



Ramadan Zymberi, a 62-year-old ethnic Albanian farmer from the Mucibaba region of Kosovo, shares a laugh with patrolling troopers from Company C, 2-6 IN.

Leaders and soldiers alike understand the stakes: the road Mini's platoon guards runs through the heart of vulnerable border communities. Minimizing the flow of contraband along the road may well reduce bloodshed in this war-torn region.

"It's a major route in and out of the Presevo Valley," Mini said. "We've basically shut down all weapons and contraband going through there. If the checkpoints weren't here, I think it would be worse."

"Traffic varies quite a bit," added the 24-year-old native of Redding, Calif. "It can be anything from hundreds of cars to just a few depending on the day."

Joint missions such as guard duty at Checkpoint 75 accomplish intangible objectives as well as physical tasks.

The presence of American and Russian guards reinforces the perception of Kosovo Force neutrality and enhances the credibility of peacekeeping operations. Serbs' historic ties to



Pfc. Ben Dojaquez of Co. A, 1-35 AR, and Pvt. Ramil Mangurov of the 13th Russian Tactical Group verify a traveler's credentials Feb. 12 at Checkpoint 75, Kosovo.

Russia and Kosovar Albanians' rapport with NATO countries leave both sides with a traditional ally serving as honest broker.

"Throughout Kosovo Americans are known for impartiality," Mini said. "It may be good for the Albanians, seeing us working together."

Joint cooperation also bodes well for relations between the former

Cold War rivals. Soldiers collaborating at Checkpoint 75 enjoy extremely cordial relations.

Few lower-enlisted Russian soldiers speak English fluently, and still fewer American soldiers understand a lick of Russian. But most Russian leaders speak at least a bit of English, and soldiers often struggle past the language barrier with mutual second-tongues such as German, gestures, tones, symbols and good will.

"We talk with them, usually about the different experiences they've had in the military," Mini said. "Our soldiers want to know what kind of training they've done. They talk about where they're from, make climate comparisons, things like that."

"Sometimes we'll trade unit patches or something like that," he continued. "They'll try to trade a 'mag light' for a Russian babushka."

According to U.S. troops, the highly sought babushkas – round fur-lined hats worn by Russians during cold weather – cost at least "a pair of boots or a 'mag light.'"

American leaders and troopers cultivate a good rapport with their Russian counterparts and often demonstrate a keen understanding of the opportunities before them.

"I think all my soldiers grew up at least during the end of the Cold War," Mini said. "I don't think any of us expected to be working side by side with Russians at a checkpoint at Kosovo. There's been no hostility between us and the Russians or anything."

"Ten to 15 years ago, you wouldn't think we'd be doing this," West agreed. "But we need to move on with the future ..."

Checkpoint 65, known by American soldiers in Kosovo as Outpost Terminator, lies just west of the Ground Security Zone in the hills of the Mucibaba region of Kosovo.

Often the only functional checkpoint in the American sector, "Terminator" attracted a booming business last winter.

"We were averaging around 1,000 vehicles per day until the

Gnjilane."

An influx of refugees greeted newly arrived IAD troops last December. "When we first got here we had a big influx of (internally displaced persons), but we haven't seen any in a

real long time, so maybe that's a good sign," Leibert said.

Third Platoon troops understand their role in a larger enterprise.

"We have the same mission as

everyone here in Task Force Falcon: providing a safe and secure environment for all ethnicities," Leibert said.

"Our mission is stability in the region; stability on the boundary itself," added Sgt. 1st Class Donald Land, the 3rd Platoon sergeant.

Yet the soldiers manning Outpost Terminator take pride in accepting and accomplishing an especially rigorous guard mission.

Unlike soldiers who conduct duty at other checkpoints, who typically work 24-hour or one-week shifts,

*"I'm happy the KFOR people are here. Now I don't have to be afraid anymore."*

*Ramadan Zymberi, Albanian farmer*

weather turned bad; we've been averaging around half that since the weather got bad," said 1st Lt. Tony Leibert, leader of 3rd Platoon, Co. C, 2-6 Inf. Rgt.

According to Leibert, between 40,000 people and 80,000 people passed through Checkpoint 65 since his platoon arrived Dec. 3.

Checkpoints exist to deter traffic in contraband, but travelers through the busy mountain pass consist "mostly (of) Albanians living within the safety zone wanting to go to work in



Soldiers from , Co. C, 2-6 IN, ponder noises in the distance the afternoon of Feb. 12 during a patrol of the Mucibaba region of Kosovo near "Outpost Terminator."