last six months or so that I have learned what it's really all about. It's about being the best we can be as a person in this somewhat small world. It's about being there for those who have a need and those who love us. But above all, it's about serving the colors that are always flying high, for the rights we have today.

It's been three years since I received my American citizenship. Being a Canadian by birth, however, complicated my situation a little. But I managed and have since joined an Army of One, an Army that I have come to love and praise. Now who would have thought I would be doing a peacekeeping mission in Kosovo?

In my experience here I have seen that we can be the world's deadliest force, but at the same time I hope we will be remembered by those that we touched as one of the most helpful, considerate forces.

This is because of the outstanding soldiers that I've encountered here. For the most part they belonged to the units in my beat like the 702nd Explosive Ordnance Disposal Battalion and the 793rd Military Police Battalion, who were kind enough to let me be attacked by their canines. And the Italian Carabinieri, who let me watch as they searched vehicles at the Administrative Boundary Line.

Sgt. Travis Try, a civil affairs specialist with the 415th Civil Affairs Battalion, once told me that "winning the hearts and minds of the people is how we hope to

achieve our mission. They are tomorrow's future."

And that is what I believe the people of Kosovo really want; a future where they have better living conditions, a back lawn filled with flower gardens and little ponds, not trash. But for soldiers of KFOR, trying to make this possible brings many obstacles that need to be resolved.

In the past, KFOR soldiers could have been faced with a dreary cluster of buildings off a broken road, where an enemy was hidden among civilians.'

Those soldiers were faced with choices; making the wrong ones could have been catastrophic.

Now ask yourself what you would have done.

This is hardly the case in Kosovo today.

Instead I've seen soldiers making choices that affect the people and not so much their own lives. Maybe the situations are not as intense as they are in Iraq or Afghanistan, but it's the small things they do here now, such as helping an old woman walk up a steep path, or playing marbles with kids, that can make a difference.

The U.S. Army today is different than it was yesterday. Less than 30 years ago, soldiers were drafted and fought in Vietnam.

This is not the case in the all-volunteer, modern U.S. military. Today, military members are the best trained, best paid, and best educated troops. They are the true keepers of the services and the nation's core values.

Now, its greatest strength are its men and women of all races and of many countries standing side-by-side defending the country in which they have great faith.

As a naturalized American, I am glad I stepped over to the red, white and blue because this is where I belong; with the men and women who share the same beliefs.





Reflections of Kosovo

One soldier's story of her time in Kosovo

By Spc. Catherine Caruso

Notes from the field:

Don't mess with the penguin. 1st Sgt. David Janney's partner-in-crime, "Copilot," can't fly on his own, but he has friends in high places (like Drew Carey for one). The backstory? Janney's daughter made him take the stuffed toy penguin on one deployment, and since, he's been mixing it up with celebrities and VIP's at MWR events all over the globe for more than a decade. Copilot always appears in proper uniform-- his battle rattle was donated by a retiring GI Joe action figure. He's definitely one cool bird.

Catch the weekly "hangar hockey" action with Task Force Dragon Aviation- Sunday nights in the Clamshell on the Camp Bondsteel flight line.

What is the secret to the best coffee in Kosovo, served fresh daily at the American Red Cross canteen and super-fuel of coffee addicts at Camp Bondsteel from Radar Hill to North Town? My sources say it's similar to the secret behind the brewing of Turkish coffee. (OK, just as long as it isn't the same as the secret behind Artillery Punch...)

Psychological Operation team members trek out to host a mix of music and information programming daily. If you have a few hours free, they can often be coerced into taking a volunteer along for the ride.



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Dan Landry

Drew Carey has dinner with Copilot during his Thanksgiving holiday visit last year.

Quotes from the field:

- “Your mothers and fathers should be proud. Their sons and daughters are giving life to the children of Kosovo,” Ilir Murtelli, owner and news director of Radio and TV Ilira in Vitina.
- “Man, these guys are tough,” Sgt. Alan Pereira, intelligence analyst for 2-2 Infantry Battalion, after the Puerto Rico native’s Spanish speaking ability landed him a job as liaison to the “Spanish Coy,” a company of mountain troops who patrolled in freezing temperatures on snowshoes out of Camp Monteith as part of Rapid Guardian 03-1.
- According to Pfc. Steven Kale, Peacekeeping Common Operations Picture system operator for HHC, 3rd Brigade, life at Camp Bondsteel is a little

like that of a hamster: “You live in a cage. Sometimes you are eating. Sometimes you are sleeping. Sometimes you are running like crazy on your little wheel. And there are little paths you can follow, like a habi-trail...”

- “You don’t forget. It’s like riding a bike,” Lt. Col. Samuel Ford, on why no one should be afraid to fly with him now that he’s regained full flight certification for the first time in six years.
- “No way... are you getting me up there. I have two children back home,” Spc. Tina Tomassetti, 114th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment administrative specialist extraordinaire, upon hearing the above news.

