

NOVEMBER 28, 2003

TALON



Season of giving

Soldiers lend a helping hand

Task Force Eagle www.tfeagle.army.mil

TALON

Published in support of
Operation Joint Forge
November 28, 2003
Volume 14, No. 9

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The *Talon* is produced in the interest of the service members of Task Force Eagle. The *Talon* is an Army-funded magazine authorized for members of the U.S. Army overseas under the provisions of AR 360-1. Contents of the *Talon* are not necessarily the official views of, nor endorsed by, the U.S. Government, Department of Defense, Department of the Army or Task Force Eagle. The *Talon* is published weekly by the Task Force Eagle Public Affairs Office, Eagle Base, APO AE 09789. DSN Telephone 314-762-0190. Email story ideas, and photo to: Clinton.Wood@email-tc3.5sigcmd.army.mil. The Task Force Eagle web address is www.tfeagle.army.mil. Printed by PrintComTuzla. Circulation: 3,500.

New legislation extends increased Imminent Danger and Family Separation Pay; 4.1% average pay raises for 2004

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Nov. 24, 2003 — Calling it a landmark piece of legislation that sends the clear message that “Americans stand with the United States military,” President Bush signed the fiscal 2004 National Defense Authorization Act in a Pentagon ceremony on Monday.

The act authorizes DoD to spend \$401.3 billion in the fiscal year that began Oct. 1. “We will do all it takes to keep our military strong, to keep the peace and to keep the American people secure,” Bush said.

The money is in addition to the \$87 billion supplemental bill passed earlier this month. “The war on terror is different than any war America has ever fought,” the president said. “Our enemies seek to inflict mass casualties without fielding mass armies. They hide in the shadows, and they are often hard to strike. The terrorists are cunning and ruthless and dangerous, as the world saw on Sept. 11, 2001, and again in Istanbul last week.”

But the terrorists now are facing the United States and its allies, “and this threat to civilization will be defeated,” Bush said.

The new threats mean the U.S. military must be fast, smart and agile, the president said. “Right now, America’s armed forces are the best-trained, best-equipped and best-prepared in the world, and this

administration will keep it that way.”

Bush said the legislation supports the force with an across-the-board pay raise that averages 4.1 percent. It extends the current payment of \$225 and \$250 per month for hazardous duty/imminent danger pay and separation pay. It reduces housing costs for those living off post, and it keeps up the robust bonus-pay program that has served the all-volunteer force so well.

“Those who risk their lives for our liberty deserve to be fairly paid and fairly treated, and this bill keeps those commitments,” Bush said.

The legislation helps America remain prepared and fully equipped for unseen challenges. “In our new struggle, challenges can emerge suddenly, and so we must always be ready,” Bush said.

The bill fully funds operations and maintenance accounts and amends some environmental laws that had an adverse effect on realistic training for America’s military.

“America’s military is standing between our country and grave danger,” he continued. “You are standing for order, hope and democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq. You’re standing up for the security of all free nations and for the advance of freedom. The American people and your commander in chief are grateful, and we will support you in all your central missions.”



Abut the cover: Sgt. Maj. William Mateer gives a child a ride at the Vojo Peric Orphanage. By Spc. Jeremiah Wickenhauser, 135th MPAD.

Calming service

Combat stress team assists soldiers, orphanage in time of need

Story and photos by

Spc. Jeremiah Wickenhauser

135th MPAD

As the holiday season marches upon us here in Bosnia and Herzegovina it is understandable that many soldiers may begin to feel homesick. The holiday season can be difficult when on deployment. Soldiers don't have to tackle the "holiday blues" on their own, combat stress units are here to help.

"Combat stress units have been helping soldiers for more than 10 years, since before Desert Shield/Desert Storm," said Maj. David Skripka, 467th Medical Detachment, Madison, Wis.

"Combat stress units are here to help soldiers get back to full function, and to let soldiers know they will be taken care of," said Skripka, a practicing psychiatrist, specializing in mental health.

The combat stress team on Eagle Base runs a variety of programs to help soldiers deal with military and personal problems.

