

JANUARY 9, 2004

# TALON



## Weapons check

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# TALON

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## Suspension of conditional promotions explained

By Sgt. Maj. David J. Larson  
*G1 Sergeant Major*

In an effort to support ongoing Operational efforts on Jan. 1, 2004, the Department of the Army suspended conditional promotions for all Active Army, Army Reserve and Army National Guard Soldiers. What this means for Task Force Eagle Soldiers is:



1. Noncommissioned officers (sergeant through sergeant first class) conditionally promoted are now considered noncommissioned officer education system qualified at their current rank. These soldiers are considered promoted without further condition and have no NCOES requirement for their current rank. They must complete the NCOES course as listed below to be eligible for further promotion.

2. All specialists and corporals with or without Primary Leadership Development Course credit are promotable to sergeant. All sergeants must have PLDC credit before they are considered for promotion to staff sergeant.

3. All sergeants with PLDC credit are promotable to staff sergeant. All staff sergeants must have Basic (Non Commissioned) Officer Course credit (all phases) before they are considered

for promotion to sergeant first class.

4. All staff sergeants with BNCOE credit (all phases) are promotable to sergeant first class. All sergeants first class must have Advanced Noncommissioned Officer credit (all phases) before they are considered for promotion to master sergeant.

**NCOs must enroll for the appropriate level of NCOES within 12 months of the effective date of promotion or, if mobilized, 12 months from the date of release from active duty. Soldiers who fail to enroll in the appropriate NCOES course within the required time frames are referred to a reduction board.**

The board will consider the case of each NCO and is authorized to order the reduction of NCOs who, through their own fault, fail to meet the NCOES requirement.

NCOs who elect to voluntarily separate or retire are considered fully eligible to separate or retire in their current rank regardless of their NCOES status, provided they are otherwise eligible.

If you have questions regarding your current status or eligibility for future promotion see your unit clerk or battalion S1 section.



**About the cover: Spc. Jake Payson, TF Bearcat, checks the action of a M48, 8 mm Mauser rifle collected during Operation Active Harvest. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Clinton Wood, 135th MPAD**

# Texans'

# white Christmas

Story and Photos by Spc.  
Jeremiah Wickenhauser, 135th MPAD

During their holiday party, Task Force Renegade got a taste of what a real white Christmas was all about.

The Texan Soldiers wrapped themselves in all the clothing they could find to prepare themselves for the party in a helicopter hanger at Eagle Base B Ramp.

For many of the Texans it was their first-ever snow-filled holiday. Ten inches of snow covered the ground after days of snowfall.

The event had a big family feel and attracted special guests from all over Eagle Base. Brig. Gen. Richard Nash, Multinational Brigade (North) commander and Sgt. Maj. David Dries, MNB (N) senior enlisted advisor,

stopped by to partake in the festivities. They offered their own personal holiday greetings to all the Texans.

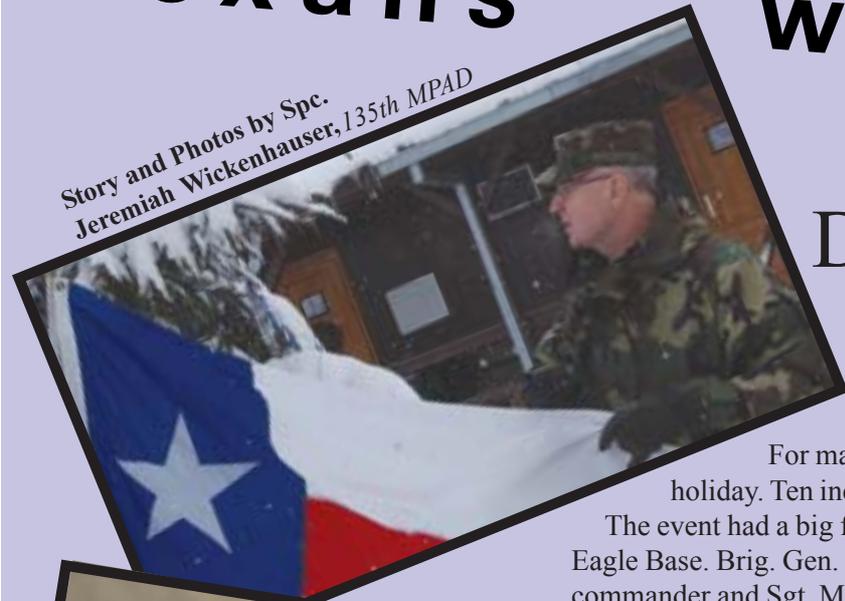
"It was a big family barbecue," said Staff Sgt. Richard Brooks, TF Renegade. "But I still missed the familiar faces from back home."

The Texans celebrated with games, gags, and a special mesquite barbecue. The mesquite wood, which was used as charcoal, was brought all the way from Texas especially for this event. The mesquite wood smoke lends a distinct flavor to cooked foods. A mesquite Web site reported there are 52 million acres in Texas of mesquite trees.

Brooks admitted, "We have been waiting for a good time to have a barbecue."

