

TALON



Talon

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On the Cover

(Left to right) Staff Sergeant James R. Smith and First Lieutenant Robert Gaudette, both members of the 84th Engineer Company from Camp Demi, prepare fuses prior to detonating six land mines unearthed by VRS soldiers Tuesday, April 7, near the town of Sekovici. (Photo by Staff Sergeant Jack McNeely, see page 12).

The Task Force Eagle Web site is located at www.tfeagle.army.mil

The Task Force Eagle web site will offer breaking news as it happens on its new web site. Messages to Task Force Eagle soldiers as well as information for soldiers is available. The Talon On-line is updated every Saturday. Webmaster: Sergeant Robert R. Ramon. Or contact us at: The Public Affairs Office, Eagle Base, Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina APO, AE 09789, Telephone MSE 551-5230, Sprint 762-5233.

By Command Sergeant Major
Carl E. Christian
Task Force Eagle CSM

These past few months, I am sure many of you have observed VIPs visiting Task Force Eagle and the surrounding base camps. These visitors have consisted of congressmen, diplomats, news media, and general officers, to name a few. Their interest is to see the progress being made in the peace-keeping mission, morale of the troops, the professionalism of soldiers and base conditions.

As soldiers of Task Force Eagle, we take pride in our base camps, our mission and our appearance, because we have the right attitude. Each base camp is our home and we have a vested interest in the conditions of the camps. If an area is not in order, we should all be concerned. This is our home, and when we spot a deficiency, we should make on-the-spot corrections, or notify the proper authorities if it is outside our scope of responsibility

It is said that people are visual and that an individual's appearance is often taken into account over what a person may actually say. That's why it is important that we keep our audience in mind as we travel throughout MND (N).

Our audience here is the multinational forces, media, congressmen, general officers, diplomats, and the local civilians.

The key thing to remember is that we are only guests in this country and part of a NATO force to keep the peace. We are soldiers doing soldier's jobs, and we do not want to present the wrong image of our fine force

The image we all want to portray to the world is that we are proud to be wearing the uniform and that we play an integral role in the Armed Forces of the United States. With the right attitude, we will reflect that...**"Today is the best day to be a soldier."**



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Task Force Eagle hosts VIPs on Easter

Story by **Stephanie L. Tatum**
1st Armored Division Public Affairs Office

As the men and women of Task Force Eagle spent this Easter far from home, several high-ranking visitors came to call on Sunday April 12.

Their message to Task Force Eagle soldiers was simple; even though your mission requires you to be here during this holiday, you are not forgotten.

Georgia Senator Max Cleland, a Vietnam combat veteran and retired Army Captain spent Sunday morning attending Easter services and dining with troops at Eagle Base. During his visit, Cleland also reenlisted two soldiers, donated a wheel chair to a resident of Tuzla, paid a visit to the Mine Action Center and wrapped up his visit with a tour of Camp Bedrock.

Cleland reenlisted Sergeant First Class James T. Anderson, 35, the first sergeant of Headquarters, Headquarters Company, Division Support Command, stationed in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, and Sergeant Timothy S. Fleming, 25, a light wheel vehicle mechanic of ADA Battery, 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, stationed in Fort Polk, La.

Cleland also presented an American flag to the Task Force Eagle commander, representing the close ties between the U.S. citizens and the soldiers stationed in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Accompanying, Cleland was Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy from Rhode Island. Kennedy, the youngest member of Congress, also attended Easter services, dined with the troops and ended his trip with a tour of the Mine Action Center and Camp Bedrock.

General Henry H. Shelton, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, accompanied by his wife Carolyn, also paid a call on Task Force Eagle. They attended Easter Sunrise services and then treated everyone to an informal breakfast with numerous photo opportunities. While Shelton visited with troops, Mrs. Shelton toured the MWR facilities and the Red Cross.

Cleland said that the American soldier, sailor, airman, and marine is the key to keeping the peace and allowing people in Bosnia-Herzegovina the opportunity for democracy and self-determination.

