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TALON



Peacekeepers share international Christmas in MND (N)

Inside this issue:

Local students perform cultural show
Carabinieri trade presents for smiles

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A Soldier's Christmas

*Duty has called us in a dangerous world,
and it's hard to be away.
Such is the fortune of soldiers
as they keep watch on Christmas Day.*

*Think of us this holiday
and be sure to make great cheer.
No sad thoughts about our choice
to defend what we all hold dear.*

*We ask for only one gift,
just a simple thing.
Toast to us for tomorrow's sake,
Lord knows what that may bring?*

*Hold our families in your heart,
it's they who suffer most.
Pray for them and wish them well
before you make that toast.*

*How many holidays will we miss?
As for that no one can say,
but rest assured we're standing tall
on this very Christmas Day.*

*by Staff Sgt. Doug Bennett
E Co., 1-183rd TF
Avionics*



About the covers: Front, Santa gets a little last minute exercise in the 5k Jingle Bell Jog. Actually it's Lt. Col. James Thompson, Deputy Chief of Staff. *Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kelly Luster.* **Back,** Warrent Officer 4 Antonio Centonze shares a smile and his beret with a child at a local church. *Photo by Spc. Jessica Abner.*



Students take first bow at PK Hall

Story and photos by Spc. Jessica Abner

Assistant Editor, 354th MPAD

From day to day soldiers see the vast country of Bosnia while on patrol, building playgrounds, or providing healthcare. The citizens of Bosnia are used to military presence in their neighborhoods, however, it is not everyday they receive an opportunity to visit the soldiers' "home away from home" during the troops' six-month deployment. The students and teachers of the local Rainci Gornji Primary School had the chance to visit their uniformed friends at Eagle Base while presenting a program of folk dances, singing, and recitation.

Peacekeepers Hall was filled with Bosnian tradition and culture as the school-children took the stage to perform skits, sing songs and dance for the soldiers. The performance was similar to a play that would be done by students back in the States, but this performance was done in the Bosnian language and was filled with Bosnian tradition. A group of girls danced in traditional clothing, including long colorful skirts and headresses, allowing only the girls' faces to be seen.

"I thought it was a really good performance," said Sgt. Theresa Carson, Secretary to the General Staff NCOIC, HHC 28th Inf. Div. "I really enjoyed the folk dancing in particular, because I like seeing different cultures and it was nice to see kids."

Events like these help keep up morale and build cultural awareness. "I think it's good for the soldiers and all people to go to a different country and see part of the culture to better understand the people,"



A student recites a poem, which was part of the performance put on by his class at Peacekeepers Hall.

said Capt. John Taylor, operations officer, B Co., 142nd Military Intel. Bn. "I think it gives us a different perspective.

The soldiers and students all enjoyed the performance. According to Taylor, the experience reminds soldiers of their own children. "I have children and you forget how much fun it is having kids around. When kids are around, it feels normal; it's like, 'wow, I'm at home,'" said Taylor.

"My daughters are 13 and 15, so they are about the same age. It was nice to see the kids because I couldn't see my own," said Carson. "Kids are kids no matter where they're from."

According to Carson, the appreciation for the troops was very evident. "They take so much pride in performing for the soldiers and that really meant a lot to me." The children were also proud to perform for the soldiers.

Alma Mesic, a 15-year-old student, said she realizes how hard it is for the soldiers to be away from their families. "It was really great to be here with your Army and I thought the soldiers were friendly," said Mesic. "I know they have children in America and it's sad they don't see them while they are here."

Mesic also said preparing for the performance was easy. "I practiced after school with friends. I love to sing. I was singing my country's most beautiful songs. I would like to be a singer."

After the performance, the students went to Triggers, a club on Eagle Base, where they were served pizza and soda sponsored by donations from soldiers. The troops continued getting to know the children while playing darts, pool and foosball. Everyone smiled and laughed as they shared lunch and games together.