Reflections:

Every time someone asked me, I had only one answer- I loved Kosovo. From the moment I got off the plane in Pristina and my eyes soaked in the expanse of blue sky and purple mountains, red, pink, and orange sunsets, russet bricks and stone walls and adobe hamlets, I loved it. Couldn’t help but love it. It seems terrible and ironic that a place as beautiful as the Balkans would be the scene of so much ugliness.

But there is, in the stripped remains of what were once Serb-owned houses in Zitinje and the broken shells of what were Albanian houses in Strpce. The bullet holes and weapons caches are the reflections of scarred souls of an entire province of people. I always believed if you can love something or someone deeply, you can also hate to protect it. The people in the Balkans are capable of both, and that makes them no different from any of us.

As soldiers, we are symbols of the failure of diplomacy. Yet over and over again, people here have told me how grateful they are we are here. It’s happened often enough to make me feel guilty places like Afghanistan and Iraq have usurped Kosovo’s place in the headlines, or that there are some Americans who couldn’t find Kosovo on a map. Enjoy it. You won’t get that kind of reception everywhere.

In 1999, Kosovo was a dateline in a newspaper to me, and its people were the grisly images printed alongside them. But the people here are not anonymous names and faces to me anymore. Today, they are people who live a difficult

existence in an environment much less safe and secure than my own. If we are all, in our own way, helping to make it safer than I am happy and proud to have been a part of it.

As the leadership has frequently said, there is peace here. It’s a fragile peace. But it’s progress. No one wants this mission to succeed more than the people of Kosovo.

As I leave and return to my own life back in the United States, the lesson my time in Kosovo taught me isn’t new, but it’s still worth remembering.

Don’t take the good things in your life for granted. It’s probably been said over a million times in a million ways in a million places by soldiers from all over the world. But that’s because it’s true.



Photo by Spc. Catherine Caruso

From left, Allen Marku, Bernard Giorgji, and Lucian Marku watch Pvt. Charles Kopinski, a tank crew member for Company A, 2-63, try his hand at a game of marbles outside a fixed guard site in Binac, March 26.

Thoughts while staggering up

Radar Hill

By Maj. David Durling
Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Dan Landry

Editor's Note: Maj. David Durling is the commander of 114th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment and has been in Kosovo since Oct. 29, 2002. Radar Hill marks the highest point on the Camp Bondsteel perimeter road, and is often a part of MWR's road race routes.

- ♦ I see the rabbit hutch at the North DFAC, but where are the rabbits?
- ♦ Why does it take the same number of signatures to dispatch a \$30,000 vehicle from Brown and Root as it does to drop off a load of laundry? I sign my name more times for clean clothes than I did enlisting in the Army.



Signing my life away to Brown and Root.

- ♦ Why don't they sell Warsteiner near-beer in the shoppette?
- ♦ Why isn't there rank on a PT uniform? I'm tired of guessing who I'm supposed

to salute.

- ♦ Why is every building brown? Was there a special at Home Depot? The first week I was here I couldn't tell the brown building I lived in from the brown building I worked in from the brown building I got my Eagle cash card in.
- ♦ Why did the Army spend millions of dollars on new, high-speed, reflective PT uniforms, then require us to wear crossing guard belts and flashlights? Hmm, maybe Brown and Root owns the company that has stock in the corporation that has a controlling interest in a battery manufacturer?
- ♦ Who named Big Duke? And who's Duke?
- ♦ Does everyone feel as silly as I do saluting in civilian clothes?
- ♦ Does anyone else feel guilty about getting hazardous duty pay and tax-free status while in Kosovo? Not that I'm complaining or anything...

- ♦ Can I sue the Army for getting me addicted to cappuccino? I'll have to ask the JAG, Maj. Byrnes.
- ♦ What's up with the Belgian camouflage colors?



UXO display or rabbit hutch?

I've been to Belgium and I don't recall seeing any purple trees there.

- ♦ I'd like to open the first Kosovo Harley dealership in the states.
- ♦ How many times have you saluted a Red Cross volunteer at night?
- ♦ Or how many times have you been about to discipline a soldier for needing a haircut, then realized they were an interpreter or with SOCCE?