"You're doing a tough job, you're doing it well, you're doing it with total commitment," he said. "Your nation is proud of you, I'm proud of you, and happy Easter."

Throughout this special day, it was truly evident that everyone, soldiers and VIPs included, were enjoying the camaraderie known only by true professionals.

"You're doing a tough job, you're doing it well, you're doing it with total commitment."

Max Cleland



Photo by Sergeant First Class Frank Casares, 345th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

(Left to right) Senator Max Cleland (D-GA), gives the oath of reenlistment to Sergeant Timothy S. Fleming, and Sergeant First Class James T. Anderson, during his Easter trip to Eagle Base.



Photo by Specialist Nancy McMillan, 196th Public Affairs Det.

(Left to right) Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy (D-R.I.), Gen. Henry H. Shelton, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Senator Max Cleland (D-Ga.).

Fox Troop platoons race to Mount Vis

2nd Sqd, 2nd ACR run five miles to top

Story and photo by First Lieutenant Lillian Sydenstricker
196th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

As the soldiers' feet pounded the earth, dust filled the air and the sun beat down on them. Their legs ached with exertion and sweat ran down their faces. Their breathing was ragged and harsh. But as these soldiers, dressed in full battle rattle, crossed the finish line, the look of pure satisfaction and accomplishment in their eyes said it was all worth the struggle.

The soldiers of Fox Troop, 2nd Squadron, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment from Fort Polk, La., ran the 5 miles from Camp Dobil to Mount Vis by platoons Saturday, March 28.

Each platoon started out at Camp Dobil in 15-minute intervals and finished on top of Mount Vis, which can be seen towering 500 feet to the west of Dobil. All the platoons finished the run in about an hour.

"It helps to build esprit de corps in the unit," said Staff Sergeant Karl Butts, 38, of Detroit, Mich.

"It's a tough run. The last part of this hill is at 7 percent grade. That's tough," he said.

Fox Troop officially took over Mount Vis on April 26, after they closed down Sierra-10.

"This run was to celebrate taking over Mount Vis and to help build unit cohesion," explained the commander of Fox Troop, Captain Ross Coffman, 30, of Williamsburg, Va.

Fox Troop will provide security for the other elements on the hill. Platoons will be rotated every two weeks from Camp Dobil to Mount Vis, Coffman noted.

Staff Sergeant Ben Griffen, 33, of Oakland, Calif. said, "Our platoon was up here two weeks ago and we did PT on the hill, so we knew what to expect."

Griffen added, "It's a nice vacation from Camp Dobil for two weeks. While here we get schooling finished that we don't have time for at Dobil. We also train our younger soldiers in troop tasks. We put our time to good use."

An excited 1st Lieutenant Lorenzo Rios, 27, of Gonzaga, Wash., claimed that the road march tested everybody's fiber. "It was awesome! We found that we had everything it took and then some," exclaimed Rios.

After Fox Troop finished the run,

Coffman gathered all the platoons together for a few words. "We crossed the line as a platoon, but we came together as a unit. Each of you did something today, and I am proud of each of you," Coffman concluded.

Finally, the last event of the day was a unit rain dance, which included an Indian chant and small dance. Butts commented, "Captain Coffman does this frequently and it usually rains."



Private First Class Artero Martinez carries the Fox Troop guide on up Mount Vis on the 5 mile road march from Camp Dobil to Mount Vis.

Battery B pounds range at Glamoc

Story and photo by Corporal James E. Baker
345th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

Red balls of fire and white-hot lethal steel rained down with fury on the Resolute Barbara Range of Glamoc. The 2nd platoon of Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery Regiment, based at Giessen, Germany, and deployed at Camp Colt, conducted four firing missions varying from two to five minutes - during a live-fire demonstration at "Dynamic Response/Strike '98." A total of 104 rounds were fired on hard targets - obsolete armored vehicles from former Warsaw Pact countries - as NATO, SFOR, and Bosnian dignitaries observed the results by the precision platoon.

