

# TALON

# Talon Inside



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



As the months go by and soldiers take advantage of the pass and R&R program, leaders need to reiterate to individuals that they are U.S. soldiers, and therefore, need to conduct themselves accordingly. Several items should be considered regarding soldiers traveling abroad.

One item is that you are a representative of the United States, and all eyes are on you. If you act inappropriately then it will certainly be a reflection on the United States as a whole, especially since people, for the most part, attach the attitudes, norms, or behaviors of one according to those of all. Our behavior should portray an image of a professional, and responsible soldiers who respect the beliefs and customs of a host country.

Consideration should be given regarding local laws and customs that the soldier must abide by. It is permissible to consume alcohol while on pass but if one is displaying drunk and disorderly conduct, then you are not portraying the image of a true professional. So, it is recommended that you drink in moderation, and consider that there are probably local laws that govern a person's behavior in public places.

Do not assume that the people in the host country can't understand what you're saying. A point to be made here is that English is the international language of commerce, and you will find that most Europeans are bilingual. Be courteous, show respect and remember that you're a guest in their country.

In conclusion, I want to say that soldiers should have a good time and explore the customs and traditions of countries in Europe, but always keep in mind that you are a U.S. soldier and therefore a representative of your country. And remember...TODAY IS THE BEST DAY TO BE A SOLDIER.

### On the Cover

A Bravo Company "Mad Dog" lugs sandbags onto the bridge. The sandbags were placed around the charges to help direct the blast. (Photo by Sergeant Terry L. Welch, see story page 11).

### The Task Force Eagle Web site is located at [www.tfeagle.army.mil](http://www.tfeagle.army.mil)

The Task Force Eagle web site offers breaking news and photos on its web site. The Web site provides information concerning the Turk, Russian, and NORDPOL Brigade assigned to Task Force Eagle, as well as U.S. soldiers stationed in Bosnia. The Talon On-line is updated every Saturday.

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Task Force Eagle Commander ..... Major General Larry R. Ellis  
Editor in Chief ..... Major Jim Yonts  
OIC ..... First Lieutenant Jacqueline E. Abbar  
Managing Editor ..... Sergeant First Class Frank Casares  
NCOIC ..... Sergeant First Class Buddy Ferguson  
Layout and Design Editor ..... Corporal Martha Louise Reyna  
Assistant Editor, Photo Editor and Webmaster ..... Sergeant Robert R. Ramon

# Dummy proves benefit of wearing protective gear

Story and photos by Sergeant Gary Hicks  
196th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

**A**s summer approaches and the temperature begins to rise, many soldiers deployed in Bosnia-Herzegovina might be reluctant to wear their protective equipment.

However, Staff Sergeant Jeffery Sowers, 26, a member of 703rd Explosive Ordnance Disposal Company at Camp Bedrock, set up an informative demonstration on May 7, to open soldiers eyes to the danger of becoming complacent.

"The purpose of the demonstration was to show soldiers that the 'flack vest' will protect them in the event of a mine strike," said Sowers an eight-year veteran EOD technician from Kingsport, Tenn. Sowers' demonstration was actually a combination of two parts.

To show the protective capability of the fragmentation vest, Sowers made a makeshift dummy adorned with a flack vest and placed it 15 feet from a PMR-2A fragmentation antipersonnel mine. Then he and the other soldiers moved approximately 100 meters away to protective cover before detonating the mine containing 100 grams of TNT.

After the flying shrapnel, rocks and swirling dust settled back down to earth, they moved forward to inspect the damage



Staff Sergeant Jeffery Sowers explains how the blast of the PMA-1 antipersonnel mine will affect the makeshift dummy.



Staff Sergeant Jeffery Sowers holds the remains of boot blown to pieces by a PMA-1 antipersonnel mine.

sustained to the body armor. Nine pieces of jagged iron had pierced the outside of the vest, but none were able to penetrate the Kevlar material. "I was actually surprised how well the vest withstood the blast," explained Sowers. "I expected a little more damage."