President George W. Bush also made a surprise visit in the form of a cutout figure. Any soldier who wanted a picture with the Commander in Chief was able to attain one. Bush stayed for most of the festivities and reportedly had a "great time with the aviators."

The event featured all the "fixins," including ribs, hot dogs, hamburgers and cole slaw served up by the TF Renegade officers.





# A TF Bearcat hills in we

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

COSICI, BiH –  
Task Force  
Bearcat

soldiers had so much success with their Operation Active Harvest in the Kladanj and Sekovici opstinas earlier this December, they decided to return again in latter part of December.

This time, the Bearcats, Soldiers from the Minnesota Army National Guard's Company B, 2nd Battalion, 136th Infantry, found themselves trudging in knee-deep snow up the steep and ice-covered hills in this small village on an Operation Active Harvest patrol.

The plan called for searching every outbuilding in this farming community, which is 1,800 feet above sea level, instead of just asking for the weapons.

"You get a little bigger hauls in remote areas," said Company Commander Capt. Tadd Vanyo, "but it is tougher getting to them and it takes a lot more manpower."

The extra effort was worth it. Combined with weapons and explosives turned in to the local authorities for their Harvest, 30 weapons and about a dozen land mines were collected this day. Stabilization Force Soldiers like the Bearcats support the local authorities in these weapon collections.

Vanyo said the areas his Soldiers searched were along the borders of areas which saw heavy fighting during the 1992-95 War. He noted these areas are the closest his soldiers have

*"You get a little bigger hauls in remote areas,"*

*- Capt. Tadd Vanyo*



Spc. Brian Kutter, TF Bearcat, searches an attic in a home.

# Active Harvest

## at soldiers hike the weapons search

been to the former front lines, about five kilometers.

During the war, Sekovici was an almost entirely Serbian town. Kladanj, just west of Sekovici, was a Muslim-held town. Sekovici was hit 800 times by shellfire from the Muslim side.

Spc. Brian Kutter said his platoon had previously collected weapons frequently from these opstinas.

Vanyo noted that the mission was started because local authorities told SFOR of reports of rifles being fired and possible heavy explosions in these areas.

Kutter and his fellow Soldiers also learned that some of the current residents didn't know that weapons were on their property. Many residents returned to their homes after the war to find they had been inhabited by other citizens.

The Soldiers were very respectful of this situation.

Kutter told a woman, whose farm's outbuilding yielded two bayonets and several rounds hidden in its rafters, "Ma'am, I want to thank you for your cooperation today. That's why we are here to keep this area safe because you don't know weapons are being planted on your property."

Vanyo said his Soldiers searched outbuildings, and primary locations like haystacks and abandoned cars.

The snow assisted in the search this day, single human tracks to a shed, haystack or wood line are indicators of suspicious activity.

"We've even found weapons hanging in trees," he said.

Other finds have included grenades in buckets and hidden underneath mattresses.

Vanyo noted that most residents are cooperative but there are still some who want to keep their weapons.

He assumed the reason for this is either to protect themselves or make themselves feel safer.

Either way, Vanyo's soldiers are doing these searches with high morale.

"Now, we're finding out (these citizens) are trying to make a difference and doing something about it so morale has been extremely high," he said.

Vanyo summed up these missions the best, "Yeah you're tired but you have a sense of purpose and accomplishment."



Staff Sgt. Kerry Mandt, TF Bearcat, looks at a bandolier of ammunition as fellow Bearcat Spc. Stephen Anderson marks their location on a GPS.



An elderly man sat on a haystack as he watched the TF Bearcat patrol leave Cosici.



Spc. Andrew Stockinger (left) and Spc. David Bangs, both of TF Bearcat, search an outbuilding.

# VTC facilitates deputy position

By Sgt. Brian Taylor  
TF Iron PAO

CAMP MCGOVERN, BiH— The video teleconferencing sites in Multinational Brigade (North) have proven to be a very successful use of technology. The VTCs have facilitated a marriage, a promotion and numerous “face to face” conversations between Soldiers and their families back home.

Recently, Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Thornwall, Task Force Iron, was interviewed via Camp McGovern’s VTC by the St. Louis County Sheriff’s Office in Minnesota for a position as a county deputy.

Representatives from the sheriff’s office used the VTC at the Duluth, Minn., Training and Community Center to conduct the real-time interview. A day later, Thornwall received an e-mail offering him the position.

“The only way I prepared for the interview was to have pressed BDUs,” Thornwall said. “And, to run some possible questions and scenarios through my head and think of possible answers.”

Thornwall’s current civilian job, as a sheriff’s deputy in another Minnesota county, is a two-hour drive from his home in Duluth. The new position in Duluth is

*“The only way I prepared for the interview was to have pressed BDUs.”*

— Sgt. 1st Class Thornwall  
Thornwall applied at St. Louis County last

January and interviewed in March. He narrowly missed being selected. While mobilizing at Fort McCoy, Wis., in August, a representative from St. Louis County called Thornwall’s wife and asked if he would still be interested in the position. As soon as Thornwall heard

the news, he put his name on the eligibility list.

“From FOB Morgan I was able to submit changes to update my background packet via fax machine,” Thornwall said. He added that St. Louis County worked hard at preparing his packet.

