

# WSWS reader comments on the US media and the Balkan war

17 June 1999

To the Editor:

On Monday night I watched Ted Koppie on the American television newsmagazine 20/20 tour Kosovo with the first wave of KFOR troops. Among the many horrible images: Serbs fleeing their homes, the deserted ethnic Albanian villages, the wrecks of bombed buildings, one moment particularly struck me. 20/20 showed footage of two Serbs in a car opening fire on German KFOR troops in Prizren. The Germans responded, killing one of the men instantly and wounding the other. At one point in this gruesome scene, the cameras showed the doors of a medical vehicle close on a German soldier who was, "slightly wounded," as I believe Mr. Koppie remarked. The critically wounded Serb, after receiving first aid from a man the whom the *New York Times* identified as an NBC producer, "was left to die on the street." The *Times* also reported that a grenade was found in his pocket.

Even after 78 days of NATO bombing I still find this inhumanity incredible, and the lack of commentary about this incident of coldheartedness by the press, at least the American press, deeply disturbing. The only comment the *New York Times* made about the behavior of the German KFOR troops in Prizren was to note their "exceptional bravery." Perhaps the producers of 20/20 felt that the images spoke for themselves. And certainly one television producer demonstrated that he valued human life. But the behavior of these NATO troops was inexcusable. Medical attention lay a few yards away and even if this Serb had been the worst sort of pogromist (and could it not be likely that he was only defending his country from foreign invasion?), he did not deserve to die that way.

I would expect soldiers of any army to return fire when fired upon, and I understand that in war one treats one's own wounded first. But am I wrong in assuming

that medical attention from NATO forces was deliberately denied to this man? Mercy is component of war just as much as killing, and there was no mercy here. The *World Socialist Web Site* has called the bombing of Yugoslavia merciless: after 78 days of bombing, after one man's ugly death, that word can never again be cliché. NATO has made "merciless" mean something.

Sincerely,  
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