



Staci McKee/DN



Armed with heavy boots, a pen and paper, Daily Nebraskan Senior Editor Matthew Waite interviews a U.S. soldier near the tiny village of Kalesija. Below, Photo Chief Staci McKee poses with Mehmed Atic.



Misconceptions lost, friends found, on visit

Matthew Waite

It isn't everyday that I go to a war zone.

I admit, my dorm room is a mess — so much so that my girlfriend will only go there if it is absolutely necessary — but this was different. This was real.

Before I left for Bosnia, I knew nothing about the area. I knew there was a war. I knew people had died.

Now, I have fallen in love with the place and the people.

It was a Monday afternoon when I found out Staci McKee, the Daily Nebraskan photo chief, had arranged for two seats on a Nebraska Air National Guard flight to Germany that was carrying Nebraska media.

Without a moment's hesitation, I volunteered to go.

I had seven days to arrange for funding, get packed and study up on the history of the area. And I needed a passport.

In those days, people told us every imaginable kind of lie about the former Yugoslavia. They said the place was a bunch of rat holes. The people were armed to the teeth and ready to fight at the drop of a hat.

It wasn't until I got there that those misconceptions melted away.

Our flight there took us through New Hampshire, then to Germany. We stayed one night in Germany and were on a C-130 (which an Air Force officer described as a garbage truck with wings that sounds like the inside of a giant air conditioner) bound for Tuzla.

We arrived on the base and were carted around to do interviews with Nebraska natives that the public affairs office had set up for us. It was snowing, but it was only about 28 degrees with 80 percent humidity. After the cold spell in Nebraska that we had just left, it was Heaven.

The military was not giving housing (more like tenting) to media, so we were left to our own devices.

Not good. There are two hotels in Tuzla —

the Hotel Bristol and the Hotel Tuzla. Both are nice, modern hotels. Both were full.

Thanks be to Allah that The Associated Press hires a couple of native Tuzlans to set up member media with housing and a translator.

They set us and the Omaha World-Herald up in an apartment at the equivalent of \$750 in American currency for the week and provided translators for each of us for the week.

We went from 10 a.m. to sometimes after 2 a.m., trying frantically to get stories and photos that we could look at and say, "Yeah, that was worth \$2,700." And we could sleep when we got back.

For four days, Staci and I poured our souls into these stories. We saw poverty and sadness on a level that I never will be able to forget.

We also saw kindness and generosity the likes of which I will never see again.

We were strangers in a strange land, and people would take us into their homes and give us everything when they had nothing to give.

And it is not just the horror and pain that I take home with me. I take home stories of people just being people.

If I wouldn't have sunk \$3,000 in tuition and housing into this semester, and if I didn't have loved ones to come home to, I would have stayed.

I pray that peace will hold. I fell in love with the city and its people in just a matter of days. It wasn't hard.

From the mountains that surround the city — despite being littered with land mines — to La Palma, a little restaurant that served great Muckalica, an ethnic dish that tasted like sweet chili with veal, I left a piece of my heart there.

I do not know what I would do if war were to destroy that.

Waite is a junior news-editorial major and Daily Nebraskan associate news editor.

Tuzla

Misunderstanding a question about his future, Pejcinovic said the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina hinged upon several factors.

"There are a few things first; because with the Dayton agreement, there was no real peace," he said. "That's not really peace. There is pressure because of the instability that maybe there will be war again in one year.

"First of all, we have to repair our factories and our economy," he said. "We have to learn about our state and our country. We have to find power in our minds to do all that we have to do."

Pejcinovic is angry now. His words are louder and stronger. His English is slipping.

"We are used to fighting," he said. "Fighting with weapons or with our minds. It is not strange to fight."

Things have quieted down in Tuzla since the Dayton accords and the arrival of American soldiers. As nationalistic as Pejcinovic is, he said he saw the soldiers as good.

"That is a sign that they are so sure that what they are doing is good and that they will do what they promised," he said.

And like a politician, Pejcinovic changed the subject to his agenda.

"But I think America is not the solution," he said, starting a lengthy sermon against the NATO Implementation Force.

"It looks like IFOR doesn't want to get the war criminals," he said.

Radovan Karadzic, the leader of the Bosnian Serbs and under indictment for war crimes by the U.N. War Crimes Tribunal, was on television in Pale. IFOR was in the next building.

"But they did not get Karadzic," Pejcinovic said, pounding the table. "Even though they could do it, they didn't."

"If all criminals would be punished in the court in The Hague (the seat of the War Crimes Tribunal in the Netherlands), there would be peace in Bosnia.

"If not there wouldn't be peace in Bosnia. There wouldn't be peace in the Balkans."

Pejcinovic continued his tirade against the U.N. and the European Community, which started to try and make peace in the Balkans,



Bosnian Muslim 1st Army patch

by repeating the mantra "Give us our guns" over and over. He said the arms embargo was killing Bosnia.

"Since we are a state and we have to defend, we need ways to get guns," he said.

"All we want is to get all criminals. They kill our sisters, our brothers, our fathers, our mothers, our people."

After helping Pejcinovic with some words, Atic told him he sounded like a politician. Somewhat taken aback, Pejcinovic defended his words.

"It's not political; it's rational thinking," he said, angry again. "We were for four years, without water, without electrical energy."

Pejcinovic then turned to politics again.

"Only we can make peace in Bosnia and in Balkans," he said, referring to the tenuous alliance of Bosnian Muslims and Croats. "Only the Bosnians and Croats may stop fascism in the 21st Century."

"Only we may stop it because we know what fascism is. We feel, with our lives, that fascism."

Atic said in Bosnian that he was crazy. Pejcinovic disagreed.

"I think that I am not crazy if I say that we Bosnians save Europe from fascism."

When asked about his future, again, he merely shrugged.

"My satisfaction is live in Bosnia," he said, his broken English flaring up again. "Because in Bosnia, people love God, love life and my place is right for Bosnia."

He said he will always live in Bosnia.

"When is war, I fight," Pejcinovic said. "When is peace, we make state stronger."