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MEDEVAC team is ready

By Command Sergeant Major Paul M. Inman
Multinational Division (N) CSM



As we get closer to April 1, the Transition of Authority date between 1st BCT and 2nd BCT, I think we need to revisit some of the standards you will be required to follow. During my travels I have noticed several personnel without lanyards on their 9mm pistols. This is a requirement for ALL personnel assigned to Task Force Eagle, regardless of your branch of service. This is designed for your own protection — the loss of a weapon is one of the most serious offenses that can occur. Every person will know and execute proper weapons clearing procedures. In the past weeks there have been several accidental weapon discharges. This is totally unacceptable, and noncommissioned officers will ensure their personnel are trained on these procedures. SFOR ID cards will be treated as if they are weapons. You will have your SFOR ID card with you at all times. Never leave your SFOR ID card unattended. Your ammunition will be with you at all times. There are only two authorized places to store your ammunition, on your person or in an authorized regulation storage site. Do not store your ammunition in your living area or in your footlocker. The Physical Fitness Uniform (PFU) is authorized for wear during physical fitness training and to and from the latrine and shower. You will not wear your PFU in the PX, soldiers club, concerts, etc. Do not wear your Gortex jacket or rain jacket over the PFU. Thermal underwear may be worn under the PFU as long as it is not visible. Smoking while walking is not permitted. Each camp has designated smoking areas that you must use. When passing an officer, from any country, you will salute with pride and render your motto or "First Team Sir/Ma'am." Officers will in turn salute and sound their unit motto or "First Team." When outside any building or covered area you will wear your proper headgear. There are no, "No hat and no saluting areas." Remember you are a reflection of your unit and branch of service. Wear your uniform with pride, act professional and always do the right thing. Remember the number one thing we do is, **FORCE PROTECTION.**

"Stay Safe"

On the Cover

A soldier and a Bosnian worker unload the scrap remains of confiscated weapons for further destruction. (Photo by Camp Doboľ's Specialist Giovanni Lorente, 319th Mobile Public Affairs Det.)

"Although no sculptured marble should rise to their memory, nor engrave stone bare record of their deeds, yet will their remembrance be as lasting as the land they honored." – Daniel Webster

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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 Brigades assigned to Task Force Eagle, as well as U.S. soldiers stationed in Bosnia.

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Anight on the wire at McGovern



Specialist Michael A. Bluestone scans beyond the concertina wire while Sergeant Paul M. Summers calls in their status during a roving patrol around Camp McGovern's perimeter.

Story and photo by Camp McGovern's
Private First Class Louis Sardinha
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Det.

Well, at least it's a clear night," says Sergeant Paul M. Summers, of Orlando, Fla., an indirect fire infantryman with the Mortar Platoon of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion of the 8th Cavalry Regiment, as he prepares his squad for their nightly roving patrol. As they approach Camp McGovern's north gate he stops his squad and splits them into teams. "Alright, you guys take the front route, and we'll take the back," he says. "We'll meet on the other side."

"I hope they finished the road back there," comments Specialist Joshua M. Kidwell, of Sacramento, Calif., an indirect fire infantryman with the Mortar Platoon. "I didn't get my uniform back from the cleaners yet. If this one gets dirty, I'm out of luck," he says jokingly about the mud that surrounds the camp.

"Our mission is to provide security by patrolling the perimeter of McGovern and seeking out any breaks in the wire," continues Summers as he shines his flashlight over the concertina wire and into the night. "Our platoon does roving patrols all night, every night," he says while jumping into the mud of a small creek that runs through the wire.

"We keep the base camp safe so the troops can get a good night's sleep," adds Specialist Michael A. Bluestone after call-

ing in their status to the unit. He's from Duluth, Minn., and is an indirect fire infantryman with the Mortar Platoon. "We check every nook and cranny and call in everything that happens out here," he said.

"I don't mind doing night patrols," comments Summers. "I'm kind of a night person anyway."