When asked if



Photo by Sgt. Brian Taylor, TF Iron PAO

**Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Thornwall, TF Iron, demonstrates a pressure point control technique during a nonlethal training class. Thornwall was offered a position as a sheriff’s deputy after a VTC interview.**

he thought being in Bosnia gave him an advantage, Thornwall replied, “I don’t believe being in Bosnia gave me an advantage. However, being in the military and my position as platoon sergeant may have.”

For Thornwall, the process was long and grueling, but it all paid off in the end. “I look forward to getting home and starting a new job close to home,” he said.

Technology has helped

American Soldiers worldwide feel a little closer to home. New uses for this and other technologies are continuing to be tested and improved.

Later this month, the VTC at Eagle Base will be used to hold a press conference between Soldiers and Sen. Mark Dayton to discuss the online college courses Soldiers have been taking throughout the Stabilization Force 14 rotation.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Nathan Winzer, TF Iron

**Staff Sgt. James Zahn, (left), Capt. Eduardo Suarez and Sgt. 1st Class Harold Lassi view a Web page at Camp McGovern.**

# Going the extra mile



Above: Sgt. Clayton Omberg, TF Bearcat, drives his humvee down a narrow mountain road near Urkovici last fall. Left: Staff Sgt. Michael Aslagson, TF Bearcat, pauses before boarding a FOB Connor patrol humvee en route to check on a waterline near Urkovici dug by Connor soldiers last fall.

## Bearcat soldiers help bring water to remote village

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

URKOVICI, BiH - Behind the wheel of an armored humvee in this small village last fall, Task Force Bearcat's Sgt. Clayton Omberg informed his vehicle leader and passengers, "This is where the trail is good."

"Good" was relative. Twigs smacked the passenger side of the humvee as it brushed against a high grassy bank. Looking out the driver's side windows, a few feet separated the grassy trail from a steep drop off.

The tires on Omberg's humvee and another humvee providing rear guard held firmly to the road as they cleared the top of the hill. The squad's mission: to check a waterline that it assisted in digging days before.

Forward Operating Base Connor Soldiers are well known for going "the extra

mile" in helping the local Bosnian communities.

Vehicle leader Staff Sgt. Michael Aslagson said that his Soldiers enjoy "hitting the back areas."

"It's really nice to go out and meet the locals," he said.

This was the fourth time that the site was visited by the Minnesota Army National Guard's C Company, 2nd Battalion, 136th Infantry Soldiers stationed at FOB Connor.

On their first visit, the Soldiers were told that about half of the homes in the village did not have running water. During the 1992-95 war, the waterline was cut in several places.

The village residents' main concern was that the waterline passed through the land of man they were not comfortable interacting

with, Schrage said.

The local community assisted the Soldiers with the work and took care of them throughout the day.

Seven Soldiers and six village residents undertook the task of digging the



Spc. Aeiiso Schrage, TF Bearcat, poses near a waterline he and several fellow FOB Connor soldiers helped dig a trench for near Urkovici.

approximately 350-meter trench with shovels and pick axes and installing a new waterline. It took about six hours to complete.

Schrage said the village people encouraged the Soldiers to take rest breaks several times.

The work was conducted during Ramadan and Schrage noted that an elderly Muslim man even

left at noon to pray and fasted in accordance with Muslim tradition.

"However, he outworked basically everybody," Schrage said.

A pipe was installed the next day in a spring about two kilometers away. Schrage said he and his fellow Soldiers escorted villagers, including the elderly man, who as a youth, remembered where the spring was located high in the mountains. Schrage said a white metal plate marked the spring in some rocks.

Whether driving these narrow mountain roads or hiking in the woods, Schrage and his fellow Soldiers will leave this country knowing that they made it better.

"(Doing tasks like this) gives us a reason for being here," he said as he pointed to the new waterline poking through the ground.

"Bringing a whole community running water gives me a reason to give up six-to-nine months of my life."

 **In our sights** 



Photo by Staff Sgt. Ralph Hurley, TFME

**Spc. Amanda Weeks, 334th Med. Grp,** was named as the Task Force Med Eagle NCO of the Quarter.



Photo by Sgt. Brian Taylor, TF Iron

**1st Lt. Fernando Franco, TF Iron,** demonstrates his artistic skills with spray paint near Camp McGovern's TOC by making this Red Bull art work.



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

**Spc. Carley Krekelberg and Staff Sgt. Daniel Bari,** both of TF Eagle, walk down the "runway" during the "Soldiers for Soldiers" Fashion Show, New Year's Eve at Peacekeepers Hall.



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

**Maj. J.P. Moszer, TF Eagle,** dances as Niki Barr sings during her concert New Year's Eve at Peacekeepers Hall. Sgt. Erik Solheid, 147th Fin. Bn., watches.



Photo by Capt. Randall Stillinger, TF Renegade

**Chief Warrant Officer Jimmy Ray (left),** explains to 49th AD Commanding General Maj. Gen. Michael H. Taylor and 49th AD Command Sgt. Maj. Rodger Brownlee how TF Renegade has increased its helicopter maintenance levels.