

## **Brief Overview of the Involvement of the Canadian Forces in Bosnia**

### ***Historical background***

After the Second World War, the socialist federation of Yugoslavia was formed under the strong leadership of Josop Broz Tito, who had been the leader of a very effective group of partisans during the war and had developed a great deal of credibility. He was viewed as a unifying symbol and his leadership and policies helped maintain the peaceful coexistence of the different republics within the Yugoslav federation that was formed after the war. After his death in 1980, tensions emerged among the republics and the diverse ethnic and religious communities. In 1991 some of them entered into a series of conflicts that lasted for the rest of the decade.

### ***Operation Harmony – CANBAT I***

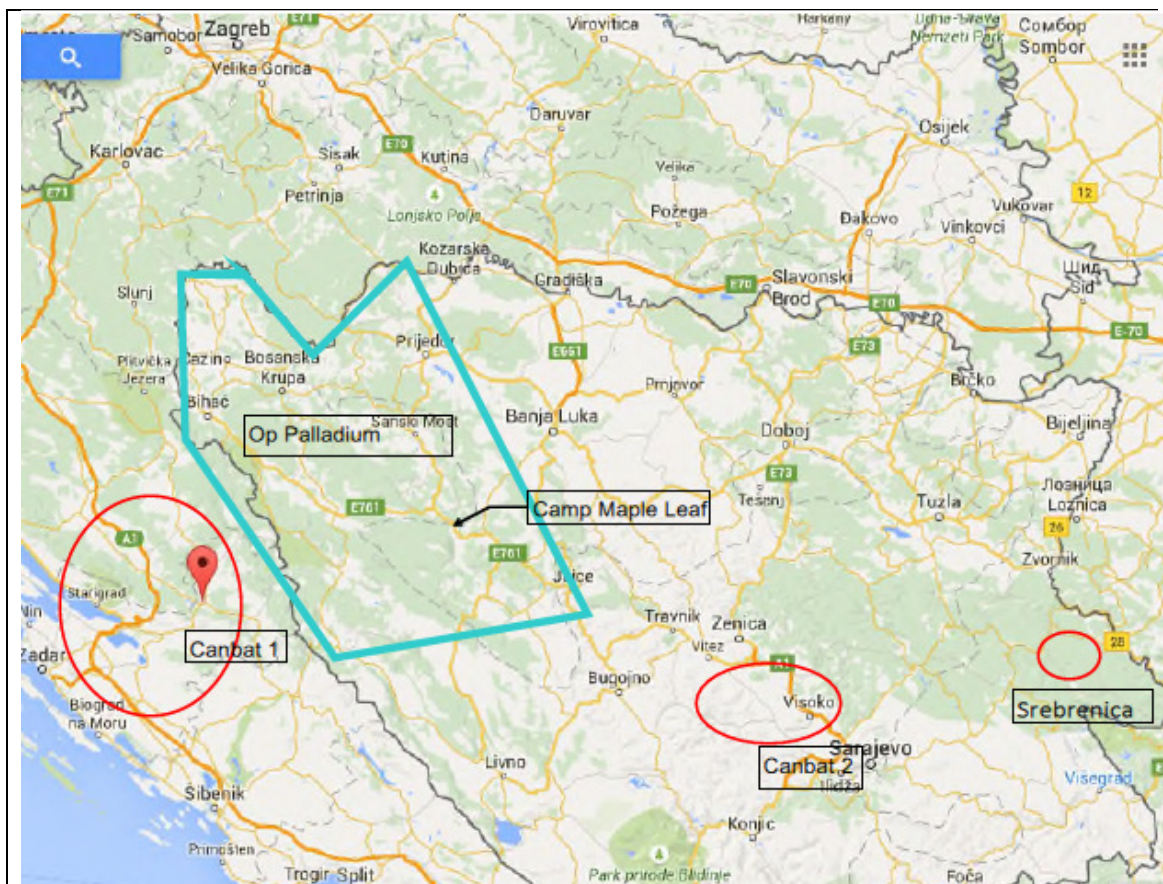
The conflict started in Croatia, where the opposing groups were the Croats and the Serbs. After some vicious fighting, the two sides agreed to a tentative ceasefire. This period was generally used by both sides to reorganise and re-equip. When the ceasefire was declared, the UN sent a peacekeeping force (UNPROFOR) into the area to supervise it. Canada contributed Canadian Armed Forces (CF) members to UNPROFOR by deploying a mixed force known as CANBAT 1 to the south-western part of Croatia in the spring of 1992. Canada also provided CF members to the United Nations Peace Forces Headquarters (UNPF) in Sarajevo. This operation was referred to as Operation *HARMONY*.