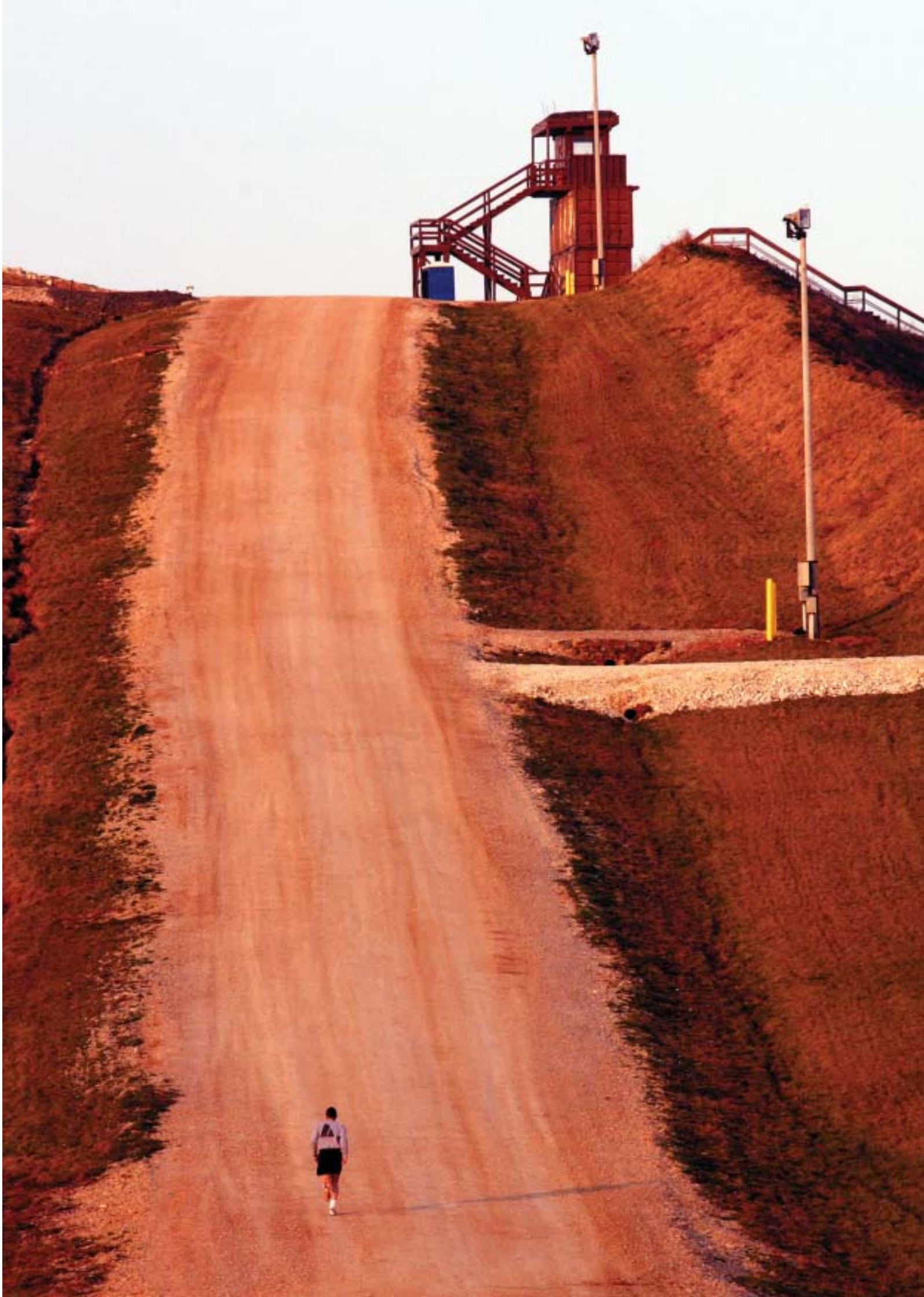


Ah, clean water in the bootwasher - another week down.

- ♦ There are two kinds of people in MNB(E): those who wear arm badge-holders, and those who wear neck badge-holders. Don't ask me the

significance of that observation.

- ♦ You know you've been Kosovo too long when you measure time by when there's clean water in the boot washers.





Multi-National Brigade (East)

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of overcoming it.” ~Helen Keller



Telling the Soldier's story to the people of Kosovo

By Sgt. Steven Ducharme

Working in media operations here in Kosovo for the last six months is the best job I've ever had in the Army.

Building relationships and selling the Army story to the civilian media is a challenging, fun and time consuming job. It's a marketing and sales position. It's great. Not only do I meet new people regularly, but as a soldier I get to establish professional relationships with civilians. It's very unique.

The best part of the job is the relationships that were built. Spending time with the local media has been rewarding in a personal and professional sense. The media is hungry for information. They want to know what we are doing and how our actions are benefiting Kosovo so they can get the message to their audience.

As journalists, the media is trained to be objective and report the facts. As citizens of a province that survived a war one can feel a sense of appreciation and respect for the presence

of the KFOR soldiers the media have. My experiences with the media and soldiers have been memorable but impossible to rank in order and importance.

My first experience with the media was in the town of Urosevac. It was my first day on the right seat ride and my predecessor let me handle the radio station manager, who wanted very much to talk with the American in charge of

media operations.

I guess that's me.