For the second part of the demonstration, Sowers placed a PMA-1 antipersonnel mine containing 200 grams of TNT at the feet of the dummy with a pair of cold weather combat boots. One of the boots was placed directly on the mine and the other approximately 30 inches away.

Once again, everyone moved to safety and awaited the blast. After the thunderous explosion, Sowers called "all clear," and they moved forward to inspect the boots and the vest.

Sowers found that the right side of the vest had only received slight scorching from the heat of the explosion. The boots, however, suffered a much worse fate. The boot that was placed about 30 inches from the mine, was found about ten feet away with slight damage. The boot directly on the mine was never completely recovered, only the top four inches was found.

"This shows what a person can expect if they step on a PMA-1 mine," explains Sowers. "The best a soldier can expect is the loss of a foot."

It may be a little hot or a little uncomfortable as the temperatures rise this summer, but wear your protective gear. As the demonstrations proved, you can learn a lot from a dummy.

# Civil Affairs vet projects lead to privatization of processing plants

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

The Sarajevo-based veterinary team of the Civil Military Cooperation (CMIC) Center is implementing programs that are making a difference in the long-range improvement of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The effort is focused on three major projects consisting of assistance to the faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Sarajevo; mediation for the unification of veterinary procedures between the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Republic of Serspka; and the evaluation of food and safety requirements.

The team has worked closely with nongovernmental organizations to make sizable donations possible, which include a cross-section of professional, civic and religious groups trying to make a difference.

"The most rewarding and fulfilling experience has occurred with the delivery of 3,000 pounds of veterinary books and four desk computers to the veterinary school library," said Major Mohamed Ibraheim, of Philadelphia, Pa. He is deployed from the 304th Civil Affairs Brigade and based at the Combined Joint Civil Military Task Force in Sarajevo.

"The once barren shelves are now filled with books – which makes an instant impact. The school is now able to provide information that they either did not have access or were limited to during the war," Ibraheim added.

The books and computers valued at \$200,000 were transported from Eagle Base, Tuzla via the veterinary team. The American Veterinary Association coordinated this shipment.

The team is also currently working with veterinary officials of both the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Serpska for cooperative veterinary programs such as prevention of infectious diseases, exportation and importation of animals and freedom of animal movement between the two nations.

The unification of these measures is anticipated to allow a mutual exchange of information on epidemiological data of animal infectious diseases such as rabies, trichinosis and brucellosis.

"It's going to take time to work out the issues," said Colonel

Jim Hansard, of Silver City, N.M. "Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of this mission is the realization of this fact. We're hoping that eventually there will be freedom of animal movement (a sticking point)." Hansard is the veterinary team chief deployed from the 321st Civil Affairs Brigade, based in San Antonio, Texas.

The expertise assistance that the veterinary team can provide has been visibly evident through its evaluation of food safety and meat and poultry inspection programs. Ibraheim is employed with the United States Department of Agriculture



Major Mohamed Ibraheim (Center), of the 304th Civil Affairs Brigade of Philadelphia, discusses veterinary issues with faculty members at the School of Veterinary Medicine.

(USDA) in the Washington, D.C. area, which has made him invaluable to his military unit. The team evaluated the food programs for their effectiveness and application of the current food safety act.

"Our team assessment revealed deficiencies in the areas of veterinary training, plant equipment and the application of the country's inspection laws," said Ibraheim.

The federation, according to team officials, is making headway by significant progress in the area of privatization – all six Sarajevo Canton slaughter and processing plants are privately owned.

# Soldier reenlists in 14th century castle

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

**O**n paper, his reenlistment would appear just like any of the hundreds that take place every day service-wide. However, the unique setting and breathtaking vistas justify such a notable event in the midst of Operation Joint Guard.

"This is incredible. I'll remember this day for the rest of my life," exclaimed a proud Corporal Sullivan Billander, 22, of Kayenta, Ariz. The combat engineer with the 84th Engineer Company from Fort Polk, La., reenlisted for three more years, thus securing additional college incentives when he returns to the U.S. this summer.