Tobacco cessation, a program to help soldiers quit nicotine, combines a behavioral plan along with prescription medication to help soldiers stop using nicotine products.

The team offers briefings on mental health such as suicide prevention and combat stress control.

The team also leads monthly trips to Vojo Peric, a displaced persons center or and a women's home.

"Our mission is to work with people

having emotional difficulties of any kind," said Skripka. "Most people we see don't have any medical problems."

Skripka noted, "How people get along out here has to do with how they take care of themselves and their unit's environment. If people get good recognition, exercise, sleep, friendship and leadership it takes care of 90 percent of all problems. One of the best ways to keep your head on straight and stay mentally fit is to do good things for other people."

Kevin Kriesel, a civilian Air Force contractor who has assisted the combat stress team every month since January, agreed and added that it is especially true during the holiday season.

Spc. Kara Loveland of the 334th Medical group, who works in the combat stress office, said, "The last visit to Vojo Peric was



Sgt. Jeffrey Vogel holds a new friend during a group picture at Vojo

excellent. I had the chance to talk to a social worker who gave me a tour of the area and I received positive feedback from everyone who went."

Sgt. 1st Class James Freund, 147th Finance Battalion, commented, "I enjoyed being able to interact with the children who just wanted to talk to someone. It helped me remember my family."

The Combat Stress Team is located on the left side of Task Force Med Eagle. Sessions are available by appointment or walk in to discuss problems or just to talk. Phone 762-2118.



Sgt. Maj. William Mateer, TF Bearcat, who earlier thrilled children with a variety of magic tricks, shows some of the older children how they work.

Lending

Task Force Bearcat soldiers showed some "Minnesota Nice" the past few weeks.

In one mission, they helped clean debris from a creek. In one of their latest missions, they repaired a soccer field's fence.

Reconstructing community one fence at a time

Story and photos by Spc. Jeremiah Wickenhauser
135th MPAD

Devic, BiH—In this small village on the Drina River north of the Zvornik municipality, seven Task Force Bearcat soldiers from Forward Operating Base Conner have been helping reconstruct an old soccer field's fence. They have been donating their time, money and skills whenever the mission allows them time to help.

The squad of volunteers from Detroit Lakes and Bemidji consists of Staff Sgt. Richard Quick, Sgt. Timothy Warren, Sgt. Gregory Roberts, Spc. Brian Winter, Spc. Dan

Thorson, Spc. Mike Frees and Spc. Robert Stanina.

Before the members of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 136th Infantry, took on the project, the soccer field and surrounding fence was in disarray. The

old fence had rusty holes in it that had been fixed and refixed with whatever materials could be spared over the years. The grass was over grown and it was a very dangerous place for children to play.

"If you saw a fence like this back in the states, you would throw a fit," said Quick.

"When we first got here we asked the townspeople what we could do to help out," he continued. "They mentioned the fence and told us a story about how a young boy fell on the old fence while playing in the area and cut his face

very badly. As soon as my squad heard about the child who was hurt they agreed to help out."

Sgt. Roberts added, "If you're going to draw a community together, the one thing you need is sports."

"This project really brought the community together," said Quick. "Usually when we show up people start filtering out to help. One day we had 15 people helping."

Community members worked side-by-side with the soldiers to help complete the task. Local community members donated new fencing. The old fencing is being torn down and removed from the area. The "Devic Mowing Team," a herd of

sheep, helps "mow" the grass.

The squad has endured minor cuts and scrapes working with the old fencing material. However, the biggest problem has been working without the proper tools and supplies.

"Without tools, or good equipment our progress is slow," said Roberts, who noted the squad had to purchase a hacksaw.

"We don't like doing the job half way," said Frees. "We would really like to see this project completed the right away."

The squad members plan to complete the project before the end of the rotation and challenge the local soccer team to a game.



TF Bearcat soldiers Sgt. Timothy Warren (left) and Sgt. Gregory Roberts cut through a rusted pipe on the soccer field fence so it can be removed from the area.