Greeted at the door, my interpreter and I were welcomed into a radio station that was actually someone's house. We were offered coffee and a seat in the "radio station," which was two rooms covered with posters of musicians from the Supremes to The Beatles to Pink. The majority were of Elvis Presley.

When I sat down, I was not sure why I was there or what their expectations were of me. The atmosphere was very similar to my job back home. As a National Guardsman for the state of New Hampshire, I have a civilian career too. I'm a salesman for a window and door company called

Pella Corporation. I was involved in a sales meeting, here in Kosovo, except I wasn't the person making the sales pitch for a change. The manager of the station was making a sales pitch to me through my translator.

I miss my family but I'm proud to represent my country and help preserve a safe and secure environment here.

the soldiers' general response to serving in MNB(E)

They wanted to become a KFOR-sponsored radio station. I was not able to help them but I did get the information to the soldiers that could.

On Nov. 18, 2002, Brig. Gen. Daniel Keefe hosted our first Press Club Luncheon. On a monthly basis, local media are invited to Camp Bondsteel for a press conference with the general, followed by a lunch at the North

Town DFAC. A lot of work went into the first Press Club and it went off without a hitch. Thankfully, the media had been through this many times. They were patient and helped me through it.

Of course they weren't all smooth. The February Press Club found me on top of what was left of my collapsed chair. Getting myself up, all I could see was Brig. Gen. Keefe staring at me. I didn't get the feeling he was upset but I don't think he was too impressed either.

Rapid Guardian, which took place in January 2003, was a super media event that offered news almost on a daily basis. We escorted 50 media representatives to the mass parachute drop to kick off the exercise at Krusevo Airfield near Klina in Multi-National Brigade (Southwest). After a long day, while on the bus back to Camp Bondsteel, we were frustrated we didn't get out early enough for the reporters to file their stories. But one radio journalist, Driton Ramadani, was able to phone his story to the radio station before the bus ride home. We all listened intently to his story of the airdrop being broadcast on the Albanian radio station and we Americans not knowing what was being said. After his story finished, the bus erupted in applause. Journalists here are not as competitive as they are in the states. They gladly share information for a bigger audience and one gets the feeling of a family of journalists versus a pack of media hounds.

Rapid Guardian also found us in the northern part of Kosovo, trudging through the snow-covered mountaintops along the Administrative Boundary Line. The videographer for TV Iliria, Ahmet Murtezi, wore his street shoes but refused to give up. He battled the elements to reach the fogged-in summit to tape footage of two soldiers from Battle Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne). His dedication and can-do attitude impressed not only me but it really impressed the soldiers who were at the top of the mountain cheering him on.

Christmas and New Years brought many journalists to Camp Bondsteel. They have a curious interest in big holiday dinners. They took pictures of the soldiers standing in line waiting for their food, pictures of the servers serving and finally pictures of the soldiers eating. They also asked the soldiers how it felt to be away from their families, protecting the peace in Kosovo. The journalists seemed to ask the question knowing the American soldier would answer in the most appropriate of ways.

"I miss my family but I'm proud to represent my country and help preserve a safe and secure environment here," was the general response offered by most soldiers.

The relationship between the media and the soldiers of the units we covered has been a great thing to watch. The media fed off the soldiers because their actions are the journalist's story. The soldiers always made the extra effort to tell the Army's story with class.

When 2-63 Armor Battalion conducted its tank gunnery, we brought media out to observe and learn about the importance of fine-tuning our

www.mnbe.hqsareur.army.mil

warfighting capabilities, even in a peacekeeping mission. The briefing was professional and thorough.

After the briefing and watching tanks go through the firing tables, the media were all given a ride in a tank. The elated looks on the face of each journalist as he or she disembarked the M1A1 Abrams was proof the tankers had done a great job. They had given our media representatives a glimpse in the life of a "Mounted Warrior."

The media in the area, both Albanian and Serbian, seem to have a respect and affection for the MNB(E) soldier. Many of them consider us not just peacekeepers but a part of the community.

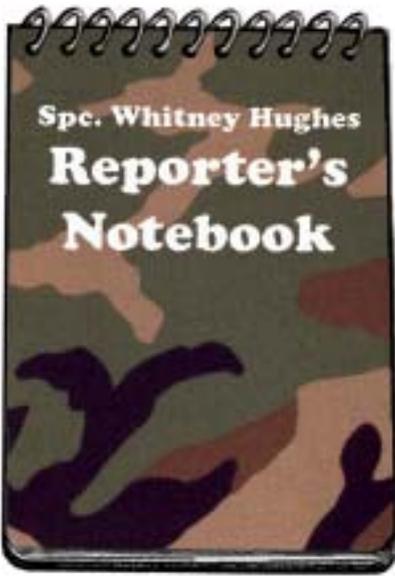
Not long ago I received an email from one of our journalists. This was how the translation read.