Before the shells ever reach their destination, coordination must occur between the forward observers, fire direction center technicians and howitzer chiefs.

"We focused on the opportunity that the live fire exercises provided. Not only did this training keep our skills sharp, but it also helped fight complacency and served as a deterrent by our presence," said Captain Steve Letzring, battery commander.

The platoon established its position at the Resolute Barbara Range that sets atop of a mine-laden hill. The presence of land mines around the platoon perimeter made the location a very tight area in which to operate. The troops endured 35-mph winds with a 30-degree temperature, making the wind chill temperature 5 degrees below 0.

"Before our deployment here, we went through individual readiness training at Hohenfels (Germany) that instructed us on how to spot mined areas and how to conduct ourselves around them.

The weather wasn't really a factor because we had cold

weather gear," said Sergeant Trevor Meier, of Chatsworth, Calif., a platoon ammunition team chief.

The firing position was cordoned off with engineer tape to indicate where the platoon perimeter extended out to the mined areas.

The soldiers took precautions to prevent cold casualties by going inside a tent, heated by kerosene heaters throughout the day.

The forward observer (FO) is a key factor in the ability of the howitzers to fire effectively, and are positioned near the projected impact area. The FOs were located on the other side of the hill to adjust the howitzer targets, if necessary.

The FOs call in the target to the fire direction center that makes the calculations for transmission to the howitzers. The observers track the rounds using a ground vehicular laser locator designator.

"We serve as the eyes and ears of the artillery to make their mission more accurate and effective in its purpose," said Sergeant David Renehan, of Warwick, R.I., whose unit, HHB 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery, based at Baumholder, Germany, and deployed in Operation Joint Guard at Camp Bedrock.

"The platoon performed exceptionally with minimal difficulty during this exercise, which is attributable to the level of preparation that we have had here and in Germany," said the fire direction chief, Sergeant First Class Olavo Amado, of Pawtucket, R.I.

"Our ability to execute the mission rests on our teamwork from the lowest man to the section chief on the gun," said Staff Sergeant Fredrick Williams, a gunnery sergeant responsible for his eight-man howitzer team.



An M109 howitzer of the second platoon of B Battery 2/3 Field Artillery, based at Giessen, Germany, and deployed in Operation Joint Guard at Camp Colt, launches a round during a live fire exercise in "Dynamic Response/Strike '98."

Curtain falls on Exercise Dynamic R

Story and photos by Sergeant Terry Welch
345th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

Military units from six countries gathered in Bosnia-Herzegovina from March 23 to April 3 as part of SFOR's Exercise Dynamic Response '98.

The exercise, which was held in order to demonstrate the capabilities of NATO strategic reserve forces (SRF) that could be called upon to enter Bosnia in the event of renewed hostilities in the country, was held in cities and towns throughout Multinational Division Southwest and Southeast.

The SRF consists of soldiers from the NATO countries of Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey and the United States, as well as soldiers from Poland and Romania (both Partnership for Peace nations). More than 5,000 troops could be deployed to Bosnia in a matter of days as part of the SRF. Command of the SRF falls to the commanding officer of a Marine Expeditionary Unit, one of which is constantly deployed to the Mediterranean region.

Aside from being a simple demonstration of the SRF's strength, General Wesley Clark, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, said it was designed to point out to Bosnia's citizens how dedicated NATO is to helping them rebuild their country as a place of peace. Clark said, "The message to the people is that

you can have confidence that the war in Bosnia is not going to restart."

Among the types of units included in this practice run for the SRF were American Marines, Polish Airborne Soldiers, Italian armored personnel carriers and Turkish troops, among others.

Dynamic Response began in earnest with patrols and road marches being conducted by many units. The Americans, Netherlands and Romanians moved on to Mostar from landing points in Ploce, Split and Zenica respectively. The U.S. Marines, as well as Turkish troops also patrolled Gorazde, Gacko and Vitkovici. Equipment in full view of those who might wish to hinder the peace process, the SFR members showed off the might that could be brought to bear.

