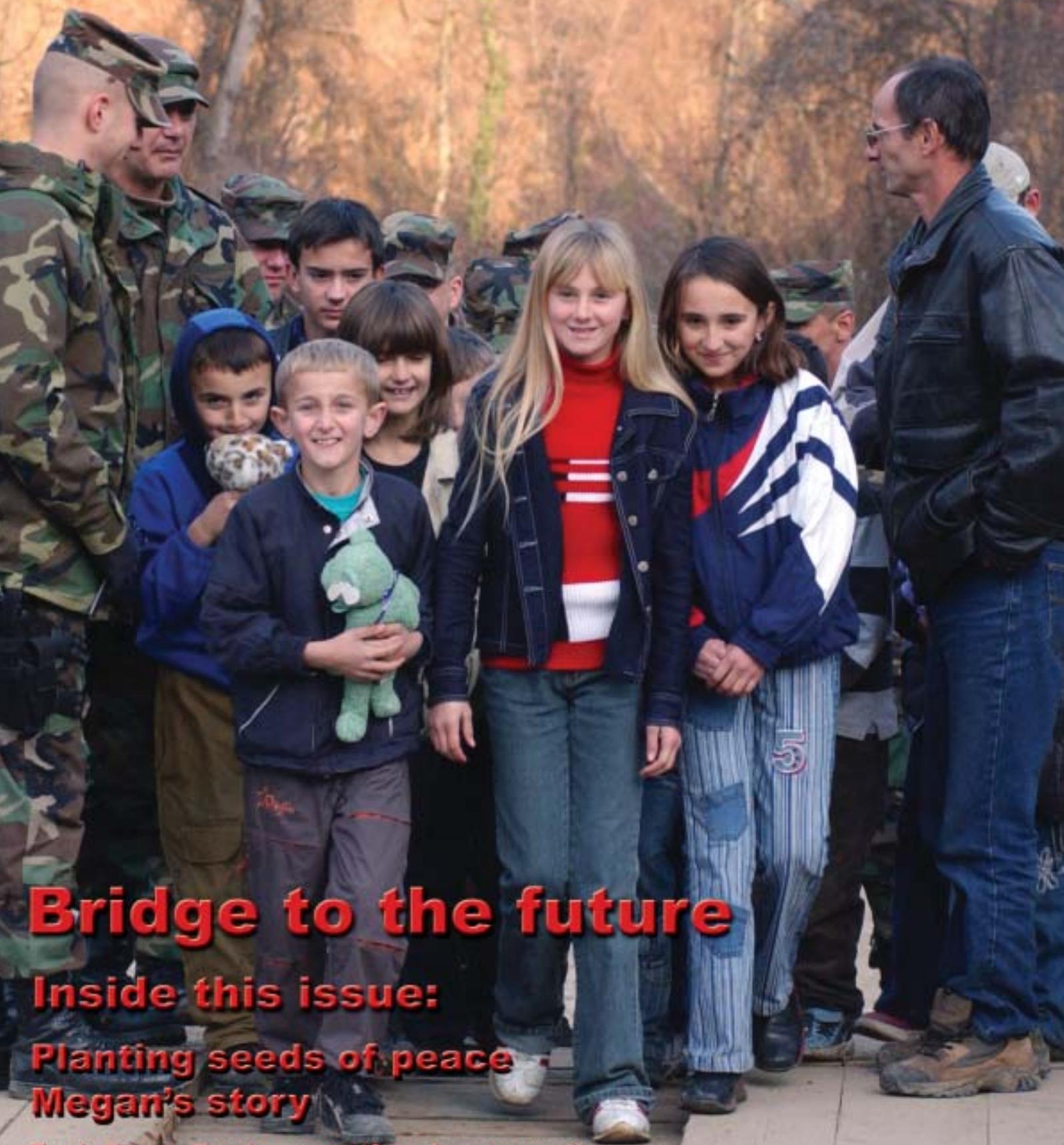


DECEMBER 26, 2003

TALON



Bridge to the future

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Megan's story

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TALON

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Commander,
Multinational Brigade (N)
Brig. Gen.
Richard Nash