The soldiers continue on their trek along the rock-infested road, trudging onward late into the night.

"Besides, it's gotten a lot easier since we first started doing these patrols. We didn't even have this road that we're walking on," says Summers as they march through the cool night air. Summers suddenly stops, looks at the road before him and shakes his head. The pavement abruptly ends, and nothing but mud lies ahead.

"Oh man," exclaims Bluestone. "They didn't finish."

Now the team slogs through the mud, their movement restricted by the thick mire. "Keep moving," Bluestone shouts back. "Because if you stop, you'll get stuck, and I don't want to have to pull you out," he says, laughing.

The group continues moving through the mire until finally, they reach a small ravine plagued with concertina wire. "We can cross over there," Summers states, pointing his flashlight at a wall of sandbags. Once across the ravine, they locate their old friend the "gravel road."

The team continues on the gravel footpath after a few steps to check on the condition of the perimeter wire and to perform a radio check. They soon reach a bend in the road where the wire extends about 20 meters from the road. "It looks pretty dry," says Summers. "Why don't you go first?"

"Oh no, you can go first," Bluestone retorts. "I went first the last time." After a brief pause, they decide to go together, which results in everyone simultaneously

sinking shin-deep in the quagmire. "So much for that idea," Bluestone comments.

After extricating themselves from the grasping earth, they spot the other team of roving guards headed their way. "So we meet again," says Private First Class Jose H. Leasure, of Brunswick, Ga., an indirect fire infantryman with the Mortar Platoon. "Are you having fun yet?" he asks.

"Yeah, I always get this muddy when I have fun," replies Bluestone, laughing as the patrol moves on.

With the mud behind them now, the team begins to make good headway. They check on the gates, make a couple more radio checks and inspect the perimeter along their route.

"This used to be Lake McGovern," Summers says, indicating the area around them as they pass along the camp's front. "We had to walk through water up to our thighs to do our perimeter checks. It was pretty nasty, but now they put all this stuff in, to make it a little easier for us."

"Lake McGovern" draws their mission to a close. They see the point where they started, a pleasant site for the patrol. Now they have the opportunity to rest briefly before trudging out again. "Remember," Summers says, "we get to do this all night long."

Within the silent camp, soldiers sleep peacefully knowing soldiers like Summers, Bluestone, Kidwell and Leasure guard the night.

MWR provides Magic for soldiers



Specialist George T. Wixon of Atlanta, Mich., plays a card during a *Magic: The Gathering* tournament at Camp McGovern.

Story and photos by Camp McGovern's Private First Class Phillip E. Breedlove Jr. 22nd Mobile Public Affairs Det.

A lone soldier assesses the situation, deciding the best way to suppress the threat and disable his foe. A full force attack was no longer an option; he had exhausted most of his resources and few assets were left at his disposal. The soldier's only chance was to take his opponent by surprise. Without hesitation, Specialist George T. Wixon casts a fireball.

Wixon, a combat medic with Medic Platoon, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, was a player during the first round in a *Magic: The Gathering* tournament as part of a Morale, Welfare and Recreation program held every Sunday at Camp McGovern.

The game, known to insiders as Magic, is a fantasy-based strategic card game played by two or more people. Each card represents a spell that can be cast during the game. The goal is to build the best deck by collecting and trading cards. The cards are collectable and some are valuable.

"The best thing about this game is that you don't have to have the most expensive cards to win," Wixon said, looking up from a table covered with colorful cards. "It's all how you put the cards together. I'm glad the game was brought to McGovern."

MWR realized the game was growing in popularity, so it made a deal with the company that creates Magic in 1995,

and when troops hit the ground with Operation Joint Endeavor, Magic deployed with them, according to Brent D. Pierson, the Task Force Eagle entertainment director.

