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TALON



One inch at a time

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Every gift has a story

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TALON

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Families make it work

Lt. Col (CH) Alan Johnson

Task Force Eagle Chaplain

One of our Task Force Eagle chaplains from a previous rotation wrote: "Marriage may be made in heaven, but the maintenance must be done on earth." People of faith believe that God designed the family for our benefit and blessing. In that divine blueprint is a great deal of strength and resilience so that the family can face hard times. Even more than that a family can be a resource of strength for each one in the family. Families that pull together can get through tough times and bounce back stronger than ever.

The holidays can be a difficult time for those of us who are deployed and away from family and friends. It is also a difficult time for our families back home. They miss us as much as we miss them. And, absence can be hardest on those who are the smallest. Holiday time is a good time to think of how we can rally the strength of our family to help each other out.

Take some extra time to think about the sacrifices our families back home are making for us. Taking care of children, finances and the daily tasks needed to keep thing working at home are tougher when you aren't around to help. Thanksgiving is a good opportunity to be grateful for your spouse, your children and the other significant people who make it possible for you to be here. Take the time to send an extra email, make an extra phone call or send some gifts to let them know that you appreciate all they do for you.

There are video teleconference sites at bases here and at several training and community centers throughout

Minnesota and other states. Now is the perfect time to take advantage of this technology.

The public affairs office is also implementing a "Read to your Kids" program that allows you to make a videotape of you reading a book to your family. Family members can then play the tape at home.

Encourage your family to participate in your unit's family readiness group. Our families back home share a common bond, and even the strongest people could use a little help now and then. Just talking to someone who is dealing with the same situation can be a big help. It can be like an extension of your family. And, besides, knowing that our families back home have others there to help, allows us to finish our jobs here so we can go home feeling good about what we have accomplished here.

Your Unit Ministry Teams (UMTs, Chaplains and Chaplain Assistants) can also help. We will have programs available to strengthen families. We also have lots of tapes, books and other resources to help. Everyone, even in the best of families, has low times. If you are going through a rough time, it can help to talk to your Chaplain or Chaplain Assistant. There are also UMTs back home who are there to help your family.

Thanks to all the families back home for the support they have given us throughout this deployment. We could not do our job without them. May this holiday season be a blessed time for you and your family members even though you are apart.



Cpl. Salih Subaic probes for mines near Gradacac last week. Photo by Nedima Hadziibrisevic, Media Specialist

EDITOR'S NOTE: To schedule a time to record a "Read to your Kids" video, contact Sgt. DeAnne Gilger, 135th MPAD via email or phone at 762-5655.

Video teleconferencing

It's almost like being there

Story and photos by Spc. Jeremiah Wickenhauser
135th MPAD

Just because we are overseas serving our country in Bosnia and Herzegovina doesn't mean we can't stay in touch with our families back home. In the past, soldiers and their families used letters to communicate, but now we have e-mail and video teleconferencing capabilities to speed up the communication process.

"Video teleconferencing, or VTC, is a way to have a web conference with someone back at a home station," said Spc. Joel Siebring, Task Force Eagle G6, who is in charge of setting up VTCs.

VTC is available in a number of training and community centers and other locations all over the United States. In Minnesota locations are available at: Alexandria, Bemidji, Brooklyn Park, Camp

Ripley, Chisholm, Crookston, Detroit Lakes, Duluth, Inver Grove Heights, Jackson, Mankato, Minneapolis, Moorhead, New Ulm, Pine City, Redwood Falls and Rochester. Soldiers from other states can e-mail MWR-VTC on the Eagle Base Global network to find locations near their home. VTC is available at Eagle Base's Cyber Café and at camp McGovern.

"Each city has a designated time-per-month that can be checked at the Web site below, but special exceptions can be made depending on circumstances," said Siebring. "About 40 people have used the VTC so far on this rotation."

To schedule a VTC in

Minnesota go to <http://www.dma.state.mn.us/FamilyPrograms/default.htm>, which is the Minnesota National Guard family program web page. Then click on the "Find scheduled video teleconferencing (VTC) times in your area" link at the bottom of the page. This will take you to the Family support VTC

calendar. This page is a calendar with city names on the left side of the page. Click on the most convenient city. This will bring up another calendar web page. Now click on the link at the top of the page labeled "view available." This will bring up a calendar



Staff Sgt. Angela Major gets her rank pinned on by Lt. Col. John Dewey and her husband in front of her family in the VTC room on Eagle Base.