Public Affairs Officer
Maj. Jarrod Krull

Command Historian
Master Sgt. Tim Peterson

**Commander, 135th MPAD/
Command Information Officer**
Capt. Chuck Traxler

NCOIC, 135th MPAD
Master Sgt.
Edwin Holt

Talon Editor
Sgt. 1st Class
Clinton Wood

Print Journalists
Sgt. Sarah C. Danielski
Spc. Jeremiah Wickenhauser

Broadcast Journalists
Sgt. Kent Westberg
Sgt. DeAnne Gilger

Media Specialists
Aleksandar Ilic
Nedima Hadziibrisevic
Haris Lelic



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Time for reflection, peace

Sgt. Maj. David Dries
Senior Enlisted Advisor

The holidays are a time when we normally would expect to be home with our families and friends, gathered to share in the celebration of the season. However, in the service of our country, sometimes that cannot be so. Obviously, this is a time in our lives where we have been asked to sacrifice so that others may know the joy of peace and the hope for a brighter future.

While we will not be home this year, we should take comfort in knowing that the peacekeepers of Multinational Brigade (North) have become part of our extended family. Our MNB(N) family is unique - among us, we share a special bond, a common understanding of the inherent sacrifices and hardships of being a family that has been brought together by our peacekeeping duties in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

What is really significant about our family is that we are made up of soldiers from many different countries

as well as the Guard, Reserve and Active Duty components of America's armed forces and also civilian employees who make sure that we are able to accomplish our mission safely each day. We should take great pride in the fact that we have come together to serve a common good.

While our mission here as peacekeepers doesn't stop during the holiday season, reserve some time to reflect on what is most important to us: our faith, our family and friends, and freedom, which you defend with honor and dignity each day. Be sure to take the extra steps necessary to ensure that we are taking care of ourselves and the members of our peacekeeping family - our people are our greatest assets and we should do everything possible to care for and to protect them.

May you, your family and friends have a safe, fulfilling, and joyful holiday season and a prosperous new year.

CFC campaign is huge success

This year's Combined Federal Campaign - Overseas was a huge success for Task Force Eagle. Setting a Camp goal of \$5,000, Task Force Eagle Multinational Brigade (North) raised a total of \$7,190.

1st Lt. John Donovan the CFC-O coordinator for MNB (N) stated, "this has been a wildly successful campaign. I have done fund-raisers before for various organizations, but never before have I seen so much money donated in such a short time."

One large contributor to this year's successful campaign was Task Force Renegade. Renegade had 92 percent participation. Said Donovan, "It is just like the guys and gals from Texas to do it up big."

Early in 2004 the task force will be honored with a plaque from the CFC for their outstanding contribution.

The campaign officially ends Wednesday. However, if soldiers or civilians of MNB (N) would still like to contribute, they may see their unit S1 or they may contact Donovan at DSN: 762-2174.



2nd Lt. Jason Inskeep, TF Bearcat, watches as children from the Rasevo village are the first to cross a bridge repaired by American soldiers. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Clinton Wood, 135th MPAD

Megan's story

TF Renegade officer's daughter is inspiration

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

Thousands of American Soldiers will be spending Christmas away from their families this year.

The day was a little more difficult for 1st Lt. Jeff Howell, a signal officer from Task Force Renegade. He was away from his wife and daughter Megan, a very special 3-year old with big blue eyes and light brownish/blonde hair, for the first time.

Fourteen months after she was born in a Kansas hospital, Megan underwent surgery at UCLA Medical Center to remove dead tissue from the left side of her brain. Pre-surgery, she was taking five medications, four times a day, and having more than 80 seizures daily.

Now, Megan, who only had a five percent chance of living until her teen

years without surgery, has not had one seizure and is medication free.

"She inspires me to never give up," Howell said. "That's it. Here's somebody who doesn't even know that she is not supposed to be able to do this or to do that. She has no idea what she has been through for the most part. She is an inspiration. You just never give up and if you want something bad enough, you are going to keep doing it."

Howell last saw Megan this fall during leave. He earned the leave after extending his six-month deployment, which started last February.

He said his wife requested that Megan see him leave on an airplane.

"That was probably one of the hardest things I had to do was to watch them both...and me cry," he said.

He said his wife told him after he left, every time Megan saw a plane, she would say, "Hi Daddy." "It was kind of cute, she was like 'my daddy is in a plane.'"