"It was wonderful and very beautiful. I am glad to be here for the children," said Envera Kusturica, the group's teacher. "It is my first time on Eagle Base and if we can, we want to do this again. The soldiers have helped the children after the war and this is



Capt. John Taylor, B Co., 142nd Military Intel., teaches a student the finer points of playing pool at Triggers.

a good thing."

Mesic also appreciates what the soldiers do for her country. "The job the soldiers do is really good. They are far away from their moms, dads, and their whole family. It's hard for them to be here, but they know the importance of being here, and they're happy to do it," said Mesic. "I'm so honored to do this, you're the best people on earth and I'm really glad to be here."

With support from family back in the States, as well as the citizens of Bosnia, many soldiers will have a bright holiday during their stay at Eagle Base — a soldiers home away from home.



A group of girls dance wearing traditional Bosnian garments.

Christmas is a global celebration

by Sgt. 1st Class Marty Collins

354th MPAD

All around the world, people celebrate Christmas with traditions and customs. Sometimes these traditions and customs are hundreds or even thousands of years old. One may not even know how or why a tradition was established or when it began. Christmas around the world is centered on family and children in particular. The holiday season is traditionally a time in the United States when friends and family come together and share faith, joy and goodwill. It should come as no surprise to those serving on a multi-national division task force that some holiday customs and traditions are very similar throughout the world.

Slovakia

Capt. Peter Vacha, of the Slovakian Air Force, is a displaced persons and refugee analyst; stationed at Eagle Base, Bosnia. He shares some of the holiday traditions of his native land, Slovakia.

Vacha, his wife and three children reside in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. "During Christmas, close friends and the whole family come together," said Vacha. The Slovakian Christmas celebration is three days-Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and the following day is the "Stefan" festival. The three days are considered national holidays and during the three day celebration Bratislava has parades and festivals as well as carolers who sing their way through the city streets.

Plum brandies, called slivovica and



Capt. Peter Vacha

borovieka as well as medovina, are traditional drinks that flow at the "Stefan" festivals. "There are a lot of vinegars in Slovakia, almost everyone has a good piece of land. It's a traditional drink and almost everyone produces their own wine," said Vacha.

On Christmas Eve the entire family fasts until dinner to enjoy a traditional Slovakian Christmas meal. A tree adorned with home made decorations, blinking lights and shiny tinsel stands guard in the living room, but there are no presents under the tree. "Before dinner the parents or the owner of the house puts the presents under the tree," said Vacha.

In Slovakia, the main course served at Christmas Eve dinner is fish. Their scales are said to bring wealth into the household. "Dinner is a big celebration, it usually takes over two hours sometimes more," said Vacha. The family begins the meal with fruit. The head of the family takes an apple or orange from a basket and each piece of fruit is cut into slices. Each family member then eats a slice to symbolize the sharing of family. Then the head of the family breaks open a walnut. Tradition says if the meat inside the nut is healthy it symbolizes the family will have good health and luck for the year. But if the meat inside the nut is spoiled or stained, it means there may be trouble ahead or someone may become seriously ill in the family.

Next comes Kapustnica, a soup made of sauerkraut, sausage, mushrooms, and caraway seeds and generously seasoned with paprika. Potato salad made of potatoes, pickles, peas and moistened with a bit of mayonnaise is the next course. The main entree is fish. The fish is usually purchased from a local vendor in a downtown market and is selected by the purchaser and netted by an attendant. It is brought home alive wrapped in newspaper. The day of the meal the fish is cleaned and prepared for frying.

After the main entrée is served, the family enjoys a favorite Slovak Christmas treat. Obaltky is a paper-thin sweet wafer, as big as a plate and sometimes rolled into tube. "Most families make their own but you can buy them already prepared," said Vacha.

After dinner and everyone is finished, the children gather around the Christmas tree and the head of the family passes out the gifts to the little ones. Symbolically, Jezisko, which means "Baby Jesus", is the one who brings and lays the gifts beneath the tree. "We also wish everyone in the family good health, because if you have a problem you can buy almost everything, but not your health," said Vacha.