Staff Sergeant James B. Pacheco of East Providence, R.I., and squad leader with 1st Platoon, 410th Military Police Company, said the MWR Magic program is one of the fastest growing interests on camp. "The game is really catching on," he said, standing amid three tables overflowing with avid card players and curious observers. "When we first arrived, we were playing four-player tournaments. Last Sunday, we had 28 participants." Pacheco is one of the soldiers that helps run the games.

Pacheco said the program has attracted players of various skill levels, from those who have national rankings in U.S. Magic tournaments to soldiers who learned to play recently during their tour in Bosnia.

He said free cards contributed to the game's success. "It is definitely an incentive for some people to come. Soldiers get two packs of cards for just showing up. The first place winner receives even more."

Corporal Andre L. Harmon of San Diego, and a combat medic with Medic Platoon, HHC 1-8 Cavalry, was introduced to Magic earlier in the deployment. "I was curious. I saw several soldiers playing the game, so I asked about it. When I found out they were giving away free cards, I started playing. Now I play all the time. I like how the program is run: MWR gives us the cards, the place and the freedom to set guidelines for our tournaments."

The final victor in this tournament was Private First Class Joshua L. Demski of Oshkosh, Wis., an armored crewman with 3rd Platoon, Company D, 1-8 Cavalry, and a soldier who ranked among the best players in the United States. "I enjoy the strategy of this game. It's like playing a game of chess with 15,000 pieces. I like the way MWR handles the tournaments, too. Whether they finish first or last, everyone walks away with something."

Magic: the Gathering is played at other base camps throughout Multinational Division (North).



The new "Brcko District"



Photo by Private First Class Phillip E. Breedlove Jr., 22nd Mobile Public Affairs Det.

Sergeant First Class Jeffery B. Bingham of Minneapolis, a team chief with Tactical Psyops Team 201, 13th Psyops Battalion, determines the local population's opinion of the upcoming Brcko arbitration decision.

Story by Eagle Base's Specialist David Howe
115th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

Independent arbitrator Judge Roberts Owen announced in Washington his long-awaited Brcko decision, in which both the Federation and the Republika of Srpska were awarded the autonomous "Brcko District."

"Today is a historic day," High Representative Carlos Westendorp said, speaking at a Sarajevo press conference about the decision's significance in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. "The status of Brcko was the one item of outstanding business left unresolved at Dayton three years ago."

"This award fully protects the interests of all the constituent peoples," Westendorp added. "It guarantees freedom of movement. It fully preserves the continuity of Republika Srpska. And, by clarifying Brcko's status, it will unlock the gates to foreign investment and capital – and to economic growth and jobs."

Also speaking in Sarajevo, General Montgomery Meigs, the Stabilization Force commander, said, "SFOR calls on all citizens ... to accept the decision and begin to build a better future."

While Meigs believes most people will accept the decision, he acknowledged "there may be a few who oppose the decision."

"SFOR will continue to act within its mandate to maintain a safe and secure environment, with the aim of preventing a few from jeopardizing the future for the many," Meigs asserted.

"There is a somewhat increased number of forces" in the Brcko District, Meigs responded at a Camp McGovern press conference when asked about the increased SFOR presence in Brcko. "It's my decision and General Byrnes' decision that we must have this heightened presence. Daily, we reconsider that presence ... as soon as possible, we will lower our operational tempo." Major General Kevin P. Byrnes is the commander of Multinational Division (North) and Task Force Eagle, the U.S. SFOR sector that encompasses Brcko.

"Our soldiers know their jobs ... they remain situationally aware," Byrnes said at his Eagle Base headquarters. "They know there are a few radical ultra-nationalists who would have been dissatisfied with any decision on Brcko that impacted their position of power and manipulation."

"These radicals stir up the troubles that we see, and are behind all incidents of violence," Byrnes said. "Our soldiers also know that the vast majority of the citizens here want a peaceful future, and rely on us to assist with that."

Regarding implementation of the Brcko decision, Byrnes explained, "Our role remains unchanged. We will continue to deter return to hostilities and ensure a safe and secure environment."