First Lieutenant Patrick O'Neal, 1st platoon leader, administered the reenlistment oath atop a partly destroyed castle that towers above the port city of Zvornik. The castle was built atop a 1,600-foot hilltop during the Ottoman Empire in the 14th Century.

But while Billander and his engineer colleagues within the 1st Platoon enjoyed the sights of the sea of red-clay tiled rooftops of Zvornik to the left, and the hydroelectric dam along the

Drina River to the right, O'Neal was busy praising Billander.

"If any of you men want to emulate a soldier, look to Corporal Billander. He's an outstanding soldier," O'Neal, 24, of Trenton, Ga., said. "He takes the initiative. He has learned a lot since coming to Bosnia. He's the type of soldier you want to keep in the Army."

As a modest Billander absorbed the accolades, he reflected on his initial three years as a combat engineer. "I wanted to work with explosives. And this tour in Bosnia has given me plenty of opportunities to detonate a lot of land mines and bunkers," he explained.

The engineers are members of the 2nd Squadron, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment. Ironically, Billander, a 1994 graduate of Monument Valley High School, is a Native American.

Meanwhile, Billander says he will take full advantage of the college incentives when he returns to Fort Polk. "I figured, hey, I'll go to school with all these months they're giving me," he said. He hopes to complete his associate's degree while stabilized at Fort Polk for a year after his Bosnian deployment.

In the meantime, Billander will continue fulfilling his role as a U.S. Peacekeeper in the war-torn Balkan region.



(Left to right) First Lieutenant Patrick O'Neal, first platoon leader of the 84th Engineer Company, 2-2 ACR, gives the reenlistment oath to Corporal Sullivan Billander.

# Multinational airborne troops descend o

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

“Six minute time warning.”  
“Get ready.”  
“Portside personnel stand up.”  
“Starboard side personnel stand up.”  
“Hook up.”  
“Check static lines.”  
“Check equipment.”  
“Sound off for equipment check.”  
“One minute.”  
“Stand by.”  
“Go!”

**S**ounds like a typical pre-jump drill called out by the primary Jumpmaster, First Sergeant Vincent T. Crosby, 34, of Fayetteville, N.C. However, there was little that was typical about this particular airborne operation – in fact, the jump at Tuzla Air Base on May 7 was actually history in the making.

Fifteen Polish Airborne troops from the 16th Battalion, 6th Pareschut Assault Brigade met with 28 American soldiers from the 21st Military Police Company (ABN) for a combined parachute jump, where they not only exchanged training techniques but also their respective country's jump wings.

What made this jump so unique is that this event was not only the first time U.S. Military Police have jumped with Polish soldiers, but also the first time Polish soldiers have jumped with a conventional U.S. airborne unit since World War II. Add to the fact that this all took place in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the participants have an incredible war story to tell their grandchildren.

Following ground training, the Poles, Americans and two British and one Norwegian soldier lined up for the first of two flights in a CH-47D Chinook.

As the paratroopers jumped, landed, repacked their chutes and ran back to the loading site, smiles split their sweat drenched faces. The joy they all felt was apparent in any language!

Sergeant First Class Tomas Swierad, 31, of the Polish 16th Bn, 6th Pareschut Assault Brigade currently stationed at the



Sergeant Robert R. Ramon, 345th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

Staff Sergeant Joshua F. Johnson performs an equipment check on St. Siera Andrej Skibon in preparation for the U.S. and Polish jump at Eagle Base.



Corporal Martha Louise Reyna, 345th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

Staff Sergeant Stephen Christopher King exits the CH-47D Chinook over the drop-zone at Tuzla Air Base.

# n Tuzla Air Base in history making jump

NORDPOL Brigade, expressed his pleasure with this event in no uncertain terms.

"This jump was just excellent! What a great opportunity to jump with the U.S. soldiers – we (Poland) will probably join NATO next year and this has given us a chance to get to know American troops and their ways of training," said Swierad, a Krakow, Poland native.