Howell said Megan can jump and walk. "She is just way ahead of the game," he said. "She is doing everything. It is just amazing."

Without the left side of her brain, the right side will have to learn to perform the functions of the missing part.

Three weeks ago, Howell's wife told

Megan, you have always been such a fighter

You make Daddy's problems seem so much lighter

It is hard to write this without a tear,

Knowing I will not be here next year

I have to serve our country overseas

Be good for Mom and continue to get better please

**From a poem written by
1st Lt. Jeff Howell for
Megan's second birthday.**

him that Megan put her right arm on a countertop.

Megan was delivered in an emergency Caesarian section. Howell's wife was in labor more than 20 hours.

Within eight hours of her birth, Megan suffered a stroke, killing at least 50 percent of her left-brain.

Howell said the doctors told the couple that Megan could have been mentally retarded, suffer from epilepsy or a variety of other conditions.

"We decided we were going to do everything we could do to help Megan," he said.

About three months before Megan's surgery, Howell witnessed something that made his decision for the surgery easier.

Howell said as he left for work, he said good-bye to Megan. She tried to reach out to him with one arm while her other arm began seizing.

Howell said he told his wife, "We've got to do whatever we can."

His wife learned of the surgery while researching epilepsy on the Internet. Megan was diagnosed with epilepsy when she was six months old.

Two and a half years later, it sounds like Megan is quite the talker. "She is happy all the time," Howell said. "If you ask her, she is daddy's little girl. She says Hi da da, love you daddy, miss you."

Megan is definitely an inspiration to all those "Daddys" out there.



1st. Lt. Jeff Howell, TF Renegade, smiles as he looks at his daughter Megan's photograph in his office on Eagle Base. Megan underwent surgery to remove dead tissue from the left side of her brain.

Planting seeds of peace

Story and photos by
Sgt. Sarah C. Danielski
135th MPAD

A visit from the Minnesota National Guard Commander-in-Chief and first lady, was a welcome show of support for all the Minnesota Soldiers participating in Stabilization Force 14. Gov. Tim Pawlenty and first lady Mary Pawlenty toured the Task Force Iron and Bearcat areas of responsibility as well as met with troops at Eagle Base, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dec. 14-15.

The governor and first lady were relieved to arrive at Camp McGovern early in the morning Dec. 14, after flight delays forced them to take a late-night driving trip through Hungary. They spent the night at the TF Iron base, instead of going on to their scheduled first stop of Eagle Base. Camp McGovern Soldiers showed an outpouring of hospitality for their unexpectedly early guests.

“We got in early this morning and didn’t get the chance to visit with any of the Soldiers,” the governor said in a town hall meeting at

Camp McGovern. “Now that I have, I want to let everyone know how impressed I am with the mission they are performing here,” he continued.

The governor assured troops throughout the duration of his visit of the unconditional support of Minnesotans back home for their deployed Soldiers.

“The state is 100 percent behind the Soldiers, and support them in every way,” said Gov. Pawlenty. “This is an important mission, and we are all very proud of the work of not only the Minnesota members, but everyone helping to make this country a safer place.”

The visit was also a chance for the first lady to tell troops about the success of The First Lady’s Family



Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty shares a laugh with one of the orphans at the orphanage for the children and spouses of war victims and

Care Initiative, a web-based program which aims to help the families of deployed National Guard members by allowing volunteers to connect with families and assist them in any way they might need.

Minnesota first lady Mary Pawlenty looks out over the many graves of the Potocari Memorial and Cemetery. It was an emotional tour where she and Gov. Tim Pawlenty saw first hand the effects of the war and how SFOR is helping.



Minn. Governor shows his support for Guard troops deployed to BiH



Children living at the Peace Village Orphanage near Tuzla. The orphanage is frequented by SFOR Soldiers on a regular basis.

“So many people are willing to donate their time and services in order to help out your families,” she said, addressing Soldiers at Eagle Base. “We are taking care of loved ones and doing everything we can to make this deployment easier for them and you.”

The web site can be found at <http://www.governor.state.mn.us/flmain1.asp>

Gov. Tim Pawlenty and first lady Mary Pawlenty chat with Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Teig of TF Bearcat at FOB Connor. All Minnesota Guard members were grateful for the show of support by their commander-in-chief.