"Brcko is one of the hot spots of SFOR," said Major David Brinkley, chief of Future Operations at Eagle Base, the MND (N) headquarters. "It's one of the more contentious places."

The Brcko District has received special attention by MND (N) authorities, partly because of the previously pending arbitration decision, according to Brinkley. "There's a lot of dynamics involved," he added. "It was certainly studied more."

"It didn't matter to us what the decision was," Brinkley commented. "We don't really have a side." Our job now, he said, is to continue to "ensure the environment is stable for that decision to be carried forth."

One major problem in Brcko, according to Brinkley, is housing for returning displaced persons. "There is a lot of fear involved, particularly among the displaced Serbs," he said. Many Serbs occupied homes in Brcko formerly owned by Croats and Muslims who were displaced during the 1992-1995 war. However, "no one will be forced to move if they have nowhere else to go."

Brinkley noted that many Bosniaks are already "going back and rebuilding their destroyed neighborhoods, where there is a substantial amount of housing to be gained."

Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats, Brinkley said, "all have forces within the area and will have to disband or remove them and their equipment. The supervisor and SFOR will set timelines and ensure that they are complied with."

The arbitration decision still allows the Entity Armed Forces to move units through the Brcko District, according to Brinkley. Military movements will be strictly supervised using the same rules, regulations and methods as are currently in place. Entity Armed Forces must coordinate with, and get permission from, the appropriate MND (N) authority.

"If we can provide the medium for this city to (successfully) transition, then we are one step closer to having a lasting peace in this country, and one step closer to leaving," Brinkley said. After all, he believes, if the constituent peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina can get along in Brcko, "then, potentially, they can get along anywhere else in the country."

**Soldiers
Remember**

Reminiscing about



out days gone by



Story and photos by Camp McGovern's
Private First Class Louis Sardinha
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Det.

It's been a long seven months for the soldiers of Company A of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment. With their mission in Bosnia nearing completion, they reminisced about the times they've had at Camp McGovern and shared some of their thoughts. "This deployment in Bosnia was like a long field problem where you're away and have the chance to do some challenging missions," said Private First Class Richard P. Brandon, of Fort Worth, Texas, and a mechanized infantryman with Company A, 2-5 Cavalry.

Sergeant Chris R. Cottingham of Placerville, Calif., also a mechanized infantryman with Company A, 2-5 Cavalry, described his deployment here as a "phenomenal experience." He said, "In Bosnia, you can see how people live in a society that was torn by war. They adapt to and overcome the situation they are in. It makes you realize that there are a lot of things we take for granted back in the states."

The infantrymen said they enjoyed their mission, which involved presence patrols throughout Brcko and Force Protection for the base camps, according to Scott A. Jensen of Arvada, Colo., another mechanized infantryman with Company A, 2-5 Cavalry. "I became a lot closer with my friends in my platoon. I have great memories of this deployment."

One of those "memories" involved a patrol where Jensen and his comrades stopped their patrol as "about 10 kids came out of a house to wave and shake our hands. We were there for a good 30 minutes just talking to them. It's the little things that I'm going to miss."

Cottingham remembers how he spent Christmas pulling guard in a tower with two of his fellow soldiers. "It's times like that when you realize that even though you're not with your family at home, you still have a family here. After being here for seven months, everyone in your platoon becomes your family."

You need to keep in contact with your friends and family to keep your morale up while you're deployed overseas, stated Jensen. "Make sure you bring pen and paper. You definitely need to write home. It helps make the deployment a little more bearable."

Be prepared for anything, Jensen added, and "make sure you have plenty of equipment wherever you go because you never know if you may get stuck at a weapons storage site for hours on end or a day or two."

"Don't laugh," he said. "It's happened before."

It was an "awesome" experience to meet soldiers from other countries, according to Jensen. "We did several patrols with other nations. You meet different people from all over the world, and you get to swap stuff with them too."