One special Christmas memory for Capt. Vacha occurred in December 2000. He had

been studying at the Defense Language Institute in San Antonio, Texas, for five months. An elderly Czech couple who were familiar with the military school invited him to their home for Christmas dinner "Once I arrived at their home I presented them with a present from Slovakia, we had the traditional Slovakian dinner and I felt like I was at home," said Vacha.



2nd Lt. Valtteri Vuorisalo

Finland

"Traditionally we gather around with the family, as you do, but what makes it different is that we celebrate on Christmas Eve," said 2nd Lt. Valtteri Vuorisalo, Finnish Cimic Officer. The Christmas tree is set up on Christmas Eve and apples and other fruits, candies, paper flags, cotton and tinsel are used as decorations while candles are used for lighting it.

Christmas in Finland marks a turning point when light begins to take over the darkness of a long and damp autumn. In Finland, the Christmas holiday is a three-day celebration: Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and the day after is known as St. Stephen's Day.

The Christmas festivities are preceded by a visit to the famous Finnish steam baths. "We'll go to the sauna and what makes it especially nice is after the sauna we jump into frozen lakes which gives an excellent feeling, which is comparable to nothing," said Vuorisalo. This is a tradition that has been done for hundreds of years.

At noon on Christmas Eve the "Peace of Christmas" is proclaimed in Turku, the former capital of Finland, along with greetings dating from the Middle Ages. Most Finnish citizens listen to the ceremony on the radio and it marks the beginning of the

Christmas feast. "We have pork roasting in the oven, although lately people have been switching to turkey as well," said Vuorisalo. Other delicacies include boiled codfish served snowy white and fluffy with allspice, boiled potatoes, and casseroles.

Finnish legend has it that Santa lives at Korvatunturi, north of the Arctic Circle. "Joulupukki (Santa) actually visits on Christmas Eve and visits the children while giving out gifts," said Vuorisalo. Finland differs from most other countries in that Father Christmas really does visit the home in person on Christmas Eve. In Vuorisalo's family the tradition is that instead of Santa visiting, it would be one of Santa's elves because Santa was too busy. Actually, none of the men in Vuorisalo's family wanted to dress up like Santa. So, one of Santa's elves visited and distributed the gifts.

One of Vuorisalo's most memorable holidays was when he figured out that the elf passing out the gifts was not legitimate. "I was seven, I guess I was sad," said Vuorisalo. He realized the elf was wearing the same Christmas boots as his cousin, who he had seen earlier. He didn't ruin the party for the other children that Christmas Eve, but later he and his mother had a long discussion regarding the mysterious elf.

Vuorisalo's Christmas wish is for peace on earth and a smooth return process back to Finland next year. "I feel lucky to be here and privileged to do this work," he said.

Denmark

The sharing of holiday cheer with friends and neighbors is an essential part of the Christmas season in Denmark. Lighted candles appear everywhere in homes, schools and churches. Inge Nedergaaro, paymaster, Danish Contingent, from Copenhagen says the practice of lighting candles is a very old tradition.



Inge Nedergaaro

The candles create an atmosphere of warmth and coziness.

In Denmark, the first of December marks the date when Christmas or Advent calendars are put out. Advent is a tradition more than 300 years old. It begins four Sundays before Christmas. Advent means "coming" and the coming of Christ. Every Sunday a candle is lit before Christmas Eve. They say that it is to count down the days until Christmas. Each candle stands for something-joy, hope, faith, and peace. Each Sunday, every child receives one present.

Christmas Day and the day afterward, called the Second Christmas Day, are both holidays in Denmark and are usually spent in an extended celebration with family and friends. "Christmas Eve is the main day when we have Christmas," said Nedergaaro. In the morning one present is opened then later in the afternoon the family arrives for the holiday festivities. Usually the dinner consists of roasted pork or duck with cab-

bage and rice pudding for dessert. Rice ala Mande is served in a big bowl located in the center of the table with one almond hiding inside. Whoever finds the almond in the pudding receives a present traditionally but not necessarily a marzipan pig.