Staff Sgt. Steven Major, a TF Bearcat squad leader stands next to his wife Staff Sgt. Angela Major, and her family via VTC, after her promotion ceremony.

with all the available times to schedule a VTC at that location. Then e-mail MWR VTC to reserve the time that works best and provide the following information: city, time, date, your name, name of contact person, home phone numbers and home address.

"The more advance notice I get, the better chances are for getting the time requested," said Siebring. "Two weeks notice is best."

Staff Sgt. Angela Major recently used the VTC at Eagle Base to have her family watch her promotion from back home. "The VTC was really neat, it was good for my mom and my family," said Major.

"They said it was great to see me and be a part of the occasion. I would recommend anyone to use the VTC. You could really sit there and talk for hours."

Safe once again

Armed forces close minefields

Story by Nedima Hadziibrisevic
TFE Media Specialist

Last week marked an end of another summer demining season in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the eight-month long season, armed forces in BiH, throughout the Multinational Brigade (North) area of operations, cleared more than 600,000 additional square meters of land, closing nearly 30 minefields and turning land over to local communities.

Task Force Eagle's Joint Military Affairs Mine Cell, along with the BiH Mine Action Center, the principal government demining agency, prioritizes and assigns all mine clearing operations, assigns minefield identification numbers and monitors the armed forces compliance with the BiH MAC

standard operating procedures while conducting the actual demining operations. Some of the things they observe include proper minefield markings and deminers' safety measures.

"We basically take the information out of the SOP and make sure they are doing the things they should be doing," said Capt. Debra Lien, JMA Mine Cell officer-in-charge, who oversees all demining throughout MNB (N).



Photo by Nedima Hadziibrisevic, Media Specialist

Samir Delibegovic, mine action center inspector, signs a document stating the demining operation was properly conducted as Maj. Ivo Miskovic watches.

"BiH MAC, out of their regional offices, will also send a representative that does the same things," she said.

Additionally, Stabilization Force relays equipment, supply or deminers' pay issues to the chief of countermines at SFOR headquarters, and facilitates resolving issues through the BiH armed forces and their



Photo by Nedima Hadziibrisevic, TFE Media Specialist

1st Lt. Vinko Barbaric, commander of the Federation Army, Croats Component, 3rd Platoon De-Mining Unit, discusses minefield data with Capt. Debra Lien.

government. Once the armed forces complete all the demining in the area, they request that the mine center conduct a quality control check, preparing the minefield for closure.

Recently, about 150 returnee families in Makljenovac, Usora Municipality, witnessed such an event in their community that was completely destroyed during the war.

During their two-year effort, soldiers from the 3rd platoon, Federation Army (Croats Component) Demining Unit, manually cleared about 31,400 square meters and destroyed 37 mines and 29 items of ordnance found in the minefield.

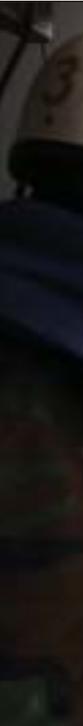
"This area is very contaminated with mines,"

said 2nd Lt. Dragan Udovicic, 3rd platoon team leader. "Maybe one of the most contaminated in this region."

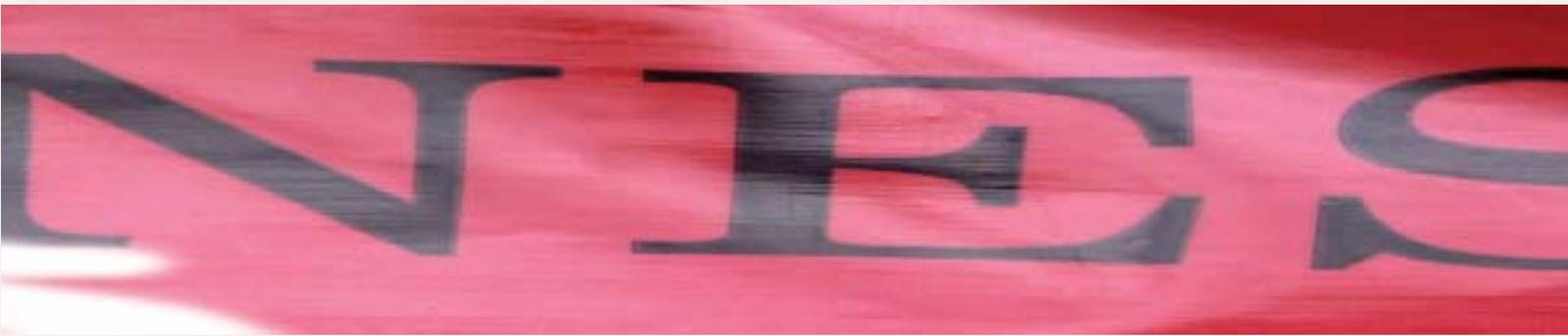
Since 1996, there were six fatalities in the community that has 10 more registered minefields to clear.