Cottingham said he felt the overall deployment was exceptional because no one was hurt, no equipment was lost, "and we completed our mission helping the people in Bosnia regardless of race, nationality or background."

To make time go by fast, soldiers should think about trying to strive for the completion of short-term goals, and focus on soldier team development, according to Cottingham. "It's the small things that make a big difference."

The soldiers of Company A, 2-5 Cavalry have found many ways to pass their time during their deployment. They went to the gym, e-mailed their friends and family, wrote letters, and watched a variety of movies. "It really does help make the time go by," Brandon added. "My advice to new soldiers is to read a lot of books, and invest in a good Sony Playstation."

Cottingham had some advice of his own. "Don't be a homebody. There are a lot of activities for the soldiers to do around camp."

Brandon also recommends learning as much of the language as possible while deployed to Bosnia. "Once you start speaking their language, the locals open up a little more."

A major thing to remember is be flexible because things change here all the time, explained Brandon. "You can't get a regular schedule."

"Things don't always happen like they were planned," Brandon elaborated. "You've got to be able to adapt, improvise and overcome."

As the soldiers reminisce about their experiences in Bosnia, most say it's not a question of remembering Bosnia ... it's "how can you forget?"

Soldiers stop illegal arms transport



Private First Class Juan A. Gonzales IV inspects a tank round confiscated during a routine checkpoint operation where his platoon uncovered an illegal arms transport.

Story and photo by Camp McGovern's Private First Class Louis Sardinha
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Det.

Stabilization Force soldiers from Camp McGovern were conducting a routine checkpoint operation near Brcko when they stopped two trucks loaded with a variety of contraband military weapons and ammunition.

During the checkpoint operation, soldiers randomly stopped a truck and found it loaded with weapons.

The soldiers operating the checkpoint are members of Company A of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment.

"The first truck didn't hide them at all," said Private First Class Juan A. Gonzales IV, of Bay City, Mich., and a mechanized infantryman. "They were just lying in the back of the vehicle."

"Transporting weapons like that without SFOR paperwork or an escort is a direct violation of the Dayton Peace Accords," said 1st Lieutenant Michael C. Ernst of Killeen, Texas, and rifle platoon leader.

After discovery of the contraband weapons, Ernst reported the incident to his command, informing them of the illegal movement of weapons through their sector. The checkpoint operators received orders to inventory the contraband, detain the driver and document the discovery while another patrol was sent to the site to escort the truck back to McGovern. Ernst said they treated the driver "in a humane and professional manner."

While the troops inspected the first vehicle, a second truck pulled into the checkpoint, according to Gonzales. "Since the first truck had weapons in it, we were going to inspect this one as well."

The second vehicle was transporting lumber, Gonzales explained, but wood wasn't its only cargo. Upon further investigation, the soldiers discovered more weapon systems hidden behind the wood. Soldiers secured the vehicle, detained the driver and his passenger and questioned the suspects.

The vehicle contained a variety of military weapons, such as surface-to-air and antitank missile systems, multiple-rocket launchers, numerous grenades, tank and small arms munitions, Ernst stated. "We do not know the origin or the destination of the weapons," Ernst said. "All we know is they were transporting illegal weapons through our sector without SFOR authorization or paperwork."

"We're trained to be prepared for this type of situation," Ernst said. "We got right down to business inventorying, identifying and questioning the drivers."

Ernst said this was the largest SFOR confiscation to date. "The whole tempo of MND North has changed as far as the patrols being more aware of what's out there and what's going on," he said.

SFOR is investigating the incident. "They are looking into the matter with greater detail because it is such a major event," Ernst said.

Ernst said he is very proud of his soldiers and the way they handled the situation. "My soldiers did an outstanding job," he said. "Under these unusual circumstances, all the training we did helped make the operation run successfully."