### ***Operation Cavalier – CANBAT II***

While the situation in Croatia was stabilising, a three-way war broke out in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The three ethnic communities in this republic – the Orthodox Serbs, the Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosniaks all started to fight around the regional capital of Sarajevo. At that time, UNPROFOR's headquarters and main supply bases were located at Sarajevo. In response, the UN created UNPROFOR II for Bosnia. Its mission was different from UNPROFOR I in that it was designed principally to escort aid convoys and protect sanctioned humanitarian efforts within certain regions of Bosnia. In theory, the UN had freedom of movement. In fact the conflict was so localized that well-armed groups of one ethnic persuasion or another would hijack food from the UN, while rogue bands would ambush and kill UNHCR drivers and steal their vehicles and supplies. All three belligerent groups, short of fuel and transport, were inclined to seize UN vehicles and repaint them for their own use. Generally, the Bosnian Serbs did not want the UN forces operating in the territory they controlled whereas the Bosnian Croats and Muslims favoured the UN presence to act as a shield. The UN wanted a force that would deter such acts without provoking the belligerents.

The first deployment of Canadian troops to Bosnia, referred to as Operation CAVALIER, occurred in November 1992. For this operation, Canadian Battalion 2 (CANBAT II) moved from Canada by ship to the Adriatic and then on to UNPROFOR 1's Sector west in Croatia, where it was held up while continuing negotiations between the UN and the belligerents delayed its deployment into Bosnia. Eventually, CANBAT II was ordered into Bosnia and established a camp in Visoko, just north of Sarajevo. This camp was occupied for a period of 3 years. It was a dangerous area since the areas controlled by the three warring parties converged near that location. Once established in Visoko, CANBAT II was responsible to escort UNHCR convoys through this area – particularly from Sarajevo to Tuzla.

In the fall of 1995, Croatian forces, backed by the United States, initiated a successful offensive into the UN Protected Areas in Croatia, overrunning the UN forces positioned there and driving the Serbs out. At the same time, the Bosnian Serbs overran the Srebrenica UN protected area in eastern Bosnia and removed the predominantly Muslim population there. Only a sustained diplomatic effort and the deployment of elements of the NATO Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (with airpower) to Sarajevo prevented an escalation of the war.



Map above shows approximate areas of deployment – Most Hussars were with CANBAT II in Visoko or with SFOR at Camp Maple Leaf