"Dear Sgt. Steve, I am happy to inform you of the announcement of my first child. A baby girl."

I couldn't help feel that burst of pride that a family member gets after hearing such great news.



Ahmet Murtezi, a camera man for TV Liria, and Driton Ramadani, a newsman for Radio Ferizaj, climb a hilltop near the Administrative Boundary Line, northeast of Kamenica, during January's Rapid Guardian.



Honoring soldiers' compassion

Story and photos by Spc. Whitney Hughes

The little boy's eyes darted around the hospital room anxiously as the soldiers poured through the door. His scalded fingers finally released their rigid grip on his baby blue blanket as his twin brother entered the room. His brother, whose head was covered with white bandages, pushed his way through the forest of camouflaged bodies to his brother's bed.

The soldiers were from Task Force Medical Falcon and had treated the boys, Prentim and Bentim Vokshi, nearly two weeks earlier when they had been injured by a grenade explosion.

The soldiers sat by the boys' bedside and visited with them, with the help of an interpreter.

The first thing Cpl. Ron Martel, a flight medic with the 236th Medical Company, 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 kid's knee and he grabbed my hand. I don't know what the feeling was, but there was definitely something that transpired there."

This is how I will always remember the relationship between the soldiers of Multi-National Brigade (East) and the citizens of Kosovo. The soldiers who are eager to help, and the citizens who are in need of help, yet still proud and resilient people. It is no wonder that together they have come so far in such a small time span.

It is amazing to see what local authorities and KFOR have accomplished at places like the Ramadan Rexhepi Elementary School in Urosevac/ Ferizaj. During a visit from a group of soldiers from 3rd Brigade's Headquarters Headquarter's Company, Ekrem Hasani, the school's principal, passed around pictures of a windowless, bullet-riddled shell of a building. It is amazing to



1st Sgt. David Janney, of Task Force Med Falcon, matches push-ups with a student at the Ramadan Rexhepi Elementary School in Urosevac/Ferizaj, Nov. 26, 2002.



(Left) A memorial in front of the Ramanda Rexhepi Elementary School in Urosevac/ Ferizaj commemorates 11 children who died there from mine explosions. **(Right top)** Maj. Eric McDonald, an emergency medicine doctor with Task Force Med Falcon, gives Premtim and Betim Vokshi gifts from the TFMF staff members, Pristina University Hospital, Dec. 18, 2002. **(Right bottom)** Marko and Staletovic Vidosava hug goodbye at the end of a Shopping Day visit before 501st soldiers bring her back to her home, Dec. 5, 2002.

compare that image to the current structure, which, now with windows and heat, has the quaint comfort of a rustic schoolhouse.

In the dusty schoolyard, soldiers towered above the mobs of children that clung to their sides as they kicked a soccer ball around. Not far from where they played stood a memorial to the 11 children who were killed in the same yard by mines.

To think that the situation has changed this much in just a few years is incredible. Even though we haven't seen the changes from beginning to end, the gratitude of the people tells the whole story.

For citizens like Staletovic and Marko Vidosava, an elderly Serbian couple, life would be very different without MNB (E)'s presence.

"Without KFOR we would never be able to see each other," said Staletovic Vidosava during a Shopping Day trip with the Greek 501st Mechanized Battalion Nov. 5, 2002. Staletovic lives in Urosevac/Ferizaj, while Marko lives in Strpce, and the trips every other Thursday

www.mnbe.hqusa.army.mil

provide the couple with their only means of seeing each other.

For the soldiers these projects may be just another routine mission, but for the citizens it offers a small amount of stability, perhaps all they have in some situations.

Some soldiers get the reward of hearing the people's appreciation first-hand.

"We are here like ambassadors," said Pvt. Dimitrios Katsarus, a translator with the 501st. "They trust me because they know the reason I am here is to help them. They tell me every time I see them."

However other soldiers, like the 82nd Engineers, who work seven days a week without exception, do not get to see this appreciation first-hand. These soldiers do not get to go outside the wire and see the impact of what they do everyday because they are busy making it safe for us to do our jobs.

It's still important for everyone here to know that his or her presence and work alone make a difference.

Places and Faces to remember

A Monteith soldier learns how to pronounce Gnjilane

Story and photos by Master Sgt. John Barr

CAMP MONTEITH, Kosovo — Gnjilane, a name I could not pronounce several months ago much less locate, has become a place that fits in with other places in far away lands where I have been and feel more at home than here.

My first walk through Gnjilane, I was greeted by so many friendly children. They were smiling, healthy looking and handsome kids. Seeing them was an indication that their parents surely must feel the environment was safe and secure. As I traveled through the eastern regions of Kosovo, entering the villages and towns, the children were usually the first to appear and greet us.

The region was rich with farmland and forest. There were mountains, valleys and plains. To see the potential for the future was easy. Importantly, I came to see the hope on the faces of the citizens and hear it in the greeting, "Miramengjes", "Good Morning," in Albanian, and "Zdrahvo", or "Hello," in Serbian.