Marine Corporal Michael Ballinger, Trion, Georgia, drives fast attack vehicles for the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, the MEU that participated in the exercise. Sitting in the ancient, barely recognizable, but fully functional and tough vehicle, he said the Marines he's talked to felt there was a major difference between this exercise and other training scenarios. "It's the Super Bowl of the Marine Corps," Ballinger said. "Practice is over and it's time to



Coalition forces prepare for live fire demonstration at Glamoc Firing Range.



Members of the 18th Polish Airborne unit deploy from a helicopter during Dynamic Strike, the live-fire exercise that concluded Exercise Dynamic Response.

Response '98

show your skills.”

Showing their skills, along with their weaponry, was what many units did during the static display portion of the exercise. Army Staff Sergeant Gary Johnson, Battery C, 4th Platoon, 27th Field Artillery, was assigned with four other 4/27 soldiers to show off their howitzer, the M109A6 “Palladin.” He said he realized that the job of showing the equipment was every bit as important as getting to fire on the hillside. “With a piece of machinery like this, you just have to look at it to know you don’t want it shooting at you,” Johnson said, smiling.

Johnson took the time to partake of some good-natured “trash talking” with several British officers, comparing the Palladin to the British AS90. Watching him rattle off statistics and wisecracks with the English, you might think he had built it in his garage, as proud of it as he seemed. Yet when the British left, apparently as proud of their gun as he was of his, he spoke to the private working with him on the Palladin display team. “That *is* a tough machine,” he said. “But it can’t fire a copperhead (laser-guided round).”

Marine 1st lieutenant Chris Sample is the platoon leader for Battalion Landing Team 3, 2nd Marines. The Annapolis, Md., native said he had learned quite a bit

working with the units from other countries. “It’s great to see everybody pull together, regardless of race or country or religion. It’s almost an example of how Bosnians can learn to work together,” he said. “But showing the people that within a 96-hour period we can pull together a force like this should scare the pants off of anyone who wants to start trouble.”

Pull together is exactly what the units did during the final phase of Dynamic Response – a live fire exercise known as Dynamic Strike. During the exercise, artillery fire, small arms fire and missile shots from several different types of helicopters were interlaced against hard targets on the Glamoc firing range. Missiles roared toward the former Soviet tanks and jeeps purchased specifically by the British for this exercise. M1A1 Abrams tanks followed with a ground-shattering barrage. Marine amphibious attack vehicles rattled off 50-caliber machine gun fire beside Marines on foot firing the SMAW.

After the show, General Clark said that the SRF represented an extension of SFOR, not a replacement for it. “We believe SFOR has the capability on the ground to handle any challenge now,” he said. “The nations have made a powerful statement: that the peace will be kept.”



An M1A1 Abrams tank of Company A, 1st Battalion, 35th Armor on the Glamoc firing range.



Lance Corporal John Nye, 3rd Battalion Landing Team, 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, stands guard at the perimeter of the Glamoc static display area.

Slavonski Brod Bridge in transition

U.S. 'Troll Village' being dismantled below

Story and photo by First Lieutenant Anmarie Daneker
196th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

It's a simple bridge by engineering standards—several hundred feet long and less than two hundred feet above the water. But the weight the Slavovnski Brod Bridge over the Sava River bears is immense because it represents a vital link to the future for those on both sides. Currently patrolled by U.S. Infantry soldiers, future plans call for turning responsibility of the bridge over to local authorities.

"The bridge will still be a NATO asset but traffic control and security will be the responsibility of local authorities," said Colonel Byron R. Lester, Task Force Pershing Commander. Current plans call for a gradual reduction in the number of hours the bridge is patrolled by American forces with a complete hand over by July.

While local police at the approach ramps check ID cards and passports of civilians, soldiers from Company C, 3-116th Infantry Regiment from Leesburg, Va., provide security and traffic control for vehicular and foot traffic that cross the bridge.