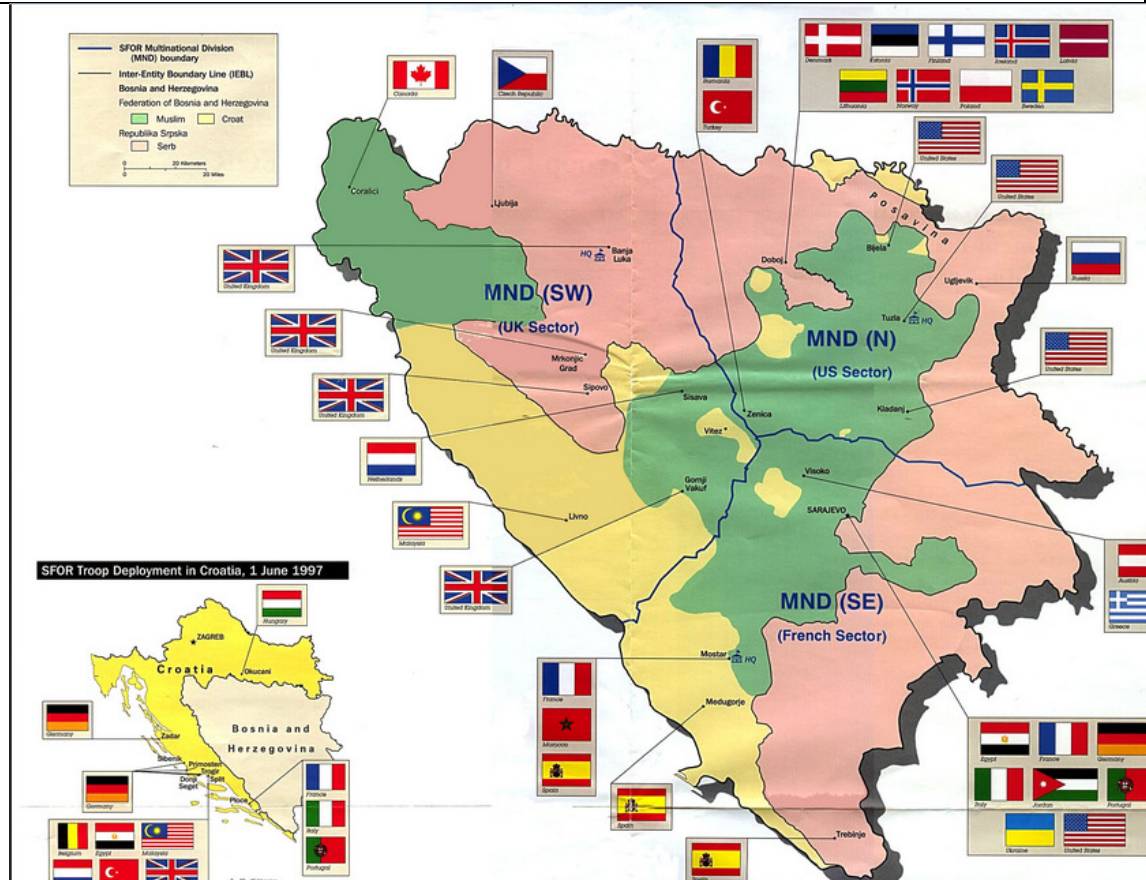
### ***Operation Alliance - IFOR***

With the December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1995, signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace at Paris, after negotiations conducted at Dayton, Ohio (referred to hereafter as the Dayton Peace Accord), the responsibility of overseeing the security of the country and the cessation of sectarian violence was transferred from the United Nations to NATO. The Dayton Peace Accord provided for a decisive restructuring of the Bosnian Republic, dividing it into 2 semi-independent entities, the Republic of Srpska, which was dominated by Serbs, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which grouped together the other two ethnic communities. In late 1995, NATO's 60,000-strong Implementation Force (IFOR) entered Bosnia and Herzegovina to ensure that the belligerent parties complied with the terms of the agreement.

As a member of the NATO Alliance, Canada was called upon to contribute to the force. Designated Operation ALLIANCE, the Canadian participation in IFOR incorporated two six-month rotations of more than 1,000 troops. In addition to the provision of brigade headquarters and signals personnel for IFOR's multinational brigade (2 Canadian Multinational Brigade and, later, 5 Canadian Multinational Brigade), the CF deployed an armoured reconnaissance squadron, an infantry company, an engineer squadron, a national support element, an advanced surgical centre and a military police platoon. Their tasks included establishing freedom of movement throughout the area of operations, supervising the withdrawal and separation of the previously warring factions and their heavy weapons, patrolling cease fire lines, supervising the removal of land mines and unexploded ordnance, settling disputes and helping with the redeployment of UN personnel and equipment still in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Canadian sailors and air force personnel also served in support of IFOR as part of the ongoing maritime blockade and enforcement of the "no-fly zone" in the region.

Without the assistance of IFOR, the peace agreement would not have endured, nor would the civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace Accord have been achieved.

MAP SHOWING THE DIVISION OF THE ETHNIC COMMUNITIES AND THE DEPLOYMENT OF NATO TROOPS



Distribution of ethnic communities after the war :

- The pink area was largely populated by Bosnian Serbs;
- The green areas were largely populated by Bosnian Muslims; and
- The yellow areas were largely populated by Bosnian Croats.

All three ethnic communities used a single language: Serbo Croatian.

The NATO forces in Bosnia were organised into 3 commands.

- The Southern command (originally referred to as South-east (SE) command during IFOR) was comprised principally of German and French troops;
- The Northern command was comprised principally of American troops; and the
- North-West command (originally referred to as South-West (SW) command during IFOR) was comprised of troops principally from the United Kingdom, Canada and the Netherlands. This sector was sometimes referred to as the UK sector.

### ***Operation Palladium - SFOR***

Approximately 1 year later, IFOR evolved into SFOR (the Multinational Peace Stabilisation Force). The Canadian Forces supported this effort through Operation Palladium from 1996 to 2004. The SFOR mission was to deter or respond to violence and thus provide the safe and secure environment necessary for the consolidation of peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the goal of promoting a climate in which the peace process could make progress without the presence of NATO forces. Specifically, SFOR troops would patrol so people could go about their daily business without fear.

The Canadian contingent in SFOR was known as Task Force Bosnia-Herzegovina (TFBH), and its headquarters and support base were located at Camp Black Bear in Velika Kladusa, a town in north-western Bosnia and Herzegovina near the Croatian border. TFBH formed part of the Multinational Brigade Northwest, headquartered at Banja Luka, which also had Dutch and British contingents. The three nations took turns providing the Brigade's commanding officer.

Within the area of responsibility assigned to the Multinational Brigade Northwest, the Canadians were deployed principally in Canton I, which was largely a Bosniak area in the extreme north-west corner of the sector. The Dutch were deployed in Cantons X and VI, which were largely Bosniak and Croat areas in the southern part of the sector, and the UK was deployed in the north-eastern portion of the sector inhabited principally by Bosnian Serbs.