Spc. Robert Stanina lashes a broken bar together with a piece of wire.

a hand

Plenty of volunteers to clean up creek

Story and photos by Sgt.
1st Class Clinton Wood
135th MPAD

KRIZEVICI, Bosnia and Herzegovina — The call went out late last month: volunteers from Task Force Bearcat were requested to assist in a creek clean-up mission near Zvornik.

There was no shortage of volunteers. Bearcat soldiers could be seen working alongside Bosnians of all ages along the creek's steep banks on each side of a dilapidated short concrete bridge.

Sgt. Ben Marquis, stationed at the nearby Forward Operating Base Connor, said he volunteered to assist the local community.

"Anything we American soldiers can do is beneficial to them," Marquis said.

He said he also volunteered because Camp Connor's presence patrols' area of responsibility includes this tiny village.

"It makes me feel good inside helping these people out," he commented.

Krizevici also is one of the first villages where Bosniaks returned to after the 1992-1995 war devastated the community.

These people also will be "helped out" for years to come. A youth center with rental classrooms and an Internet café is being built a few yards from the creek. Funds from non-



Spc. Chad Olson, TF Bearcat, nearly slipped as he removed debris from a creek bank near Krizevici during the creek clean-up mission.

by weeds and littered with debris and building materials.

2nd Lt. Dan Cunningham of the task force's headquarters company, standing in the muddy ankle-deep water moving debris from underneath the bridge said upon arrival he thought to himself "This stuff is never getting going to get cleaned up."

By the time this public affairs crew left about an hour later, the creek's water was already clearer and running more freely.

Last week, Self wrote in an e-mail that local engineers from two different cities met with IPAK, Friends of Bosnia, Stabilization Force 14 Civil Affairs and the local community leader.

Self noted that SFOR 14's predecessor, SFOR 13, started this project.

"I'm actually privileged to be able to have the job I have and to possibly impact the way the country is developed," said the former Marine from Conshohocken, Pa., a community just outside of Philadelphia.

"These volunteers made Bosnia and Herzegovina a safer place to live with their sweat and time."

governmental organizations, "Friends of Bosnia" and "IPAK," are already in place to ensure the center is built and stays open.

Cpl. Brian Self of the task force's civil affairs section said that local engineers may also assist in building a new bridge in the future.

"We're basically cleaning up and showing our support for what we think is a worthwhile cause to bring stability to this community," he said.

The cleanup spanned about 200 yards of the creek in an area overrun

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Above: 1st Lt. Scott Davis, TF Iron, discusses with a Bosnian policeman how his soldiers will search three sectors on an Active Harvest Patrol. Left: Davis talked with his soldiers before leaving Camp Morgan on the patrol earlier this month.

Camp Morgan soldiers hit streets to collect weapons

Story and photos by Sgt. 1st Class Clinton Wood 135th MPAD

KOPINCE, BiH — It was a beautiful day for a walk that served a purpose around this community earlier this month.

As the sun shimmered off the frozen landscape, Sgt. Josh Moen, Task Force Iron, and a Bosnian policeman walked door-to-door requesting that citizens turn in weapons and unexploded ordnance. This mission was part of Camp Morgan's Active Harvest campaign, where people are asked to give up illegal weapons, ammunition, explosives or left over field gear from the war.

The frosty morning began with several armored humvees leaving Camp Morgan as the sun began to crest the forward operating base's fence. With two raps of a rock held in his right hand on the humvee's roof, humvee gunner Sgt. John

Eggers signaled that it was clear for his humvee to leave the gates. He was in the rear humvee, providing rear guard for the patrol.

"It's nice doing something different where we actually get out and go door-to-door and see more people's faces," Moen, a father of two, said.

The mission began with three teams dividing a sector of the town. All were escorted by an armored humvee with a gunner in the turret. Each team started from the outside of the sector and worked its way in to a rally point. Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 194th Armor, was responsible for the collection patrols.

At one house they were greeted with by a man with an axe in his hand. The man laid down the axe and began explaining that he had no weapons. Despite the language barrier, the soldiers could understand he was

explaining that the axe was his only weapon.