"We make sure that the cars and trucks that cross the bridge are evenly spaced as they cross the river," said Sergeant Hugh T. Davis from Winchester, Va. With almost a third of the original roadbed destroyed and replaced by temporary spans, ensuring traffic doesn't bunch up is an important job if the bridge is to last until it is either repaired or replaced.

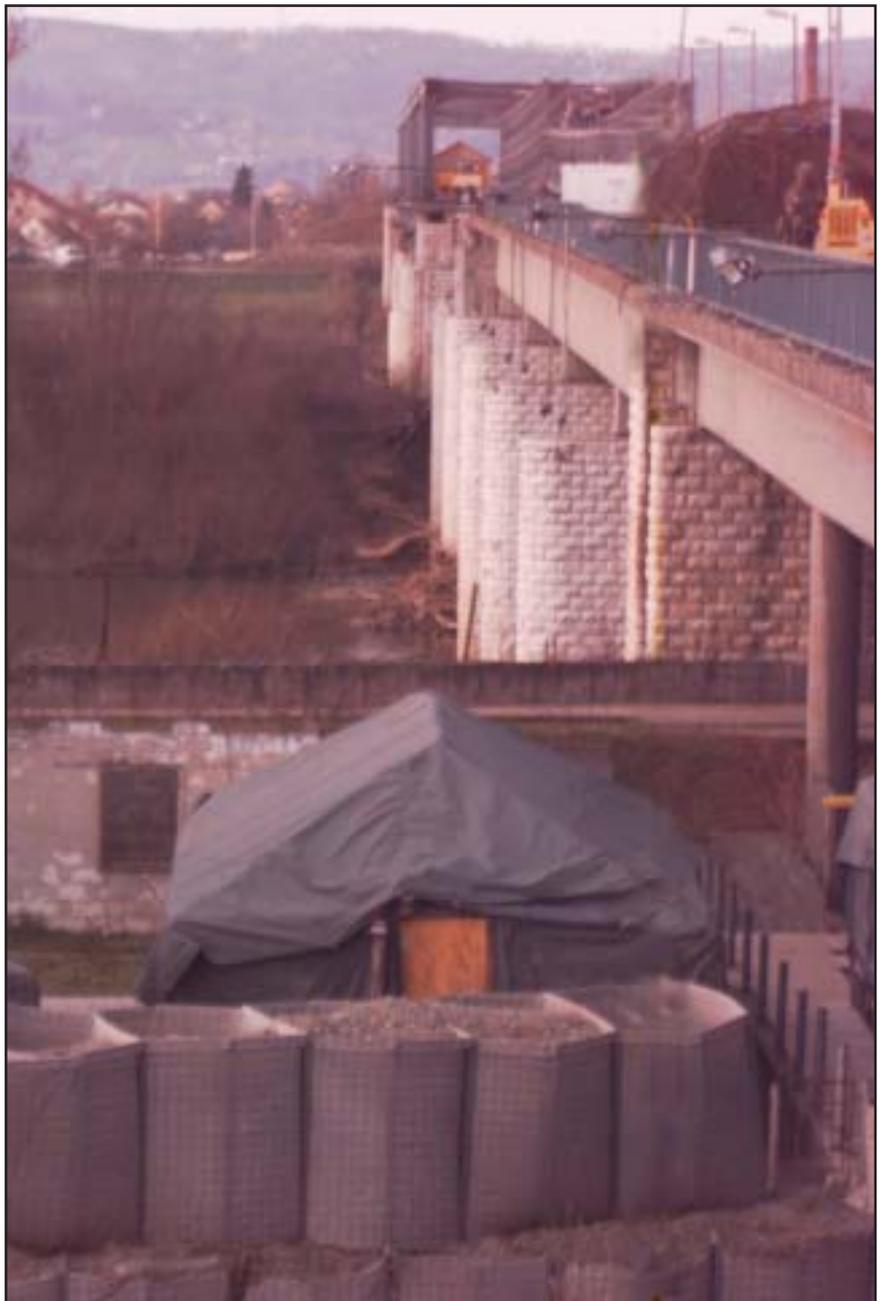
Company C, which holds the distinction of being the only National Guard Infantry unit deployed since the Vietnam War, also conducts foot patrols throughout the surrounding neighborhoods during the week. "Each platoon sends out squad-sized patrols and the patrols can last anywhere from 1 to 5 hours," said Sergeant Kent L. Robinson, from Hampton, Va. During their deployment the patrols have helped the Infantry soldiers relate more with the local population and to let them know that the U.S. Army is a presence in the area.