Attending press conferences and a variety of municipal meetings, I was close to the sincerity, the frustrations, and the bureaucracy of endless searching for common ground. I recall it took years for my own country to forge our constitution and still we debate it.

For us at Camp Monteith, a blackbird will trigger the memories of new friends and times shared on this mission. I suppose whenever I do see one, no matter where I am, I will recall Gnjilane and the names I came to know like Vera, Teuta, Ekrum, Gazmed, Valon, Zhavera, and Booki.

Out in the sector, the numerous towns and villages we all spent time in will stay with me. Somehow we take a part of those places and the people and leave a part of ourselves in return. Place names like Cernica, Dobrcane, Rogacica, Kamenica, Novo Brdo, Zegra, Perkovci, Bilince, Donji Livoc, Klokot, Ramnjane, Mucibaba, Stublina, and the Presevo Valley will be logged in my memory alongside so many others I still don't correctly pronounce. Terms like "the Chicken Leg," "ABL," and "FYROM," along with the alphabet soup of acronyms that, unique to KFOR, will be another part of my conversation no one can relate to unless they were there. Words like Stag, Magnesium, Chrome, and Rat are no longer just words. How could I forget Route Rat and the thought of fishing that string of lakes up there east of Pristina?

There are those places where we lived that no longer exist. Little, if no sign of us remain. Places like OP Power, Thunder, and Zegra Base are now a part of our history, linked with the history of Kosovo. Only the photos remain as testimony and it's not just my imagination. Twenty-five years from now those photos will be called "militaria," and be sought by collectors.

Others I shared some time with... I ate with the Greeks, shot with the Germans, skied with the French and patrolled with the Russians atop their BRT-80s. From the Spanish

Coy, I learned of the "Tizona," the sword of el Cid, and even that the name "el Cid," comes from what the Moors called him, "al Saeed," out of respect for the great soldier.

I followed the Italian Marines on a cordon and search and we talked of times in Venice, where they are based. From the Ukrainians, I renewed an old desire to see Kiev.

For the different cultures of this land, where before I had no opinion, I have a new respect. A mosque is not a symbol of threat nor is an Orthodox church a mystery of Christian history. The ethnic diversity of the Balkans is as ancient as the stories of Noah and his descendants found in the Bible record, the Koran, ancient Mesopotamian records, and the earliest writings of western history such as Herodotus' work, "The Histories." The region is rich with culture, art, traditions and tribal dress, stories of heroes and heroines, comedy and tragedy, victory and defeat, love and hate. It causes me to wonder if my land and I are so different? Are the differences so large from the place my people started from?

I shall remember the work of all the people, soldiers, 415th Civil Affairs, the BRT patrols, UNMIK, CIVPOL, and so many others in Novo Brdo. I'll recall the sincerity of Verka Sentic, the president of the municipality, for all her neighbors and people there. I want to watch her work and follow the future of Novo Brdo.

People I spoke to on the street told me they considered the American Army their Army, and expressed gratitude for the respect shown them by the soldiers.

"A wonderful Army which behaves very good to the people," said Hanso Maloku of Kamenica.

"Treating the population the right way makes KFOR great," said Sadete Leci, a Kamenica house wife and mother. "We are treated with respect and we respect that in return."

The opportunities to serve here have been endless and I am both humbled and privileged to have been a part of the mission. Finally, I am fortunate to have served with the 2-2 Infantry and all those with the 2-2 Inf. Task Force. It has been a long time since I have worked with soldiers, NCOs and commanders as professional then those of the Ramrods.

Each of you have been a great help: the motor section, HHC, the line companies, the staff sections, the service and support units, the AST and all the Brown and Root folks, each and every one. Thank you all, God's speed, and remember wherever you may go, you go in the service of others. The statement that follows says it all.

"You know, the people of Kosovo have many times needed help and asked for it, but no one ever came, until this time," said one man, a college history major from Gnjilane. "We called for help and the Americans and KFOR came."



Novo Brdo



Novo Brdo



Dobracane



Cernica



Staff Sgt Jacob Malsack, a squad leader with Company C 2-63, stands guard at the Serb Orthodox church in Vitina.



Pfc. Kenneth Parkerson, a tank crewmember with Company C, 2-63, and a local boy exchange greeting at a fixed guard site in Vitina.

“Good soldiers” of 2-63 shed armor for peacekeeping

Story and photos by Spc. Catherine Caruso

CAMP MAGRATH, Kosovo— In the Vitina Municipality, the soldiers of 2-63 Armor Bn. are sometimes referred to as “the good soldiers.”

“We are very grateful to have them here. They do not cause problems,” said Shuqeri Halabaku, a reporter in Pozaranje .