[/www.governor.state.mn.us/flmain1.asp](http://www.governor.state.mn.us/flmain1.asp)

Soldiers were grateful for the show of support from their senior commander.

“I think it’s great to see how much the state commander-in-chief cares about his troops,” said 1st Lt. Scott Davis, TF Iron. “It’s even more important during the holiday season, because he is taking time out of his busy schedule to show his support.”

The Pawlenty’s got a chance to see first hand the tolls of war and what SFOR is doing to help the country rebuild itself, when they visited an orphanage near Tuzla. The

orphanage is frequented by TF Renegade Soldiers, primarily from the

Texas National Guard, on a regular basis, where Soldiers are encouraged to interact, visit and read to the residents.

“We are all very proud of the work of not only the Minnesota members, but everyone helping to make this country a safer place.”

-Minn. Gov. Tim Pawlenty

The governor and first lady were also given an opportunity to meet with the mayor of Srebrenica, and tour the Potocari Memorial and Cemetery, an area where many atrocities were committed during the war, and where the communities are just now starting to mend their wounds and get back on their feet again.

“You are planting the seeds of freedom and peace,” the governor told SFOR Soldiers. “You are making sure that this country does not go back to the way it was 10 years ago. Minnesotans and Americans deeply appreciate the work you do here.”



Donations to warm the heart

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

SAPNA, BiH – The city of Alexandria, Minn. and the Nezuk displaced persons' camp near Sapna, Bosnia and Herzegovina had never heard of each other before the arrival of the Task Force Bearcat's 2nd Battalion, 136th Infantry.

That all changed when 100 boxes of donated clothing, school supplies and a variety of other items were

"This is a very tangible way to see that we are helping the people over here."

-Sgt. Bryan Kallstrom

distributed to the local community by the unit's Soldiers.

The boxes are the first of approximately 230 boxes donated by the Alexandria community and earmarked for the Sapna area.



This all began as the brainchild of Alexandria resident Sandra Mateer, wife of Sgt. Major William Mateer, the task force's operations sergeant major. Shortly after arriving in BiH, Mateer wrote his wife describing a beautiful country where numbers of persons were struggling to make it day to day.

"My wife wanted to know what to do," Mateer said. "I got guidance from the chaplain here who provided us a 'chaplain's letter' explaining what items were generally needed and how to go about distributing them if we could get donations."

Word went out to the Alexandria community after a local radio station hosted the Mateers during a morning talk show. Mateer participated by phone from Eagle Base, where he is stationed, while his wife was in the radio station's studio in Alexandria.

"It really took off," Mateer said. "Before long, people were bringing in all kinds of items including checks and cash. It was really very special."

Two other Soldiers from Alexandria, Sgt. Bryan Kallstrom and Spc. Jason Colen, enlisted the support of their parents to join the Mateers in facilitating the sorting and packing of donations. Before anyone knew it, an

Spc. Rachel Wurst hands out stuffed toys last week to children at Nezuk, a displaced persons' center near Sapna.



Sgt. Bryan Kallstrom, 134th Signal Battalion, carries boxes of donated clothes to a collection center for displaced persons.

initial goal of putting together 50 boxes mushroomed into 230 actual boxes.

"This feels incredibly good," Kallstrom said. "My Mom and Dad packed these boxes and now I'm distributing them. We're doing a peacekeeping mission and this is a very tangible way to see that we are helping the people over here."

"My Mom and Dad and Jason's (Colen) Mom and Dad worked all the time," Kallstrom added. "Every time I called home, they were at the armory where the donations were collected, sorted and boxed."

With guidance from Soldiers from the 416th Civil Affairs Battalion who were on a mission in Sapna, Kallstrom, Mateer and other Soldiers, some from outside the task force, drove the one-lane, bumpy, mountain road into Nezuk where local residents gathered to welcome the troops.

While one resident made coffee for the Soldiers, boxes were unloaded. Soon men, women and children gathered and everything brought along was handed out.

As Mateer climbed into his vehicle to drive away, a woman walked by and smiled at him. Mateer smiled back.