But the bridge is more than this unit's post—it is also their home. Like the famed character in Grimm's fairy tale, the soldiers live under the southernmost span of the bridge in what has been appropriately dubbed "Troll Village."

"We are the only unit that lives in Troll Village," said Specialist Robert Watling from Leesburg, Va. The small enclave is self-sufficient with its own DFAC, weight room and latrine facilities. Each platoon in the company rotates to duty on the bridge in varied shifts, lasting anywhere from 8 days to 3 weeks. But

with the planned reduction of U.S. security at the bridge, Troll Village's days are numbered: deconstruction began on March 24 and the entire camp will be removed by mid-April, said Col. Lester.

Once the soldiers from Company C leave the bridge, hopes remain high that the damaged structure can stand up to the demands of spanning a vital link between Croatia and the Republika Srpska.



Troll Village, home of C Company, 3-116th Infantry, lies nestled beneath the southern span of the Slavovnski Brod Bridge

Medics respond to emergency call

Story and Photos by Sergeant Tim Fischer
196th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

The Combat Medics are sitting at the Aid Station conducting their daily work logs when the call comes in: "We have an explosion at Camp Bedrock! Mass casualties in a tent...send the medics. We need help now!" Launching into action, Corporal Landon D. Estes, a 24-year-old Combat Medic with the Medical Platoon of Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment, from Baumholder, Germany, runs to the tent along with four other personnel from the Aid Station.

A mass casualty exercise is designed to enhance and refine the skills of the Combat Medic. The real time exercises are conducted using Moulage, a realistic simulation aid which includes broken bones, sunken chest wounds, thoracic and abdominal wounds, burned skin and flowing blood. This choreographed event provides the Combat Medic the opportunity to actually perform his job in a real time environment.

"Practicing these types of scenarios keeps us ready as medics for our peacekeeping mission here in Bosnia," said Estes. "We take pride in the fact that soldiers here at Bedrock can count on us for medical support when it is needed."

Once the Combat Medics arrive at the tent, they follow certain steps to provide the best quality of care, and the timely treatment for all the patients. During the recent exercise, the overwhelming number of casualties was too large for Estes and his team of 4 men to handle, so the medics called back for

reinforcements. "After we arrived at the tent, we knew there was too much for us to handle, so we called back to the Aid station to set in motion a different course of action for this many patients," said the Ada, Okla. native Estes.

The first step in any medical emergency is a triage exam, to identify and quickly assess the level of treatment needed for each patient. Then the victims are classified into categories of emergency. "We take each patient one by one and assess the airway, breathing, and circulation, (ABC), at the same time we are communicating with each other so together we can set up a priority for evacuation," said Estes. "Getting the men to a field hospital as soon as possible is what we do; saving the lives of injured soldiers is what they count on from us."

Estes and his medic team utilized all their basic combat medical skills during the mass casualty drill. As 1st Lieutenant Anthony T. Bunch explains, past experience in the medical field helps Estes perform his combat medic duties. "Corporal Estes is an outstanding soldier-medic," said Bunch, a Physician's Assistant from Goldsboro, N.C. "With his medical background as a certified paramedic, Estes is a great asset to our combat medical team. I have all the confidence in the world in his ability to save lives, and he proved that ability today."

Although the Combat Medics of Bedrock only practiced their mass casualty skills, they proved that, if called upon here in Bosnia, they hold all of the necessary knowledge and skills to save lives. The U.S. soldiers of Operation Joint Guard can rest assured that in the event of a medical emergency, they can count on the Combat Medics to save lives.