He said the main difference he noted in the parachute guidelines between the two countries is that the Americans stress emergency procedures a bit more than Poland, but as Swierad explained, "That's as it should be – you can never be too careful with this work."

Both Polish and American soldiers were very excited about exchanging jump wings, too. One MP was perhaps even a little more excited than the others were – and with good reason.

Staff Sergeant James Osburn, a 34 year-old with the 21st MP Co (ABN) from Fort Bragg, N.C., stationed at Eagle Base, made the final jump required for his Master Jump Wings on this very day. He would be receiving them along with the Polish wings during the ceremony.

"This was great! It took some time and planning but the jump

was approved and now we're finally here," said the Barboursville, W. Va., native with a grin. "Not only do we get to jump with another country but how many people can say they made a jump inside Bosnia-Herzegovina?"

As the two countries lined up for the exchange ceremony, there was a flurry of activity on the runway as a surprise visitor came forward to place the wings on the chests of the Polish Airborne Battalion Commander and the 21st MP Co. Commander.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Henry H. Shelton, stopped by en route to a meeting to greet the group of paratroopers, along with General Eric K. Shinseki, Major General Larry R. Ellis and Brigadier General Anthony R. Jones.

Shelton wished the soldiers well and congratulated them on their joint success of the day.

Both teams gained much from the experience. The Americans and Poles added a new set of jumpwings to their uniforms, an honorary certificate to their personnel files and a deeper understanding of each others culture.

The Polish soldiers also took away something else from the day – they added a new word to their vocabulary that sounds the same in both languages – "HOOAH!"



Corporal Martha Louise Reyna, 345th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

U.S. and Polish soldiers have their "knees in the breeze" during the U.S. and Polish jump at Eagle Base.



Sergeant Robert R. Ramon, 345th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

First Sergeant Vincent T. Crosby completes his jump during the U.S. and Polish jump at Eagle Base.

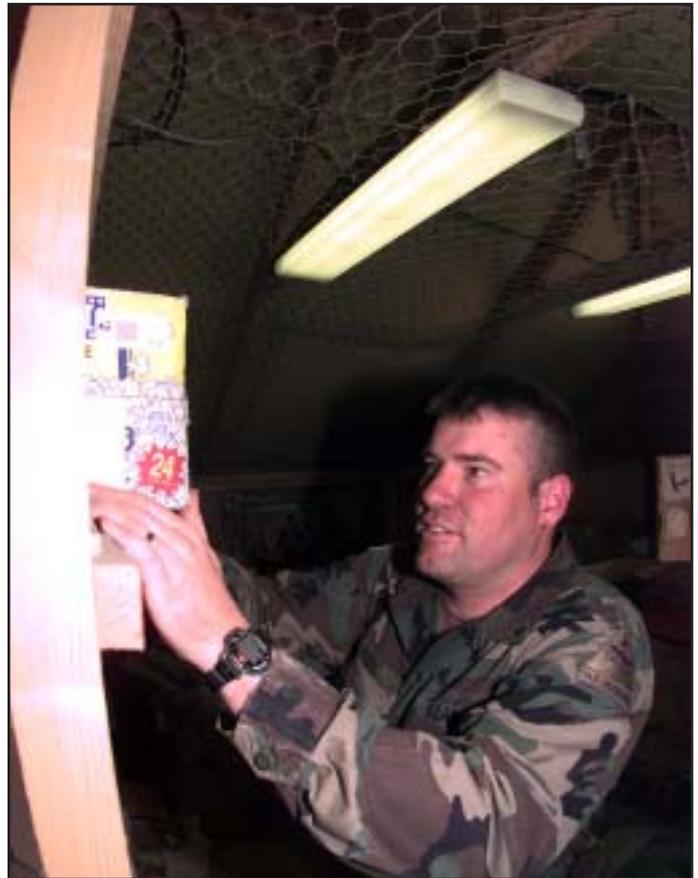
# Vision of new post office at Camp Bedrock becomes reality

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

After months of performing daily peacekeeping missions in Bosnia, U.S. soldiers at Camp Bedrock need something to put smiles on their faces. Taking the first steps to ultimately change the postal service at Bedrock was the personal goal of one particular soldier. Initiating the plan to expand the Postal Service, thus increasing the overall quality of life at "The Rock," is what makes this soldier exceptional.

