

Pvt. Lopez shares military life with former U.S. adversaries in Asia

By MICHAEL TOLZMANN
Army and Air Force News Service

CHIRCHIK, UZBEKISTAN — It was an unusual sight to see the son of a Dallas couple in this extremely dry and starkly barren land. It was the same region Genghis Khan conquered over 800 years ago, and until recently Soviet troops ruled with an iron fist. Instead, these former Cold War enemies were smiling, laughing and dancing together, showing off their weapons, shaking hands and even occasionally embracing one another.

Army Pvt. 2 Eduardo L. Lopez, son of Agapito Lopez and Sandra L. Medina-Lopez of Dallas, was one of more than 500 American soldiers who literally "dropped in" to the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan where instead of conflict they were welcomed with open arms.

These countries now independent, were born after the break-up of the U.S.S.R., and are desperately fighting to move away from the rigid, institutionalized, communistic society they've always known, and become more like the free-market societies of the West. Hosting the American Army was a chance for them to learn about the West, and its military, first hand.

Lopez, a member of the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division from Fort Bragg, N.C., brought his infantry expertise—and a parachute—to Kazakhstan on a 20-hour nonstop flight. Follow-

ing three in-air refuelings that kept the aircraft aloft, he jumped out of the C-17 airplane and into American military history. The flight was recorded as the longest associated with an airborne jump.

Once on the ground, Lopez and his fellow soldiers began a peacekeeping training mission, including interaction with armies from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Latvia, Georgia and NATO ally Turkey.

"After we hit the ground with our parachutes, our mission was to set up and operate several traffic control points. I operate a squad automatic weapon. We also interacted with the other countries' troops at a tent city compound. We traded several items with them and got a taste of their different cultural customs," said Lopez, a 1996 graduate of Dallas Senior High School.

At the military camp, groups of foreign soldiers swarmed around the Americans, looking for a chance to trade anything they had for an American souvenir or badge. Lopez had plenty to learn from these soldiers, and experienced life in this obscure part of the world.

"It's important for the U.S. to interact with these countries in a peaceful manner—during the Cold War they were our enemies. A great distance separates us, but we both have the same purpose of defending our countries with honor" Lopez said.

For Lopez, it's hard to

compare this place to anywhere he's been before. The average soldier here makes less than \$50 per month. Most free-market transactions occur with the barter system, as citizens sell melons, soda, and other goods on the side of the road.

"The food is very different here. It's mostly rice, barley or noodles, with veal, beef, horse or cow tongue. They eat sponge bread, pita bread, or hard rolls and goat cheese. It's been an interesting dining experience," Lopez said.

Once this short training exchange is over, Lopez will return to Fort Bragg and his life in America as a soldier.

"We'll be going back to Fort Bragg where I just recently acquired the expert infantry badge. It is a very high award, and difficult to get, for any infantryman. This is an award that we train for and earn—not everyone can get it," Lopez said.

The Asian soldiers here are sure to continue with traditional goose-step marching and other Soviet influenced practices for some time to come. But the experience they shared with Lopez and the American Army may strengthen their vision of the future, a future where friendship has replaced hatred.



During an elaborate military and cultural ceremony, local Kazakhstan people, in their traditional wear, demonstrate their historical horse riding activities. Games and races were played on horseback as the American paratroopers watched nearby. (Photo by Gary R. Coppage)



Army Pvt. 2 Eduardo L. Lopez and more than 500 members of the 82nd Airborne Division recently flew halfway around the world to the countries of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for peacekeeping training. (Photo by Gary R. Coppage)

Schedule

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easier to teach when you don't have to stop in the middle of the lesson. I teach from bell to bell."

Several other teachers would not comment on the new schedule when asked to do so.

A few changes have also been made in what's needed to graduate. The class of 2000 will be required to acquire 26 credits instead of 23. They will also be required to turn in a completion project in order to graduate. Galicki feels this leaves room for creativity. "We can start looking at setting up internships and allowing more students to take college credits."

Also, the moratorium on field trips has been lifted. However, only two school days can be missed on overnight field trips.

Even so, there are still some of

kinks. The science department feels they still are losing time, about 50 hours. Science labs are now conducted during class instead of having a separate lab period. Galicki readily admits that they are going to need to look at how classes are being taught and determine what classes need to be added to the curriculum.

Jennifer Vodzak, a senior, feels that Dallas doesn't have the facilities to run on this schedule. "If Dallas had a bigger building and the administration worked with the teachers, (the schedule) would work better."

"The flex period has improved a lot. There's more control."
John McCarthy
English teacher

PROPERTY TRANSFERS

The following property transactions were recorded at the Luzerne County Courthouse the week of Dec. 12-18, 1997.

R.J. Langan Construction, Inc. to Kenneth M. Rutolis, et ux, 146 Elmcrest Woods, Dallas

Boro., \$214,900.
Robert J. Mitkus, et ux to Patricia M. Leonard vir al, Lot 25 Meadow Crest Manor, Jackson Twp., \$118,000.
William H. Hughton to David Jones, Lot 41 Wordon Place, Lake Twp., \$45,000.

L-L taxpayers cancel Jan. meeting

The regular monthly meeting of the Lake-Lehman School District Taxpayers Association scheduled for Thurs., January 1, has been cancelled.

The meeting Thurs., Feb. 5, will be held in the Lehman Township Municipal Building located on "Old Route 115", and will start at 7:30 p.m. All taxpayers are urged to attend.

No trash collection on New Year's

DAMA wishes to remind customers that there will be no collection of trash or recyclables on New Year's Day, Thurs., Jan. 1. Thursday collection will be on Fri. and Fri. collection will be on Sat.

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