Corporal Landon D. Estes, a Combat Medic with the Medical Platoon Headquarters Company, 2nd of the 6th Infantry Regiment starts an intravenous fluid on a Casualty.



Combat medics perform last minute triage checks before medevacking patients to the field hospital.

Reserve 396th CSH active at Blue Factory Over 8,000 patients treated since October '97

Story and photo by Sergeant First Class Sherry L. Claus
196th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

One definition of "reserve," according to Webster's dictionary, is "to save for a special purpose." The 396th Combat Support Hospital (CSH), a U.S. Army Reserve unit at Blue Factory, more than exemplifies that description.

Since taking over the hospital from the 405th CSH in October 1997, this special purpose unit from the Spokane and Vancouver areas of Washington have seen over 8,000 outpatients, taken more than 1,800 X-rays, performed over 12,000 individual lab tests and filled as many as 11,000 prescriptions.

Those figures don't even take into account the 1,000 dentistry patients, over 600 physical therapy visits and more than 300 surgical procedures this unit has dealt with.

Yet, as Captain Gary P. Williams, a lab officer from Seattle, Washington, puts it, "Even though we've been really busy, unless it's trauma, medicine itself is pretty slow. You have to wait for lab results and X-rays to come back and that takes time."

Thankfully, the 396th hasn't seen too much in the way of traumatic injury but they have treated a pilot and copilot involved in a helicopter crash and four recent automobile accident victims here.

The unit has several unique aspects including the only Diagnostic Radiologist and Combat Dietician in the theatre. They also hold the distinction of being the first and only hospital unit in the theatre to have a female nurse as a commander. Historically, hospital commanders have been male doctors.

There are 720 people on the unit's TOE but only 69 are here for this particular deployment.

"A lot of us are on our second or third deployment," said Williams. "We've been to Haiti, the Gulf War and Central America, among others. Just about anywhere the U.S. forces have been, so has our unit."

Operating out of an unusual combination of Deployable Medical Systems (DEP MEDS), which are collapsible trailers, tentage and exoskeletons all connected to permanent buildings is par for the course for the 396th.

The unit was fortunate in that most of the hospital was already in place when they arrived. "To put up an entire hospital and all the structures that entails, and become fully functional takes about a week," explained Williams. "We didn't have to do much at all to set up here."

Williams credits the 396th Biomedical Maintenance and Repair section with keeping their special equipment functional. "These guys do a fantastic job - they keep us up and run-

ning," he said. "If it weren't for them, our equipment would have to be shipped to Central Region and that would lower our effectiveness considerably."

The 396th has reason to be proud of their many accomplishments during this deployment, which is winding down. Beginning 19 April, they will pass the torch - and scalpel, syringes and bandages - to the 67th CSH, an Active Army unit from Central Region.

"Active," according to Webster's, means "in action, moving." The 396th CSH certainly fits that description, as well.



Sergeant First Class Robert A. Bruce a lab technician with the 396th CSH, performs a blood cell count at Blue Factory, Guardian Base.

Engineer Co. moves barriers at Camp Dobol

Story and photo by Sergeant Oreta M. Spencer
196th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

When U.S. troops at Camp Dobol were notified of an increased terrorist threat, members of the 84th Engineer Company were quick to react.

The Fort Polk, La., engineers moved a road barrier further from the U.S. camp Saturday, March 28.

The barrier used to be located just across the road from the front gate leading into base camp.

Sergeant First Class Robert P. Heck, 40, of Miami, Fla., explains why this movement was necessary. "The barrier needed to move about 400 meters further away from base camp to eliminate the possibility of an incident occurring outside of the gate."

Although moving a road barrier sounds like simple work, a lot is entailed in performing the job effectively, he noted.

"We start out by drilling three holes into the roadway approximately four to five feet into the ground," Heck explained. "Then dragon teeth (pieces of angle iron welded together) are placed into these holes."