"When I saw the troops waiting for hours outside the small postal tent just to mail their loved ones packages, I then realized we needed to do something to fix the enigma," said Specialist Troy J. Rivers, a 35-year-old Camp Verde, Ariz., native. "The problem of standing in a long line was bad enough, yet when inclement weather was present, the soldiers had to somehow protect their packages from the snow and rain." The soldiers at Bedrock will not have to endure this type of situation any longer. On May 11, a new full-time post office was completed and open for business.

For Rivers, in his second trip to Bosnia, making a difference in the lives of the local people is important; but making it better for the U.S. soldiers is foremost in his mind. "The one thing I enjoy the most about my job as a postal clerk is that when



Specialist Troy J. Rivers prepares for the opening of the new post office at Camp Bedrock.



Petty Officer Third Class Matthew J. Jarrecchia finishes the door trim on the new post office at Camp Bedrock.

everyone leaves my tent, they leave with a smile," said Rivers. "I take pride in my job and I realized that soldiers need a full time post office here at Bedrock."

Rivers works out of the S-1 shop for Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment from Baumholder, Germany. Using his chain of command, he requested the need for a full time postal service. Rivers works hand in hand with Captain Tod A. Friant, from Normal, Ill., also with the S-1, 2/6th "Gators." They contacted the Task Force 90th Personnel Support Battalion out of Eagle Base, and through Rivers' efforts, his vision of a new and improved postal facility came to fruition. The 133rd Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (Seabees) out of Gulfport, Miss., completed the actual construction using excess building materials to keep the cost down.

"This project is a direct result of Specialist Rivers," stated Friant. "I had no idea we needed a full time post office until Rivers brought it to my attention. With the amount of business we were doing here at Camp Bedrock, the space we had allotted for the post office was just inadequate."

The traditional mail service in the military has long been a saving grace to soldiers who are away from families. Receiving mail from home will be expedited at the full-time facility, and thanks to Specialist Rivers, the troops will continue to leave the new post office with smiles on their faces.

# Revitalization of energy industry in Bosnia-Herzegovina on the mend

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

**E**nergy is the lifeblood of a modern industrial nation, and when this source is not readily available, the prospect for economic progress dwindles. During the Bosnian civil war, the petrochemical industry came to a halt. Members of the economic community of Bosnia and Herzegovina met April 30 to present the Rafinerija Nafta Brod Repair Implementation Plan to Mr. Vladomir Djokic, Republic of Serpska Ministry of Energy and Mining.

Ninety percent of the 1.85 million tons of crude derivatives purchased in prewar Bosnia-Herzegovina came from Rafinerija Nafta Brod in Bosanski Brod.

"The revitalization of this refinery is of extreme importance to the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina because it will help to forge an important economic link between the two entities, promote nationwide economic reconstruction, and generate employment for many people," said Second Lieutenant Peter Nilsen, of Houston, Texas, with the Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) Center based at Sarajevo.

Nilsen, a U.S. Army Reservist, is a chemical and environmental engineer with the 321st Civil Affairs Brigade based in San Antonio, Texas. In his civilian position, he is a process and controls engineer responsible for large projects such as

oil refineries.

"This plan is the first major step in the revitalization of the refinery," Nilsen said. In addition to Minister Djokic, mayors from the sister cities of Bosanski Brod and Slavonski Brod were in attendance.

The commander of the Headquarters of the SFOR CIMIC Center, Brigadier General Sam Gibson, and the energy representative of the Office of High Representatives were notable dignitaries in attendance as well.