Christmas in Denmark also marks the time when the mischievous elf, Julnisse, has his fun. He is said to live in attics and the lofts of old farmhouses. He likes to play jokes on one and all. He wears gray woolen clothes, a red bonnet, red stockings and white clogs. Families leave him a bowl of rice pudding or porridge on Christmas Eve to keep his jokes within limits. Usually he is kind and helpful aiding the farmers and being especially good to children.

"Santa is called Jule Mander and when my niece and nephew were small my mother dressed up like Santa and handed out the gifts," said Nedergaaro. Christmas in Danish is called Jul; an old Nordic word for "feast", and it is the biggest holiday in Denmark with traditions that go back centuries. After dinner the children sing songs and dance around the Christmas tree then afterwards open their gifts.

Nedergaaro will not be with her family this holiday season like most of the soldiers here. She has spent many holidays traveling the world. One of Nedergaaro's most memorable holidays was spent in the African Sudan under a Babobab tree. "Spending Christmas in Bosnia is different. The Danish contingency will have a celebration at Dobojo," said Nedergaaro.

Christmas is steeped in tradition, no matter what country you are from. Nations and families have their own specific traditions during the holidays and these celebrations and customs have been passed from generation to generation. No matter what part of the world you are in, the tradition of Christmas is one of joy, faith and hope. Merry Christmas.



SFOR soldier gets a little creative

Story and photo by Spc. Jessica Abner

Assistant Editor, 354th MPAD

As you're walking to work in the morning, a brightly lit object on wheels catches your eye. You think your eyes are playing tricks on you, so you look again and confirm 'Yes, it's a soldier on what appears to be a bicycle.'

This is no ordinary bicycle. According to Sgt. Anthony Pope, avionics mechanic, E Co. 1-183rd Avn., it all started with a coffee-cup holder. "A month after we got here, I started gathering parts here and there. Whatever I gathered along the way I put on the bike," said Pope.

Now, the bicycle is decked out with more conveniences than some luxury cars. Pope conveniently added a seat with back support and a canopy, which provides some protection against the rain. "It keeps me dry while I'm riding around," said Pope. He later added the luggage on the back and then Christmas lights.

In addition, the bicycle now sports even more Christmas decorations, appropriate for the holiday season. Rudolph the Red Nose reindeer is in the lead, yet instead of guiding Santa and the rest of his reindeer, he guides Pope to wherever he wants to go.

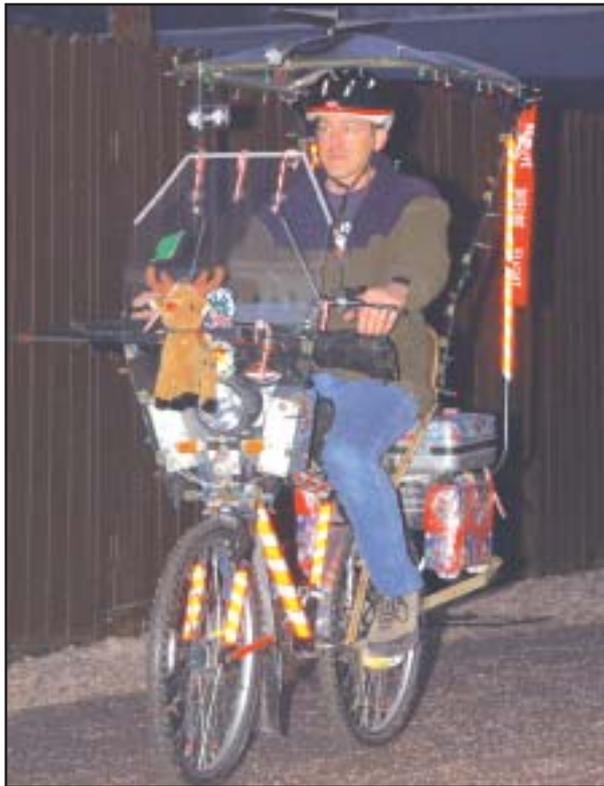
According to Pope, he has always been

creative. "I built a dune buggy, which is my toy back home. Since I've been here, I've built a simulated fireplace for one of the soldier's hooches." Being creative and spending time adding parts to his bike is relaxing. "I find it very therapeutic, not only for me, but for everybody. It also helps pass the time," said Pope, who spends about two hours every other night working on his bike.