Taking care of business

Story and photo by Camp Dobol's Specialist Giovanni Lorente
319th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

Every day soldiers from Task Force 2-5 conduct patrols in their sector of the Brcko District, meeting with public officials and members of the local community. Servicemembers take time to learn about the Bosnian culture and how best Stabilization Forces can help foster peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina — always ensuring the policies of the Dayton Peace Accords are followed.

Monitoring weapons' storage sites plays a key role in ensuring civic leaders and Entity Armed Forces hold to the Accords. Stabilization Force soldiers have stepped in and confiscated weapons from sites either because there were discrepancies in the paperwork, or because weapons in the site were acquired from conquests during the 1992-1995 war.

An EOD team from Camp Dobol recently removed various missiles and small arms ammunition from

a weapons site and destroyed them because the weapons were the product of conquest. Missiles formerly belonging to a Dutch Battalion located in Srebrenica were destroyed because Serbs had acquired the weapons during the war.

The EOD team destroyed the weapons in a remote location with explosives.

With the help of local Entity Armed Forces, the weapons were carefully unloaded from trucks and placed in pits in the ground. The EOD team covered the weapons with a blanket of C4 blocks and gently attached blasting caps and the detonation cable. The area was then cleared of all personnel and from a good distance away the explosives were set off, utterly destroying the weapons.

SFOR is committed to securing peace and security in the Brcko District and helping local civic leaders maintain control over weapons storage sites. Servicemembers played a key role in securing and destroying illegal weapons and will continue to uphold the Dayton Peace Accords in a fair and impartial manner.

Soldiers celebrate anniversary, reenlist together in Bosnia

Story and photos by Eagle Base's Specialist Robert B. Valentine
319th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

Loosing a family member for several months to a deployment is a hardship families contend with regularly in today's military. The extended period of separation can make a soldier miss important events, and create feelings of loneliness for those who are left behind. But for a very small percentage of married soldiers, a deployment to Bosnia is a blessing.

Specialist Norberto Lara and Specialist Starlyn Lara recently celebrated their two-year anniversary while in Bosnia and reenlisted together for an additional three years. Norberto is with the 545th Military Police Company, 1st Cavalry Division, and Starlyn is with Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division.

"We are able to spend a lot of time together over here," said Starlyn, an administrative specialist. "We consider ourselves to be very lucky because being together makes every aspect of this deployment better. We have more time together than most people in garrison."

At first, some of their coworkers seemed envious and joked with the couple about being together during a deployment, according to the Laras. "My first sergeant used to tease us a little, but everybody is pretty much happy for us," Starlyn said with a smile.

"There are a few married people in Bosnia, but unfortunately most are not at the same base camp like us," said Norberto, a driver with the Provost Marshall's Office. "Everyone here has been so supportive. My noncommissioned officer in charge makes sure that I am given time to spend with her."

The Laras met in Korea in 1996 and moved together to Fort Hood following their assignment there. They married later that year. Deploying to a dangerous area like Bosnia with a spouse has its ups and downs, Norberto explained.

"I sometimes worry, when she pulls guard duty," Norberto said. "I tell her to be extra careful. There are times I wish I could pull guard duty for her, but having my wife here with me is my biggest morale booster."

"It felt great reenlisting together with my wife. I am pretty proud of my Army family," Norberto said.

The Laras' next assignment is Fort Irwin, Calif., where much of Norberto's family lives.

"When we decided what our future goals would be, reenlisting was the smartest thing for us to do right now," Starlyn said. "By reenlisting and moving to California, it gives us a chance to acclimate to a new area before coming off active duty."

Norberto joined the Army because he wanted a career in law enforcement and the Army provided a valuable steppingstone.

Starlyn said she joined the Army after high school because she was unsure of what she wanted to study in college. "The Army is a good way to figure out what to do with the rest of your life. The Army has treated us well. We have a comfortable lifestyle that has grown around the Army."

"We both went before the E5 board together here," Norberto said. "Our immediate goal is for the both of us to become sergeants. Excelling in the Army has become important to us."