A finalized proposal was reached with a forthcoming submission to the U.S. Trade Development Agency (TDA) for funding of a detailed repair estimate for repair and start up of the refinery's new production line.

"The refinery did a controlled shut down of the process lines before the war, and it was very well preserved from severe damage with all major vessels intact. It's now a matter of getting this new line to reinvest in the repair of other sections of the refinery," said Nilsen.

Rafinerija Nafta has implemented repairs and is presently refining 600,000 tons of crude oil per year. The nonfunctional new production line, built in 1991, produced a substance called bitumen. This product is used in the construction industry, namely roofing, road paving, and sealant.

Officials have stated that there had been an increased demand for bitumen that is an essential element in the national rebuilding process.



(Left to right) Brigadier General Sam Gibson, commander of the Headquarters SFOR CMIC Center, shakes hands with Mr. Vladomir Djokic, Republic of Serpska Ministry of Energy and Mining at Rafinerija Nafta Brod.



Rafinerija Nafta Brod is in the preliminary stages of revitalization.

# Bradleys packed and ready to go

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

**C**amp Bedrock is the pinnacle of a rock quarry near the small town of Zivinice. Established on February 2, 1996, Bedrock arose during the buildup of the military force in the Balkans. The site was initially covered with enormous truck tires each weighing nearly a ton. These tires have become a permanent fixture of security for the soldiers at Bedrock.

However, the veritable line of defense for the U.S. soldiers on Bedrock is the M2 Bradley, the men that constitute the crew of the fighting machine, and their ability to defend the camp when called. As 21-year old Corporal Jon A. Otero explained, the infantrymen are primed to protect the soldiers at Bedrock. "A common phrase we use is 'packed and ready to go at a moments notice'," said Otero, a native of Miami, Fla. "We spend a lot of time preparing for the call, to go down range."

Working throughout the Multinational Division (North) sector, Otero, and members of Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion of the 6th Infantry Regiment out of Baumholder, Germany,

participate in the huge responsibility of providing a safe and secure environment for the implementation of the civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement. The Bravo Company "Bulldogs," and their combat-loaded Bradleys are also responsible for security of Bedrock, Hill 562, Eagle Base and also Camp Ugljevik. "We continuously strive to fulfill our security mission here in Bosnia," Otero said.

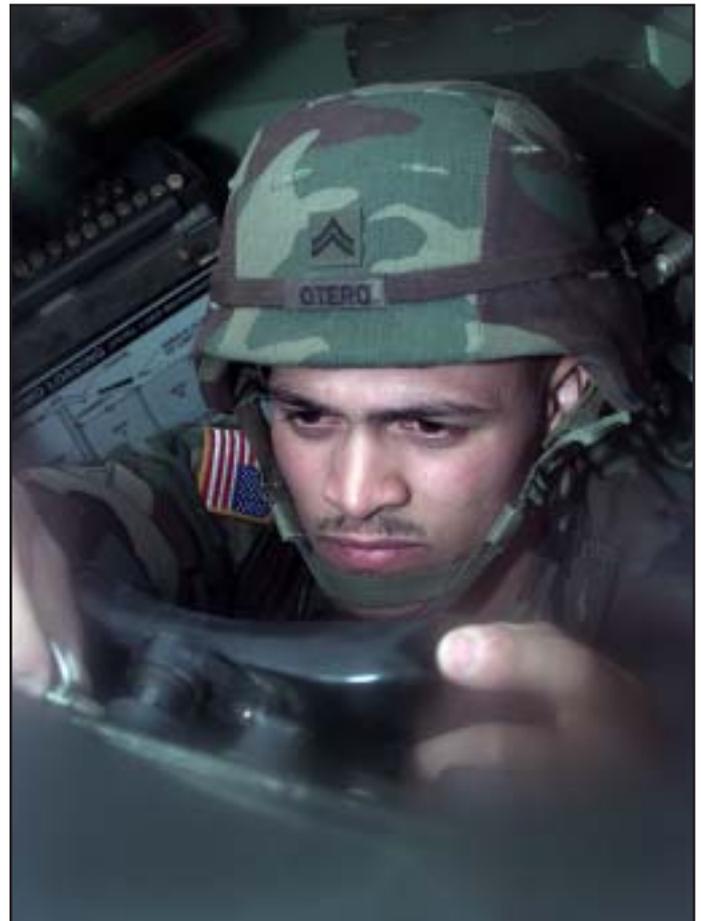
"We have a wide range of missions here at Camp Bedrock, Yet the number one priority is to protect the SFOR soldiers."