Pope also said the soldiers' reactions are what his project is all about. "The soldiers in my unit get a kick out of it. They laugh and wonder what I'm going to do next. Every now and then, people donate things for it," said Pope. "Soldiers look at it and laugh or smile and that's what it's all about, that's what makes it all worth it."

What is Pope's next addition? "I'll probably have some New Year's decorations, maybe a ball dropping or something," said Pope.

After the rotation, Pope plans to pass



Sgt. Anthony Pope

his creation to the incoming replacements. "I'll probably donate my bike to the next crew coming through and see if they're up to the challenge to continue the tradition."



Left, The 28th Infantry Division Band marches to the beat of the drum as they make their way along Salute Alley to the Balkan Grille. The band also put on a performance for their fellow soldiers at Peacekeepers Hall. *Photo by Major John Dowling.* Top, The Education Center staff pose next to the the winning entry in the Christmas door decorating contest sponsored by the Morale Welfare and Recreation office. *Photo by Spc. Jessica Abner.*

Carabinieri deliver early Christmas to children of local church parish

by Maj. John Dowling

Commander, 354th MPAD

Armed with a truckload of Christmas gifts and holiday cheer, the Italian Carabinieri delivered Christmas a little early to some children from a local church near Eagle Base.

More than 10 soldiers dropped off donations from companies and individuals back in Italy for the needy children of St. Anne's Church in nearby Par Selo.

Col. Antonio Colacicco, the Multinational Specialized Unit commander, traveled from Sarajevo specifically to be there while "Santa-binieri" and the rest of his merry elves delivered packages for the children who accepted them with open arms and open hearts. The MSU CIMIC Headquarters personnel on Eagle Base organized the event.

"We are very happy to be able to come to this parish and through these presents put smiles on faces of the children living here," said Colacicco. "We brought Christmas gifts for girls and boys who live in



by Maj. John Dowling

Maj. Aniello Sansone plays Santa and hands out gifts at a local church.

the area. There are toys for all ages inside boxes. That is a small token of appreciation for these children."

Before the gifts were distributed, Father Marijan Marjanovic, the church pastor, welcomed the visitors with traditional Bosnian coffee and baked goods. As the children began to migrate to the church after being released from school, they filed into the church where Marjanovic celebrated Mass in their native language.

The Italian guests sat proudly on the altar as the church choir honored them with song from the balcony and Father Marjanovic thanked them for their kindness in

front of the children. Many of their parents also attended.

"We are very grateful to the Carabinieri for what they did for us," said Marjanovic. "Besides Christmas gifts for children, they provided clothes and food for the church. We will deliver those to the old and sick people in order to bring some warmth and Christmas spirit in their homes and to show them they are not forgotten."

During the service, Marjanovic encouraged the children to learn something from the soldiers and model their sense of sharing. It is by sharing that all people will develop understanding of each other and bring healing to this country where many have suffered as a result of not caring for their fellow man, said Marjanovic.

Sharing is a concept the Italians have in Bosnia and since their arrival in 1998, said Colacicco. Besides the humanitarian aid of food, clothes and personal products, the soldiers have also arranged to have computers donated from home to advance the children's skills in the latest technology.

Much of the kindness has centered on orphanages near Camp Butmir and Sarajevo where several hundred MSU soldiers call home.

The soldiers have also built a relationship with churches back in Italy that share St. Anne's name. A statue of St. Anne is being shipped courtesy of St. Anne's Church in Naples as a reminder to the people of this parish of the soldiers from Italy who made their Christmas in 2002 a little bit brighter.



by Spc. Jessica Abner

Before the children arrived at the Church, the MSU team unloaded Christmas gifts from a storage truck.



by Spc. Jessica Abner

A little girl receives a gift.