That feeling is in large part due to the concerted efforts of the 2-63 Armor Bn.

From Camp Magrath, the battalion patrols and protects the area in and around Vitina, a mission no different from the one performed by soldiers all over Kosovo. But watching them at work in their sector, you sense something different.

“No one here remembers an incident, even a small incident, between us and these soldiers. They are among the best and maybe the most responsible troops... for us, the American soldiers are our soldiers,” said Halabaku. “I want them to feel this is their home.”

Peacekeeping isn't a military occupational specialty, so soldiers from career fields as diverse as engineering to mechanics, infantryman to cooks pull patrols and guard duty during peacekeeping operations like those in the Balkans.

Whether a soldier trained as a warrior can also be an effective peacekeeper – or vice versa – has always been a matter of debate among experts. But outside the debates among experts, there is the voice of the soldier.

“These soldiers will do anything you ask them to do,” said 2nd Lt. Royal Hatch, a platoon leader for Avenger Co., 2-63 Armor Bn. “They might complain about it first, but they'll always do it. They are good troops.”

Most of the soldiers on patrol out of Camp Magrath joined the military to drive tanks, not to pound the pavement during patrols. At home station in Germany, the soldiers of 2-63 Armor Bn. pride themselves on maintaining one of the most aggressive training schedules in the service, spending four weeks in the field for every four weeks in garrison. Now, they watch TV while fellow tankers move across a distant desert with barrels blazing.

“I was trained to be a warrior,” said Sgt. 1st Class Charles Gregory, glancing at a TV broadcasting a cable news channel's live 24-hour war coverage in the dining facility. “Not a peacekeeper.”

It was asking a lot for these troops to put aside their armor in Kosovo, and learn to deal with people face to face. Nonetheless, they seem to be enjoying some success.

“People are always saying, “this is good intelligence, where did you get it?”” said 1st Lt. Greg Tomlin, the battalion's information operations officer.

Frequently, the answer is: from a tanker. Part of the battalion's strategy has been to involve everyone from platoon leaders to squads in developing a relationship between the task force and the community.

While Battalion Commander Lt. Col Jeffery Culp meets with the most influential of the local leadership, platoon leaders and even squad leaders check in with community “opinion leaders” during their patrols.

Most recently, soldiers began a housing survey of Vitina. Armed with maps from before the war, they plan to knock on the door of every residence in the municipality and interview



Staff Sgt Jacob Malsack, a squad leader with Company C, 2-63, patrols a busy street in downtown Vitina.



Cpl. Joshua Bebout, an Avenger crew member for Delta Battery, 4-3 Air Defense Artillery, mans a 50 caliber machine gun from a humvee at Camp Magrath.

the people who live there. The information will support efforts by the municipality's Cadastre office, which handles deeds and land disputes. But KFOR also benefits, because the personal contact is also improving communication between the community and 2-63's troops.

"Sometimes they invite them in for coffee, or talk about other concerns they have..."

"Sometimes they invite them in for coffee, or talk about other concerns they have... A lot of people say 'this is the first time in three years someone from KFOR has actually come to my house. It's helping them establish better relationships in their sector.'"

A lot of people say "this is the first time in three years someone from KFOR has actually come to my house," Tomlin said. "It's helping them establish better relationships in their sector." It isn't uncommon for the meetings to raise issues that haven't made their way to their command via more formal channels.

When it comes to peacekeeping, having a personality seems to help. In 2-63, soldiers are also routinely involved in missions that are traditionally the province of psychological operations or civil affairs units. Soldiers host music and information programming on local radio stations, distributing command messages between tracks of their favorite music, and platoon leaders frequently help residents bring their issues to the appropriate municipal officials.

As they get to know their sector better, they are more effective monitors of ongoing issues, and more efficient responders to other incidents.

In Mogilla, a series of increasingly violent disputes early this year prompted 2-63's leadership to invest extra effort in communication on all sides. 2-63 soldiers began manning two extra checkpoints on the main road through the city, questioning residents about where they were going and what they were doing each time they passed through. Other

soldiers went door-to-door, questioning residents and relaying KFOR's concerns that what appeared to be an argument between two families not escalate into renewed inter-ethnic violence. And the battalion's leadership began a series of

"community leader" meetings, inviting heads of large families, school administrators, and other prominent citizens to Camp Magrath "and basically

Lt. Greg Tomlin, 2-63 information operations officer

saying, 'we want you to work out your differences, and we have invited you here to open a dialogue,' Tomlin said.

While 2-63's policy of building good relationships with the communities it works in has been bringing good results, it's not without risks.

In Vitina, the local population is 75 percent Albanian and "there's no real safe place for the Serb children to play," said Staff Sgt. Jacob Malsack, a Cobra Co. squad leader. "So the children tend to gather in a courtyard surrounded by a perimeter of 2-63 soldiers guarding an Orthodox Church and the home of a local priest."