Recognized for his commitment to the mission, Otero's Battalion selected him as the Noncommissioned Officer of the Month. "Corporal Otero is a prime example of the type of men that assure the safety here at Bedrock," said 1st Lieutenant David J. Creasman, the executive officer for Bravo Company. "Through our daily maintenance of the vehicles, and constant training, soldiers of the Bradley section are prepared to react at a moment's notice."

The presence of the M2 Bradley fighting Bulldogs inside Bedrock is the auspicious force of protection for the U.S. service members. "Don't let the sight of the big tires fool you," Otero says with a grin. "It's a fence holding the big dogs in."



Corporal Jon A. Otero returns through the gates of Camp Bedrock after completing a patrol with the M2A2 Bradley Armored Fighting Vehicle.



Corporal Jon A. Otero adjusts the Integrated Sighting Unit on a M2A2 Bradley AFV.

# Engineers blast bridge over Sava River at Bosanski Samic

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

Before the war, the bridge at Bosanski Samic was one of the most important passages from Bosnia-Herzegovina into the rest of the Europe. The war took its toll, however, and until recently it stretched – cracked and broken – across the Sava River as a monument to the war's destructive results. Company B, 16th Engineering Battalion, was tasked to prepare the bridge for reconstruction.

It was a case of something having to get worse before it could get better. In order for the citizens of Bosnia to be able to rebuild the bridge, the "Mad Dogs" of Company B had to demolish the bridge's broken sections. This is not the first time they'd worked on this type of project. As Company B of the 23rd Engineering Battalion, before their unit was "reflagged," the combat engineers also completed the destruction of the Brcko rail bridge when deployed to Bosnia with the Implementation Force.

They began the bridge's demolition Saturday, May 2, and after a day of blasting, the bridge proved itself resilient even in decay. The section that the engineers had been blasting still stood.

The next day, Specialist Robert Block stood at the top of a long ladder, chipping away at the bridge's underside with a pickax, trying to strip concrete from the reinforcing steel bars inside. "These steel bars are the problem here," the East Hardwick, Vt., native said. "We're going to place steel-cutting

charges on the 're-bar.'"

Meanwhile soldiers at a temporary command post a mile away were preparing a breaching charge, which is a wooden half-box with roughly 60 packages of C-4 explosives packed inside. When the charge was brought to the bridge site, Sergeant First Class Eugene Moses, Company B's Assault and Obstacles Platoon Sergeant, looked it over and then smiled. 13 years after he left his hometown of Anchorage, Alaska, to become an Army combat engineer, Moses admitted that he's still a little kid inside when it comes to seeing a blast. "It's a fun sight to see, every time a blast goes off," he said. "That's why I do what I do, because I love it."

Underneath the bridge, Sergeant Moncito Caba and Private First Class Scott Ledbetter cut detonation cord into the proper time lengths. Ledbetter, from Alhambra, Ill., said that for him, being a combat engineer is a family tradition. "My dad was a 12B (combat engineer) and I wanted to do the same thing."

Swinging his eyes to the span overhead, Ledbetter mused on the impact of the engineer's efforts on the peacekeeping mission as a whole. "When we do demo, the part of the bridge that's torn up is going to allow the community to come through and rebuild on the structure," he said. "Plus, I guess it'll save them a lot of heartache of having to try to tear it down themselves. These people sure don't need any more heartaches than they've already got."