While long deployments such as Operation Joint Forge are often a hardship for Army families, the Laras said they wouldn't have it any other way.



Captain Kris Perkins congratulates Specialist Starlyn Lara and 1st Lieutenant Benefsheh Shamel congratulates Specialist Norberto Lara. Both reenlisted on their two year anniversary.

Lifeline in the heliport accomplishes mission

Story and photo by Camp McGovern's
Private First Class
Phillip E. Breedlove Jr.
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Det.

This is by far the most versatile unit on Camp McGovern, according to Specialist George E. Bono of Hopatcong, N.J. Bono is a driver with Headquarters and Headquarters Company of 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment. His multipurpose platoon can attach to a convoy and go outside the wire at night to support nearly any mission, then come back and assist in preparation for the morning meal.

Private First Class Shandrick D. Ellis of Miami, and a petroleum supply specialist with Support Platoon, said the mission of his unit could be summed up in one word: "support."

"It sounds simple, but there's a lot to it. Our mission is to support Task Force 1-8 with whatever they need," Ellis said. "That could be with soldiers, vehicles, food or some other miscellaneous task like dumping scrap metal. We take care of the little things that somebody has to do."

Bono said the platoon handles miscellaneous tasks such as transporting equipment, handling and distributing ammunition, providing fuel for McGovern vehicles and operating and maintaining the camp's dining facility. They have refueled a majority of the vehicles passing through the camp, including vehicles belonging to the Russian and Norwegian militaries, and the Multinational Specialized Unit. The Support Platoon supplies over 15,000 gallons of fuel a day.

"We are the lifeline of McGovern," Bono said. "Sometimes even the best of soldiers need help once in a while and that's

why we're here."

The Support Platoon assisted the task force in previous operations such as transporting and setting up McGovern's gym, delivering units' military vans for transport to Fort Hood and supplying vehicles and manpower in the recent weapon seizure in Brcko, according to Bono.

The small unit also acts as Quick Reaction Force for certain specialized tasks such as mass casualty treatment, hazardous material cleanups, and nuclear, biological and chemical support, Bono asserted. The team is also responsible for medically evacuating McGovern personnel in emergency situations.

Most of these tasks require specialized training essential for the support mission. All Support Platoon personnel are hazardous material qualified and proficient with every vehicle on wheels the task force controls. Additionally, 90 percent are combat lifesaver certified. "We're sort of a jack-of-all-trades.

Each soldier has

his special area, but everyone also knows each other's job front to back."

A support soldier's job can be tough at times as the 30 soldiers perform the mission of a 76-member unit. Despite their tough assignment, they have no reason to complain, according to Bono. "If we needed help, we could recruit more people from the other units, but the thought of asking for help hasn't really occurred to us. We've never had a problem handling the workload."

Of all the things the platoon provides, the most important one is peace of mind, Ellis stated. "It doesn't matter if you're infantry or a finance clerk; you always need someone to watch your back. That's what we do. We watch out for the soldiers and get them what they need to accomplish their mission."



Specialist George E. Bono checks the fuel level to ensure the tank isn't low on fuel.

MEDEVAC teams stand ready

Story and photos by
Staff Sergeant Pat Johnston
319th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

The 126th Medical Evacuation Company didn't get much work during the fourth Stabilization Force rotation, and the Air Ambulance, California Army National Guard unit isn't complaining.

The motto, "Force protection is number one," seemed to have an impact on the safety consciousness of soldiers serving in Bosnia for the past seven months, according to Eagle Base Hospital Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Agueira, of the 41st Combat Support Hospital. There were very few injuries and no fatalities.

The 126th MEDEVAC Company provided MEDEVAC support to the Eagle Base Hospital since August 1998. The hospital serves the health needs of the 10,000 SFOR soldiers who keep the peace in the American sector of Bosnia.