"She's wearing my mother-in-law's coat," Mateer said.

Bridge to the future

Story by Aleksandar Ilic
TF Eagle PA

KUSLAT, BiH — It was an unconventional image on a freezing Sunday afternoon in this small village south of Zvornik. U.S. Soldiers and local civilians stood at the beginning of a bridge with a blue



Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Clinton Wood 135th MPAD

The children wave to the American Soldiers as they leave Kuslat.

ribbon stretched in front of them. In the first row, several 7-to-12-year-old children held stuffed animals with their cold hands, trying to comprehend whether to look under or over the tape.

Task Force Bearcat's 2nd Lt. Jason Inskip and the local community representative, Besim Mustafic, helped their decision...they cut the ribbon to officially open the improved Bailey bridge and the children led the group across the bridge to the other side.

The bridge is the only means for these children and the Rasevo village residents to get to school, work or travel. Rasevo was one of the first return areas in Eastern Bosnia in 1999. The bridge provides the children access to an education that will one day create a better life for themselves, and their country.

Staff Sgt. Steven Grove said the bridge was discovered while he and

his fellow Bearcat Soldiers were patrolling. "The entire bridge was full of big holes," he said. "It was hard even to walk across. Our humvees had problems going over the bridge. I can imagine how hard it was for their small cars with those tiny tires."

Maj. J.P. Moszer, Multinational Brigade (North) Engineer, said the wooden bridge was rotting away. "It was really unsafe for the children to go to school every day," he said.

That was all it took for the Bearcats to roll up their sleeves and get to work. Bearcats and Soldiers of the Minnesota Army National Guard's

682nd Engineer Battalion acquired some scrap and recycled construction material.

Sgt. 1st Class Kurt Freitag, the engineer noncommissioned officer in charge, said the bridgework was completed in 10 hours with only one minor problem.

"At the end, we had to work during the nighttime but we brought vehicles to the bridge and finished the work with the help of headlights," he said. "It's so good to see the final result, a product that everybody benefits from."

Moszer noted the soldiers repaired the bridge expediently and to safety standards. "Our Soldiers will safely patrol the area now and this bridge will increase freedom of movement for the returnees and all other citizens."

The happiest man in the

world at the moment certainly was Mustafic, the first returnee to the area who also drives the children to and from their school.

Mustafic said he was prepared to purchase the repair materials himself. That was until Grove and his soldiers told him to wait until they received approval to repair the bridge. "One morning, I came to the bridge and it was done," he said. "They even did it on a weekend so the children would not stay out of school for a single day."

Mustafic credits the Stabilization Force Soldiers for all the help his community has received since its return to the area.

"If it wasn't for SFOR assistance we could not live here," he spoke critically. "It is absurd it took soldiers who live 5,000 miles overseas to come over here and help these children to safely cross this bridge."

He expressed at the ribbon-cutting ceremony his own and Rasevo residents' gratitude to U.S. Soldiers who found the means and time to help their small community. "You showed one more time how much you care for children and others in need," he said. "You have earned even more of our respect for you."



Maj. J. P. Moszer, MNB (N) Engineer, greets the children of the Rasevo village before the ribbon cutting ceremony.

 **In our sights** 



Photo by Sgt. Brian Taylor, TF Iron

Sgt. 1st Class Jeffrey Kazel, TF Iron, shows a British engineer how an M-240B machine gun works in preparation for a mission.



Photo by Spc. Jeremiah Wickenhauser, 135th MPAD

Spc. Alexander Back, TF Bearcat, shows he still believes in Santa Claus as he gives old Saint Nick a handshake at FOB Connor.



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

Sgt. Michael Bryers, TF Iron, smiles as a WCCO-TV, Minneapolis, Minn., photojournalist films him watching a videotape of his newborn daughter.



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

Master Sgt. Walter Cole, TF Eagle, is framed in a snow-covered volleyball net at Minue Park on Eagle Base as he walks down Salute Alley Tuesday.



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

Col. You-Ying Whipple, TFME, along with 147th Fin., Bn., soldiers Spc. Danielle Eng (left), Sgt 1st Class Gary Keeler, Staff Sgt. Michael Brown and Spc. Kelley Pexsa run in the 5K Jingle Bell Jog Sunday.