A&O Platoon Leader First Lieutenant Jason Borg agreed. "If they ever want to build another bridge here, they could, but not with it like this. This is a small piece of the overall building process," said the Seattle, Wash., native.

After the det-cord was placed in the charges and the charges placed on the bridge, it was time for the "Mad Dogs" to fire the fuses and retreat to the safety of the TCP to watch the blast. While waiting for the flash and thunder of the explosives, Caba, who hails from San Jose, Calif., commented that it wasn't only Bosnian citizens benefiting from the engineers' work on the bridge. "In a war, we need to be able to do this fast," he said. "It's good for these guys to learn out here, hands-on. It's better than any school."

The blast couldn't be physically felt from a mile away, but it made an impression.

The bridge section still stood, though, hanging by steel threads, and would until the next day when the bridge finally succumbed to the relentless efforts of the engineers. Sometimes, it appears, taking apart a bridge can seem as hard as putting a country back together.



Specialist Todd Nedolski, in front, looks intently forward as he and other B Company "Mad Dogs" raise a ladder to the bridge's underside.



Sergeant Moncito Caba cuts detonation cord – a type of time fuse – to the proper length in preparation of the bridges demolition.

# Base camps compete in 'Sapper Stakes' squad event

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

**F**rogs in the distance are the only sounds that break the silence of the darkness this night. Suddenly, just a fleeting rustle of something in the shadows...then nothing. The Silent Sappers low crawl into the darkness, probing the distance — careful not to set off trip wires and land mines as they cross the field.

Their goal — to make it across the field undetected by a nearby guard. Time limits, strategically placed electronic mines and triple stand concertina wire that they must breach at the end, add to the difficulty of this task.

"It was a very intense and challenging event. Our team worked together really well. I look forward to doing this again next year," said Sergeant Charles W. Davis, 28, of San Antonio, Texas. Davis is stationed at Camp Demi.

The Silent Sapper event was the highlight of the recent joint camp competition "Sapper Stakes" held by the 84th Engineer Company.

Soldiers from three base camps came together to test their warfighting skills and endurance during the 3-day squad competition at Camps Dobil, Colt, and Demi. Dobil's 84th Engineer Company soldiers competed against each other to build team cohesion and sharpen their skills.

"It was definitely high-speed training," commented Private First Class Brandon Miller Simmerman, 20, of New Concord, Ohio. Simmerman is a member of 2nd Squad, 3rd Platoon stationed at Camp Colt.

Sapper Stakes consisted of seven events. "We started the competition at 4:30 a.m. with a physical training test. From there, the platoons had until midnight to rotate through the different events," said Captain Storm Eric Reynolds, the 84th Engineer commander.

The bridge demolition mission tested the entire platoon to include the squad leader. "The events are designed to test different skill levels so that everyone is involved," explained Reynolds, of Paris, Texas.

According to Reynolds, the bridge demolition mission is a detailed task. "They start out planning on a sand table. Then they must march to the bridge, classify the bridge, determine the location or best spot and amount of explosive needed to blow the bridge. A target folder must be created along with a demo sketch plan before marching back to Camp Dobil," he said.

Simmerman recalled a unique aspect of such training. "We put sand bags in our rucks to simulate demolition material. It gave the task a more realistic effect."

"The squad competition is designed to validate some of our warfighting common skills tasks," said Reynolds. He said it helps them to determine their strengths and weaknesses so they will know which tasks need to be reinforced.

"To make things more challenging, soldiers were blind-folded and timed to see how fast they could disassemble and reassemble their M16 rifles," Reynolds stated.

## Sapper Stakes

"The soldiers from each of the camps performed well. Everyone gained something from this competition. We try to format it to make it fun and to help build squad team cohesion. I was very pleased with the results," commented Reynolds.

"I will remember the Silent Sapper night event. I learned a lot and I will be ready to do it again next year," said Davis.

The soldiers from Dobil were the winners of this year's Sapper Stakes Squad Competition.



Sergeant Charles William Davis breaches the wire during a recent squad competition at Camp Dobil.