The previous day, one of the patrols met a man who turned in two machine guns and several rounds of ammunition. Other items collected during previous patrols included knives, grenades, mortar rounds and a few artillery rounds.

The patrols are ordered that rounds more than 20 mm must be handled by Stabilization Force 14 Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams.

Moen's driver, Spc. Nicholas Peterson, was not concerned about handling weapons like grenades

"They're not a problem

as long as you know the proper procedures to handle them," he said.

The weapons collected are usually given to Bosnian law enforcement authorities for storage. SFOR 14 EOD teams later pick up the items for demolition.

For Moen, he completed the mission with pride.

"It feels good that we show concern," he said, "and actually go out of our way to go door-to-door as individuals to express our concerns and show an act of kindness on a one-to-one basis."



Sgt. Josh Moen, TF Iron, and a Bosnian policeman visited with a citizen during an Active Harvest Patrol.

From tank to humvee

Sgt. Winters enjoys the view in humvee

Story and photos by Sgt. 1st Class Clinton Wood
135th MPAD

CAMP MORGAN, BiH -Back in Minnesota, Sgt. Joe Winters is a gunner on one of the 2nd Battalion, 194th

Armor's 67-ton M1A1 Abrams main battle tanks.

Here at this U.S. outpost northwest of Tuzla, this former Marine is an assistant gunner on a whole "different animal." An armored humvee weighing less than five tons.

Winters said there really is no comparison.

"Actually, you can see a lot more around you," he said of being in the humvee's turret. "You can see 360 degrees."

Winters, and gunners like him, have plenty of opportunities to observe

everything around them.

Several of these humvees

make daily presence patrols around the camp's area of responsibility. These mounted patrols, where the gunner in the lead vehicle faces forward and the gunner in the rear vehicle faces backward, patrol cities in

"You can see 360 degrees."

- Sgt. Joe Winters



Sgt. Joe Winters, a TF Iron assistant humvee gunner, dons Ranger Body Armor which has two heavy plates that slide into the vest to protect him. This body armor weighs about 28 pounds.

Bosnia to show a Stabilization Force presence.

The gunner sits in a swing-like chair in the hatch of the humvee. He is able to turn completely around.

Winters said being an assistant gunner is a fun job.

"You can wave at all the kids," he said with a smile.

Being exposed to the elements does have its drawbacks especially during the winter.

During cold weather, the gunners will switch about every half hour.

The biting cold isn't the only drawback. Sgt. John Eggers, a fellow gunner,

said that it is difficult to hear the humvee driver or passengers while he is in the hatch. He noted that sometimes his leg has to be tapped by one of the soldiers to get his attention.

"For the most part, you're kind of on your own," he said.

But being on their own isn't all that bad. It allows them to focus all their attention on what is happening outside the vehicle.



Winters does a radio check before his squad leaves Camp Morgan on a presence patrol earlier this month.



Earlier this week, Brig. Gen. Richard Nash, commander, MNB (N), hosted a number of general officers who met with soldiers and observed operations throughout the area of responsibility. Pictured from left to right are: Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, Chief National Guard Bureau; Maj. Gen. Larry Shellito, Adj. Gen. Minn. National Guard and 34th Inf. Div. commander; Brig. Gen. Nash; Brig. Gen. Harry A. Sieben Jr., Asst. Adj. Gen., Air, Minn. National Guard; and Brig. Gen. Warner I. Sumpter, Asst. Adj. Gen., Army, Md., National Guard.



Photo by Spc. Jeremiah Wickenhauser, 135th MPAD



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

Spc Joe Butler, TF Bearcat, battles for control of the puck with a FOB Connor employee at Connor's basketball court last week.

Spc. Nicholas Peterson, TF Iron, checks his blind spot as he drives his humvee during an Active Harvest Patrol near Orajse earlier this month.



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



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

Staff Sgt. Marie Herbort, TF Rengegade, does a pre-flight on the MNB (N) Commander's UH-60 Black Hawk earlier this month.