

Governor's Column - 12/23/01

Holiday Season Time for Peace and Charity

“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.” – *President Abraham Lincoln, 2nd Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865.*

The trip to Bosnia was originally scheduled to be a gift-bearing trip to our Mississippi National Guard soldiers participating in the Bosnia peacekeeping mission. Mississippi National Guard adjutant general James H. Lipscomb escorted me, along with a group of elected officials and media to deliver holiday packages and messages to the soldiers from loved ones in Mississippi. Approximately 421 Mississippi guardsmen stationed in Bosnia are from 35 communities. From Amory to Biloxi, from Sardis to Natchez, these citizen soldiers have responded to the call for peace.

Our mission was to take a bit of the Holiday Season from Mississippi to our troops in Bosnia. Upon arriving in Bosnia, we quickly became the recipients of the true meaning of the Holiday Season – Peace and Charity. The men and women who are serving in the Task Force First Battalion, 155th Infantry – the Task Force Rifles - are providing peace to a country that has no peace.

Major General H. Steve Blum, Commander of the American Forces in Bosnia, relayed to me how impressed he was of our men and women from Mississippi. Not only are our soldiers among the most proficient in helping local authorities and patrolling operations, they are also considered some of the best in assisting civilians in bettering their quality of life.

While in Bosnia, I noticed major damage to almost every structure. This is a country with no appreciable infrastructure. Our guard members have not only provided peace, they have also provided supplies and food directly to the people of Bosnia. A community we visited was holding school in a hollowed out basement structure with no heat during temperatures with highs of 25 degrees. Our Mississippi guard worked with the local community to find a suitable, heated and enclosed facility in the area where the children could spend time learning in a more appropriate environment.

There are so many other stories I could tell you about the trip, from meeting with the troops, to our visits in the Bosnian communities. Our Guard troops in Bosnia are giving the greatest gift – the gift of peace and charity. After visiting with our soldiers and the Bosnian people, I want to say a special thanks to the family members and employers of these men and women who are serving.

Peace and charity are not only overseas, but also around the corner. Unfortunately, this year, we as Americans and Mississippians know something about the disruption of our

peace here at home. In an instant, so many lives were dramatically changed on September 11. We lost two men from Durant on that day. I also think of families in Mississippi who have recently lost a loved one through the tornado and flooding our state has experienced. Traveling around the state during these disasters also showed me how our communities respond to these events that disrupt our peace. You can say that our troops learned the meaning of peace and charity right here at home.

The Holiday Season means peace and charity. Peace and charity here in Mississippi, in the United States, and peace and charity with the men and women who serve in the military and national guard overseas who are demonstrating the true meaning of the Holiday Season.