After the mine center representative conducted a spot check of certain areas, he signed a land-turnover document along with local community and armed forces representatives. The effort enabled seven more families to return out of the original 300 who lived there before the war.

Borislav Gaso, coordinator for demining issues, Usora Municipality, said the returnees are thrilled with the deminers' work.



A Federation Army soldier clears a remote minefield.



“People feel more free now,” he stressed. “They have some faith in better life. This means a lot to them.”

The Gradacac Municipality is another area that is a focus of comprehensive demining efforts in BiH. In late September, the 1st Demining Company, Federation Army (Bosniak Component) Demining Battalion, commenced clearing the Sibovac minefield. As with each assigned task, BiH MAC obtained all the available data on the minefield and provided it to the deminers prior to their mission.

When the deminers conducted a reconnaissance



Photo by Nedima Hadziibrisevic, Media Specialist

This antipersonnel mine was found during clearing operations. The mine will be destroyed in place.



Photo by Capt. Chuck Traxler, 135th MPAD

Federation Army Bosniak component soldier clearing a minefield from a safe distance using a controlled mini-flail.

and determined the best suitable clearing operation, they brought an average of 50 people daily to speed operations.

“We are using an integral demining method, which includes mechanical preparation, working with dogs and manual demining,” said Capt. Senad Smigalovic, commander of 1st Demining Company whose soldiers cleared about 50 percent of their assigned area by the end of the season. The rest of the minefield will be completed next March, when the 2004 summer demining campaign

should begin.

Smigalovic highlighted his satisfaction with the results the company achieved throughout the season.

They had no accidents this year and increased the cleared area to 360,000 square meters -compared to 300,000 last year.

“From day to day we are getting better equipment, more equipment, and more dog teams, which significantly affects our productivity on the field,” said Smigalovic.

Lien commended the soldiers’ dedication and professionalism, while emphasizing the great success that her office had with the deminers they worked with.

“They have been very helpful in sharing their knowledge of the war and where they believe mines are placed in certain areas,” she said. “They take their job very seriously and take a great amount of pride in the work that they do.”

Since the summer demining season is over, the armed forces in BiH keep their skills sharp by training throughout the winter.

Even with the growing success that the deminers achieve year after year, there is still a lot of work to do. According to estimates it will take more than 70 years to completely demine BiH.

Every gift has a story

Story and photos by
Master Sgt. Edwin Holt
135th MPAD

Gifts for family and friends back home and getting them there on time was on the mind of Master Sgt. Richard Kelso and Spc. Jason Austin when both soldiers found time Sunday to shop at the kiosks on Eagle Base. What the two soldiers from Stabilization Force 14 left with was a whole lot more than gifts.

Whether looking for that specific Bosnian product or imported gift from other European countries, both soldiers discovered each shop has its own story.

Austin was first to discover several stories behind some of the shops. Austin, a Task Force Iron

scout stationed at Camp McGovern, took time from escort duty to explore what was available in gifts for his mother and sister.

While Austin purchased two dolls, kiosk worker Nasija Dzihanovic explained that many handmade Bosnian items are produced by persons displaced during the war. "Some of the people were unable to go back home and

now live in or around Tuzla," she said.

Among the items Dzihanovic sells are handmade carpets woven by women whose husbands and sons were killed, or are still missing, after the fall of

Srebrenica. As she showed a carpet, she proudly explained that each carpet is named for the woman who made it. "The sale of the carpet is their salary for the month," Dzihanovic said.

Kelso, who works in Task Force Eagle's SJA office on Eagle Base, had a similar experience while visiting a fine jewelry kiosk. Samra Bakalovic explained the shop owner continues to make many of the items on sale in the store even after being shot in the head which resulted in blindness in one eye.

"Most of these stories are surprising," Kelso said. "I came here to buy gifts for my wife, mother, daughter and son-in-law. I really had no idea."

Bakalovic said that soldiers do not have to buy things to hear the stories. "Just ask," she said.