Now the 126th MEDEVAC Company is turning over their mission to the 24th MEDEVAC Company Air Ambulance of the Nebraska Army National Guard.

There are only 13 U.S. Army National Guard air ambulance units. Four of these units are high priority units, according to 24th MEDEVAC Company 1st Sergeant Troy D. Johnson from Lincoln, Neb. The other two high priority units, in addition to California's 126th MEDEVAC Company and Nebraska's 24th MEDEVAC Company, are located in Wyoming and Maine.

Major Scott A. Gronewold, commander of the 24th MEDEVAC Company, said his soldiers are ready for this mission. They have had Blackhawk helicopters for two years and received a lot of new equipment in the past six months.

The pilots, medics, maintenance teams and support personnel of both units work closely to provide a smooth transition for the 24th MEDEVAC Company.

Staff Sergeant Kelly Verne Hughes, 126th MEDEVAC Company crew chief, is impressed by the expertise of the 24th MEDEVAC Company soldiers. "In our unit, as well as the 24th MEDEVAC Company, we have a solid core of people that have really deep experience in aviation," Hughes said.

The 126th and 24th MEDEVAC Companies served in Desert Storm, and both units have pilots who served in Vietnam.

Agueira looks forward to working with the Nebraska Army National Guard air ambulance teams. "I have every confidence that folks from the 24th will do as good a job as the 126th," the San Antonio hospital administrator said.

The 126th MEDEVAC Company was the first Army National Guard air ambulance unit tasked with the MEDEVAC mission in Bosnia. Agueira was impressed with their professionalism and emergency medical technician experience. "The

real-world patients that they've brought in have been handled extremely efficiently ... they have done a very good job of initial assessment in triaging out in the field as well as preparing the patients for transport to the hospital," Agueira said.

The 126th MEDEVAC Company flew 10 medical evacuation missions during their seven-month rotation. Some were true MEDEVACs, such as a couple of fractures, and a soldier at a base camp with appendicitis, but some were just hospital transfers. "Surprisingly, we haven't had a whole lot of MEDEVACs, partly due to the fact that soldiers weren't getting hurt, but also due to the weather," said Chief Warrant Officer Raymond Green, 126th MEDEVAC Company pilot and assistant operations officer.

A Swedish Army ambulance called a SISU was dispatched for the hospital pickup when poor visibility or a low ceiling kept the helicopters on the ground. The SISU is an armored personnel carrier equipped for critical-care patients.

"We can give anesthesia and do some surgical procedures in the SISU," said Major Patrik Hansson, a physician in the Swedish Army Reserves who volunteered to spend his vacation on duty in Bosnia.

The SISU dispatch office is located next to the MEDEVAC air operations desk where the ground and air medical teams stand by. The SISU crew includes a driver, team commander and medic. A Swedish Army doctor and nurse, both specialists in anesthesiology and critical care medicine, are available to accompany either the SISU or MEDEVAC helicopter if necessary.

"Since August the SISU has been called out once or twice a week," Hansson said. About half of those calls are aborted because either there is another unit who can respond quickly or a helicopter is launched instead. They don't respond to civilian emergencies either because they aren't part of the SFOR mission, according to Hansson.

At home in California the 126th MEDEVAC Company deals with MEDEVAC emergencies at least once a week, according to 126th MEDEVAC Company commander, Major Louis E. Carmona from Roseville, Calif. In Bosnia, it was over two months before his soldiers responded to their first MEDEVAC mission. He cautions the soldiers of the 24th MEDEVAC Company to stay alert, even though there are periods of inactivity.

Carmona credits the Swedish SISU medical teams for their great support, particularly during the beginning of their rotation. "The first time we had a MEDEVAC, those guys they're clicking on all cylinders and they're positioning assets to maintain radio communications ... they provide a lot more than a ground ambulance," Carmona said.

The 112th MEDEVAC Company Air Ambulance, Maine Army National Guard, will relieve the 24th MEDEVAC Company in September.