



**Pvt. 2 Charles Cheney, 1st Battalion 36th Regiment, looks through his binoculars Thursday at the sector surrounding the checkpoint in Outpost Sapper, Kosovo. Right: Sgt. Robert Lewis searches a local ethnic Albanian for illegal weapons, as Spc. Cameron McCullough keeps watch. Vehicles that enter and exit the border must be checked.**

— PHOTOS BY DALE BROWN/  
Stars and Stripes



# On the lookout

## U.S. troops watch, wait at tense Kosovo border

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OUTPOST SAPPER,  
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Using the shine of the moonlight along with a mental map of the trail, a group of Army combat engineers navigates up and down a ridge, 150 meters from the Serbian border.

"We're just trying to see if there's any activity," says Pfc. Jeremy Mathis before grabbing his night-vision goggles to scan the horizon.

Except for the hum of the baseball stadiumlike flood lights, it is unusually quiet at this small, tank-guarded U.S. military outpost.

It is rare that soldiers like Mathis — of Company A, 16th Engineer Battalion, 1st Armored Division of Giessen, Germany — do not hear automatic gunfire across the border near the village of Dobrosin, where a small but growing ethnic Albanian guerrilla group trains for what might be another battle with Serbian forces.

Sporadic violence in the border region the past month has renewed concerns among soldiers

that the guerrilla army is provoking the Serbs to fight, a situation that could draw U.S. forces into the conflict and present NATO officials with a political dilemma.

Last month, a series of bomb blasts rocked southeast Serbian towns of Buganovac and Presevo, both near the U.S.-controlled section of Kosovo. Belgrade officials blamed the explosions on "Albanian terrorists."

Less than a week later, hundreds of ethnic Albanians fled southeast Serbia near Kosovo after police reported that the last two Serbs living in a village, an elderly father and daughter, were murdered. NATO-led peacekeepers said the ethnic Albanians feared reprisals from Serbian police and left.

Some soldiers say that the recent incidents might just be the beginning of more clashes between Serbs and ethnic Albanians, who dominate the region south of the Kosovo border.

Ethnic Albanian guerrillas are "provoking the Serbs," said Army Capt. Tom Hairgrove, commander of Company A.

An observation tower atop a

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## In an unsecure place, 'brothers' have found security in each other

Jeremy Mathis and Dan Fareh consider themselves brothers who are inseparable.

They do everything together. That's why the two soldiers with the Germany-based Company A, 16th Engineer Battalion, 1st Armored Division are thrilled they ended up at the same, small Army outpost in Kosovo.

It has given them security in a unsecure place. "It's nice to have someone from home that you've known forever, and you can just sit down and talk with and they know where you're coming," Mathis said. "It's nice, relaxing. It takes a lot of stress out of being here."

The 20-year-olds have spent most of their brief careers on the same path because of the Army's little-known Buddy Enlistment Program, which allows up to four friends to go through basic training and their first duty station together.

Mathis and Fareh, both first-class privates, said they could not imagine surviving the rigors of basic training and the separation from home without the support of

each other. The same goes for their first deployment to the Balkans.

"I can't imagine doing it alone," Fareh said. "There's no way I'd be able to make it through without his comfort."

"It would be miserable," Mathis said.

The two have been friends since eighth grade. In their hometown of Central Point, Ore., they worked similar jobs, went to the same schools and hung out with the same group of friends. They acted much like brothers.

And then five years ago, they actually became brothers. When Fareh's mother died of cancer, Mathis' mother agreed to adopt his best friend. It is something that Fareh still thinks about today. Speaking about it makes his eyes well up with tears. The death of his mother was a crushing blow, but he said Mathis helped him through it.

"He was always there," Fareh said. "Whenever I needed somebody to talk to, he was there for me."

In September, Mathis came to Fareh with the idea of joining the Army. Fareh refused at first, but he later gave in and



**Pfc. Dan Fareh, left, and Pfc. Jeremy Mathis, both assigned to Alpha Company 16th Engineers Battalion, are "brothers" serving at Outpost Sapper, Kosovo. The pair entered the Army on the Buddy Enlistment Program and elected to serve in Kosovo together.**

— DALE BROWN/Stars and Stripes

signed up. He quit his job at a company that made industrial transformers; Mathis left his job as a pizza shop manager. They have no regrets.

"We wanted a new adventure," Fareh said. "We liked our jobs. But they were too monotonous."

Through the Army's buddy program, they went through boot camp together and followed each other to their first duty station in Giessen, Germany.

Initially, they weren't supposed to go to

Kosovo on the same rotation, but Fareh switched assignments with another soldier. They're glad the soldier agreed to swap.

Being together in Kosovo, they said, is like having a little bit of home with them.

"He does things for me that nobody else can do," Mathis said. "When I'm ... wanting to go home and I'm homesick and what not, he knows what to say and make it better. And vice versa."

"We're really fortunate," Fareh said.

— Scott Schonauer