"We have many interesting things to say. Whether we own the shop or just

"Most of these stories are surprising,"

- Master Sgt. Richard Kelso



Master Sgt. Richard Kelso, found what he was looking for while holiday shopping at Eagle Base.



Spc. Jason Austin talks with kiosk worker Nasija Dzihanovic, Sunday, on Eagle Base.

work here, we know what is behind it," Bakalovic said.

For Austin, the chance to visit the Eagle Base kiosks was a satisfying experience.

"I really wanted to purchase something that is unique to Bosnia. It's special when it's a Bosnian craft, we can't find this at home," Austin said.

"It's even more special when the owners are friendly and willing to tell the story behind the product," he said.

Whether in the market for that special holiday gift to send back home or in the mood for some local Bosnian stories behind the art and handmade crafts, spending some time at the Eagle Base kiosks can provide a taste of local fare.

Multinational team helps keep drinking water safe

Story and photos by
Capt. Chuck Traxler
135th MPAD

Clean drinking water. Something most Americans expect to have access to by simply turning on the water faucet in their home. Unfortunately, the municipal infrastructure of many cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not stable enough to provide this for its citizens. One example of this is the city of Doboj.

After the war, dirt, sand and rocks were needed to help rebuild homes, roads and other facilities in the city. Citizens started extracting these materials from a site on the edge of town. After years of extraction, the site no longer produced the needed materials and what remained was a large hole. Over the years, people began to fill the hole with trash. This in itself is a problem, but it was compounded by the fact that the hole was subject to flooding from the nearby Bosna River and was less than 100 meters from two city water wells. During periods of flooding or heavy rain, water would flow through the trash and quickly move into the nearby city wells without the benefit of the cleansing effects of slow filtration through the soil.

Portuguese soldiers from the Multinational Battle Group's Task Force Golf learned of the problem after meeting with officials from

Doboj. Capt. Bernardo Ponte, Task Force Golf S5, informed Task Force Commander Col. Luis Ville De Brito of the situation and then began to formulate a plan to help the community. "We asked the local leaders how we could assist them and this project was a top priority for them," said Capt. Ponte.

Task Force Golf used its resources and soldiers to remove semitrailers full of trash from the site. However, with the trash removed, only half the job was done. There was still a large hole that would allow water to quickly filter into the city wells. To complete the job, the hole needed to be filled and the surrounding landscape needed to be graded so water would drain away from the wells. Task Force Golf had the skills



A Portuguese soldier uses an SFOR bulldozer to grade the project site near Doboj.

U.S. Soldiers from the 682nd Engineer Battalion and Portuguese soldiers from Task Force Golf. The U.S. engineers brought their equipment and expertise to Doboj; the Portuguese provided engineers and equipment operators. The resulting multinational training exercise helped complete the project.

The soldiers worked and trained together as a team to complete the project. In the process, they discovered that although their languages were different, engineering principles and equipment operations are universal. "We didn't really have a tough time working together," said Sgt. Eric Schueller, 682nd Eng. Bn. "Verbal communication was a challenge at times, but bulldozers are basically the same everywhere. So, doing the work together was easy."

After several days, the work was completed and the people of Doboj can now look forward to a more stable water supply.



Capt. Ponte (left) and 1st. Sgt. Victor Luis Da Costa Monteiro Lourenco oversee Portuguese operations on-site.

to complete the task; they just didn't have the equipment. Enter the engineer section of Multinational Brigade (North).

MNB(N) had the bulldozers, graders and expertise needed to complete the job. A plan was developed that incorporated training between



In our sights



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Clinton Wood, 135th MPAD

Spc. Michael James, TF Iron, flexes his biceps while curling 100 pounds in the Camp Morgan gym last week.



Photo by Sgt. Brian Taylor, TF Iron

Sgt. 1st Class Ronald Garni and TF Iron Command Sgt. Maj. Erick Keppeler raise the POW/MIA Flag at Camp McGovern. The VFW provided the flag to Keppeler



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Clinton Wood, 135th MPAD

Spc. Marshall Tanner, TF Bearcat Barbarians, charges into a Olovo player in a struggle for a loose ball during their game Saturday at Peacekeepers Hall. Olovo won 59-58.



Photo by Sgt. Sarah C. Danielski, 135th MPAD

Robert "Two Buffalo" Murray performs a traditional Native American dance at Peacekeepers Hall commemorating the American Eagle. Murray is part of Full Circle Regalia, a Native American dance troupe making stops all over the Balkans as part of MWR and Armed Forces Entertainment sponsored events.