Behind the machine guns and M-16's, up-armored humvees and sandbagged positions, there are nearly two dozen children hanging out or playing soccer inside the perimeter as darkness falls. The soldiers, tankers by trade and now peacekeepers by training, look suspiciously like babysitters.

The soldiers of 2-63 appear to have earned the trust of the local community.

"My parents don't worry about me when I'm at the church," said Aca Deukic.

Capturing the experience of Kosovo

Soldiers develop appreciation for the healing of a province

Story and photos by 1st Sgt. Thomas Hayes

People who don't know any better ask why people here just don't get over it and get on with their lives. When you talk with the residents here in Kosovo, you learn why. You listen, and try not to cry when they do in the telling. You try to imagine what it is like to be forced to leave the house

you and your parents and their parents grew up in. You wonder what it feels like to see your house and your neighbors' house go up in flames.

You try to imagine recognizing, to your horror, the eyes behind the ski masks of the soldier evicting you is your neighbor.

You try to imagine what it is like to wake up screaming from the nightmares. And, you realize, you can't.

As a journalist, though, it is important to walk around, step over the rotting fruit on the ground, and look for the buds bearing new fruit. In my travels throughout this area, I've met



Russell Smith and Teresa Weiss speak with Novice Bojan



at the Holy Archangels Monastery in Prizren.

Wood sculpture



Zoran Popovic, a Serb artist

soldiers, artists, politicians, and just ordinary folks. I've met Christians, Jews, and Muslims, Albanians, Serbs and Macedonians. Every person has a story.

And you remember for an instant, forever, what it is like to be an American and how fortunate you are. And that what we do as peacekeepers does matter.

It is not our job to be sympathetic to the Kosovo-Albanians or to the Kosovo-Serbs. You listen to both sides. You see how people who have lived together for years can turn on one another. You recall Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and remember the power of mass movement, of nationalism.

We're here because of a regime change. Slobodan Milosevic is no longer in power and the Province of Kosovo is in transition. The healing is gradual. This countryside is dotted with the shells of both Serbian and Albanian houses. It takes generations to heal these wounds.

"It would be very hard to believe that this generation will meet together and solve their problems," former U.N. Administrator Pasqualino "Pino" Verdecchia told me in January before he retired. "That's why we have to work with the children, because the children are the future."

People back in the States hunt for Kosovo on globes or maps, but it is tough to find. Albania borders on the southwest and Kosovo has a majority Albanian population. The Serbs, who governed this province, want to maintain control. None of this was an issue under Tito's iron-fisted rule, but when he died, Yugoslavia broke up. Then all hell broke loose and everyone wanted their share of the pie. In an Orwellian twist, some wanted to be more equal than others. The story is longer than that, but suffice it to say, there was war. And NATO ended it. Now, our role as peacekeepers is to ensure a safe and secure environment so that civilian authorities can maintain control of this place. Whether or not Kosovo becomes independent of Serbia is not our decision. Certainly most of Serbia doesn't want that and just as certainly, most

Kosovo-Albanians do. Both sides acknowledge that a KFOR pullout now would be disastrous. It's too early to rip off the KFOR dressing. The sutures are needed to keep the wound from opening up.

There's a student-developed sub-culture called post-pessimism.

"We are not as pessimistic as we used to be, but we are not yet optimists," reads literature from Post-pessimist student groups of displaced Kosovo refugees throughout the world.

Post-pessimism is hoping against hope, once removed. Serb Milan Stojcetovic is a shoulder shrug away from post-pessimism. He, who despite the inconsistency of electricity, kept his factory in business, with a "You can always make something" philosophy. Lola Metal Works switched from making piano wire and machine parts to sleds, boot washers, and signs. Whatever it takes.

Then there are the conditional optimists.

Besa Sadiku fits that mold. Her bright outlook on the future of Kosovo is contingent on the U.S. and NATO forces remaining here. I met her, a Kosovo-Albanian, in March when I was doing some personal business at the Camp Bondsteel Education Center. In that meeting, her love of America came through loud and clear. It was fortuitous, because at that time I found it interesting that the U.S. soldiers here were feeling that they were not being well utilized. There is war in a desert two time zones away, and here I am pulling guard duty—not quite one of the 212 ways to be a soldier they signed on for. But, what our soldiers do here is important, and Besa will tell anyone that what we do matters.

"I wish the U.S. troops would be here forever," Sadiku said. "When the U.S. and NATO came there was a feeling that finally somebody did something for us," Sadiku said. "That's why I call Camp Bondsteel the City of Hope."

Besa Sadiku



UMUC Field Representative

Pino Verdecchia



UN Administrator

Sladan Ilic



President of Strpce

Scenes of Kosovo



A man strolls across the Bistrica River in downtown Prizren.

Photo by 1st Sgt. Thomas Hayes