The Canadian area of operations comprised more than 9,200 square kilometres, an area about the size of Cape Breton Island. In this area, the Canadians conducted operations near the Croatian border, between the cities of Velika Kladusa (in the north), Bihac, Zgon, Drvar and Tomislavgrad (in the south).

On December 2, 2003, NATO confirmed that the security situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina had improved to such a degree that the strength of SFOR could be reduced from 12, 000 to 7, 000 troops by June 2004. In line with other NATO members contributing troops to SFOR, Canada reduced its commitment proportionately.

### ***Transfer to the European Economic Community***

Near the end of 2004, it was deemed that the three ethnic groups could safely live together in a country that had achieved a certain level of economic and political stability. At that point, the mandate of providing international assistance in Bosnia was transferred from NATO to the European Union and the Canadian Forces were redeployed to other locations.

## Staffing of the Canadian contingent stationed in Bosnia

The Canadian Armed Forces contingent in the theatre of operations was staffed using a plan that rotated the troops on the ground after a period of approximately 6 months. These rotations were generally organised around the military structure in Canada. One of the brigade groups in Canada would be tasked to send a battlegroup to the region including infantry, armour, artillery, engineers and logistical support. When the brigade groups did not have the sufficient regular force soldiers available to fill all positions in a rotation, they would ask their related militia command structures to augment their numbers with militia soldiers. When it was the turn of the *5<sup>e</sup> Groupe-brigade mécanisé du Canada* in Canadian Forces Base Valcartier to deploy one or more of its units, it generally called upon militia units in the province of Quebec to fill the vacant positions. One of the units that provided militia soldiers in this manner was the Royal Canadian Hussars. The table below lists the RCH members who participated in these rotations.

### Summary of deployments of RCH personnel to Bosnia

Operation	Rotation	Period (year-month)	Resources	Personnel
Cavalier, CANBAT II	1	1993-04 to 1993-10	7	Cpl P Bornn Cpl K Duknic Cpl RD Ivey Cvr S Bourque <b><u>Cvr A. Roy (Tatoo)</u></b> Cvr Arseneault Cvr K Raymond
Cavalier, CANBAT II	3	1993-11 to 1994-05	9	MCpl M Stringer <b>Cpl B Cobby</b> Cpl Gaumond-Leclerc <b><u>Cpl Y Bilodeau</u></b> Cpl M Gazaille Cpl Legault Cpl Martel Cpl Paradis <b>Cpl J Rioux</b>
Harmony, Croatia	1	1993-10 to 1994-04	1	<b>Cpl B Mowat</b>
Alliance - IFOR	2	1996-07 to 1997-01	4	Cpl C Arnsby <b>Cpl B Cobby</b> Cpl M. Fex Cpl M Legault
Palladium- SFOR	5	1999-08 to 2000-02	2	<b>Cpl E Duckworth</b> Cpl J Wakil
Palladium- SFOR	9	2001-10 to 2002-03	2	Cpl F Pelletier Cpl V Hamelin
Palladium- SFOR	10	2002-04 to 2002-10	2	<b>Cpl G. Bériau</b> Cpl K. Ishmael
Palladium- SFOR	14	2004-03 to 2004-09	8	<b>Lt R Thibault</b> <b><u>Lt T Sykes</u></b> <b>Lt M Bisson</b> WO M Stringer Cpl Duplessis Cpl Liamine <b>Cpl PJ Pilon</b> Cpl Richer

Source: RCH association web site

Red-Underlined = Deceased subsequently

Blue-Bold = Participant in history project

Most of the Hussars deployed on these operations were employed as drivers. On the last rotation, when the Afghanistan missions were starting to compete for military resources, some officers and NCO's were also deployed.

Regardless of the role that they played, these soldiers lived some interesting experiences and saw some very different things. Their lives were very much at risk, especially from unmarked minefields and dangerous road conditions.

Some of the members listed above have volunteered to work with the authors on the present project to document their experiences while they were on site in the theatre. The stories that follow are accounts of their experiences told principally from their point of view.

#### Bibliography

- [www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad-past/op-harmony](http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad-past/op-harmony) - **Operation Harmony and other operations**
- The War in Bosnia, 1992-1995 – 1993-2000 – Milestones, US Department of State, Office of the Historian

#### Footnotes

1. To facilitate the reading of this document, the belligerent forces mentioned therein are referred to using simplified names. The term Serbs, refers to the Army of Republika Srpska, which was comprised mostly of Bosnian Serbs. The term Bosniaks, refers to the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH), which was comprised mostly of Bosnian Muslims; and, the term Croats refers to the Croatian Defense Council (HVO), which was comprised mostly of Bosnian Croats.