Then concrete is mixed and poured into the holes. "You have to make sure the concrete is completely surrounding the metal in the ground to form a good seal," said Heck.

After dirt has been added to completely fill in the holes, more dragon teeth are welded onto the ones in the ground, thus fortifying the barrier.

"The welding is done so that one leg is pointed out at a 45 degree angle. This is done to stop trucks, vehicles and tanks," Heck said.

According to Heck, the angled barrier will lift the front end up on a vehicle or tank so there is no traction.

The job is completed once the engineers use a D7 dozer to push the berm up, blocking access around the dragon teeth.

"By moving the barrier it will give us a sufficient standoff area to safeguard ourselves," concluded Heck.

With the increased fortifications in place, the approximately 1,000 U.S. soldiers and civilians who call Dobol home can now rest assured an incident is less likely here.



Members of the 84th Engineer Company place dragon teeth in the road to form a barrier.

Land mines found by Serbs destroyed by U.S. soldiers near Sekovici

Story and photos by Staff Sergeant Jack McNeely
196th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

One year ago Private First Class Thomas Payton came to a crossroads in his life. He and his wife, Kendra, were expecting their first child. But the couple who had earlier moved from the jobless foothills of West Virginia in the heart of Appalachia could find no gainful employment in Florida.

Therefore, Payton, who wishes to be an architect some day, thought it would be a good career move to join the U.S. Army and become a combat engineer. Thus, 10 days after his daughter, Skyler, was born last summer, Payton and the rest of the 84th Engineer Company from Fort Polk, La., deployed to Operation Joint Guard, the ongoing NATO-led peacekeeping mission in war-torn Bosnia.

On this spring-like Tuesday afternoon, April 7, atop a 1,000-meter mountain to the west of the Republika Srpska town of Sekovici, the 23-year-old Fairmont, W.

Va., native activated a timed fuse with an M-60 fuse igniter. A few moments later, after members of the demolition team evacuated the area, the stillness alongside the logging-like road was abruptly shattered by the blast of over a pound of C-4 plastic explosives and six Yugoslavian-made land mines.

"Just another day at the office," said Payton. "One less mine in the ground means one less chance someone will get hurt."

With the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in November 1995, the fighting ceased, however, up to 1 million land mines were estimated to be deployed in minefields peppered throughout the war-torn Balkan region.

Staff Sergeant Richard Easter, Mine Action Center, said that in November 1995, there was originally estimated to be 8 million mines in Bosnia. He said that after two years of receiving up to date information, the number of mines, from minefield records, is said to be 350,000 mines throughout all of Bosnia, and 161,000 mines in MND(N) sector.

"We believe that we only have 50 to 60 percent of the minefield records though," said Easter. "We estimate there is up to 1 million mines throughout Bosnia and 350,000 mines in the MND North sector. During last year's SFOR de-mining effort, 9,000 mines were destroyed."

First Lieutenant Robert Gaudette, team leader said he and his men monitor the Serb soldiers as they scan the charred, hillside minefield for antipersonnel mines. "It is my responsibility to determine whether they earn an effective day of de-mining," he explained. "If they earn 20 days a month, then their entire brigade is allowed to train for a month. That's their incentive to come out here and find these mines."

"Payton said he is not concerned for his safety when monitoring the Serb soldiers alongside the minefield. "It's less dangerous than driving on the roads here," he said while likening the pothole-filled, narrow, winding roads to those in rural West Virginia.

Meanwhile, the 1993 graduate of North Marion High School said he will absorb as much technical information as possible during his four years in the Army. "I really want to get into construction. And I could use some of this demolition training. But my first goal is to return to college and earn a degree in architecture," he said.

But in the meantime, Payton and the rest of the mine demolition team will continue the tedious job of ridding the beautiful Bosnian landscape of its hidden remnants of the civil war — land mines.



Private First Class Thomas Payton ignites a fuse that will ultimately set off a pound of C-4 plastic explosives and six land mines unearthed at a nearby Serbian mine field.