



ROYAL CANADIAN HUSSARS

HISTORY DOCUMENTATION PROJECT

INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP EXPERIENCES OF RCH MEMBERS DURING
THE BOSNIAN DEPLOYMENT DURING THE PERIOD FROM 1993 TO 2004



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Foreword

The history project that resulted in the publication of this document was undertaken in 2015. It was aimed at documenting the individual or group experiences of Royal Canadian Hussars who participated on a military mission overseas. Each individual's experience was documented as a separate summary.

When documenting these experiences we tried to take note of the location of deployment, the role the individual played in the location, the description of the unit to which they were assigned, and the unit's activities. Where possible, we have also described the soldiers' day-to-day routine, their uniforms and equipment, and any interesting stories or experiences that they were prepared to share. The texts are complemented by pictures or maps generally provided by the soldiers themselves.

The purpose of the project was to provide future members of the unit as well as the families and friends of the soldiers involved with an idea of what occurred during these operations, and what it felt like to be a soldier at this time in history. The summaries have been assembled in a PDF document that is to be made available at no charge to members of the unit, project participants, their families and friends and other members of the public.

The Royal Canadian Hussars Association holds the non-exclusive transferable publication rights of the final document. Each of the project participants holds the rights to their own story and their pictures. Copies of the document or permission to reprint it in whole or in part can be obtained by communicating with a member of the executive of the association. For more information, please contact: The Royal Canadian Hussars Association, 4185 Cote des Neiges Road, Montreal, Quebec, H3H 1X2.

This record was prepared in 2015 and 2016, many years after the events occurred. The authors prepared this record principally using information obtained during interviews with the individuals involved. Where possible, this information was corroborated through interviews with others and a review of pictures and other available information. The record presents the events as the individuals remembered them several years after they occurred.


Since many of the participants in this project were attached to sub-units of the *12^e Régiment blindé du Canada* and the *5^e Groupe-brigade mécanisé du Canada*, and since many of the sub-units mentioned in the text were composite units comprised of members of the regular force and the other three reserve armoured units based in Quebec – The militia branch of the *12^e Régiment blindé du Canada* in Trois-Rivières, the Sherbrooke Hussars, and the *Régiment de Hull* – it is a history that is shared with those units.

The initial versions of this document are mixed language versions, with each participant working in his or her language of choice. Once all stories have been documented, fully-translated versions will be prepared.

We thank all those who participated in the project for having given their time and effort and for their willingness to share their experiences with future generations.

Principal authors and collaborators

The principal authors of this text, aside from the individuals recounting their stories, were John Cochrane, and Marina Tinkler. Other members of the association have helped out in the project notably to contact the individual participants and to review, improve and format the documents. They include Chuck O'Donnell, Robin Thibault, Steven Barrett, Philippe Chevalier and others.

	<p>John Cochrane is a former member of the Royal Canadian Hussars. He served in the Canadian Armed Forces Reserves from 1971 to 1991. He first joined the Sherbrooke Hussars and then transferred to the Royal Canadian Hussars when he moved to Montreal in 1977. He served as a troop leader in A squadron, as the regimental training officer, the adjutant, the officer commanding B squadron in St Hubert, the Deputy Commanding officer and finally as the Commanding Officer from 1984 to 1987. After having served as Commanding Officer, he went on to command Militia district number 1. In his civilian life, John was a Chartered Professional Accountant who served as an employee and then as a partner successively at Coopers & Lybrand, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton. He retired from public accountancy in 2015.</p>
	<p>Marina Tinkler is John's niece and goddaughter. She was raised on a family farm in the Eastern Townships and moved to Montreal to continue her education. At the beginning of this project, she was a student at Concordia University in the English Literature Honours program. Upon graduation from Concordia, she was accepted to pursue a Master's degree in Literatures of Modernity at Ryerson University in Toronto. Since John invited her to participate in this history documentation project, she has had the privilege of meeting several members of the Royal Canadian Hussars and hearing about their firsthand experiences as soldiers deployed overseas.</p>

Project participation and suggestions for improvement

If any Hussar who served in this deployment wishes to participate in the project and add their story to future versions of this document, they can initiate procedures to do so by contacting the undersigned. Also, please let us know if you see an error or an area that can be improved. Please send any questions, comments or suggestions to:

John Cochrane – john.s.cochrane@videotron.ca – 514-591-9455

Cover pictures provided by: Mike Bisson. Troop from A squadron of 12 RBC on Patrol in Bosnia in 2003.

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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. 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*.

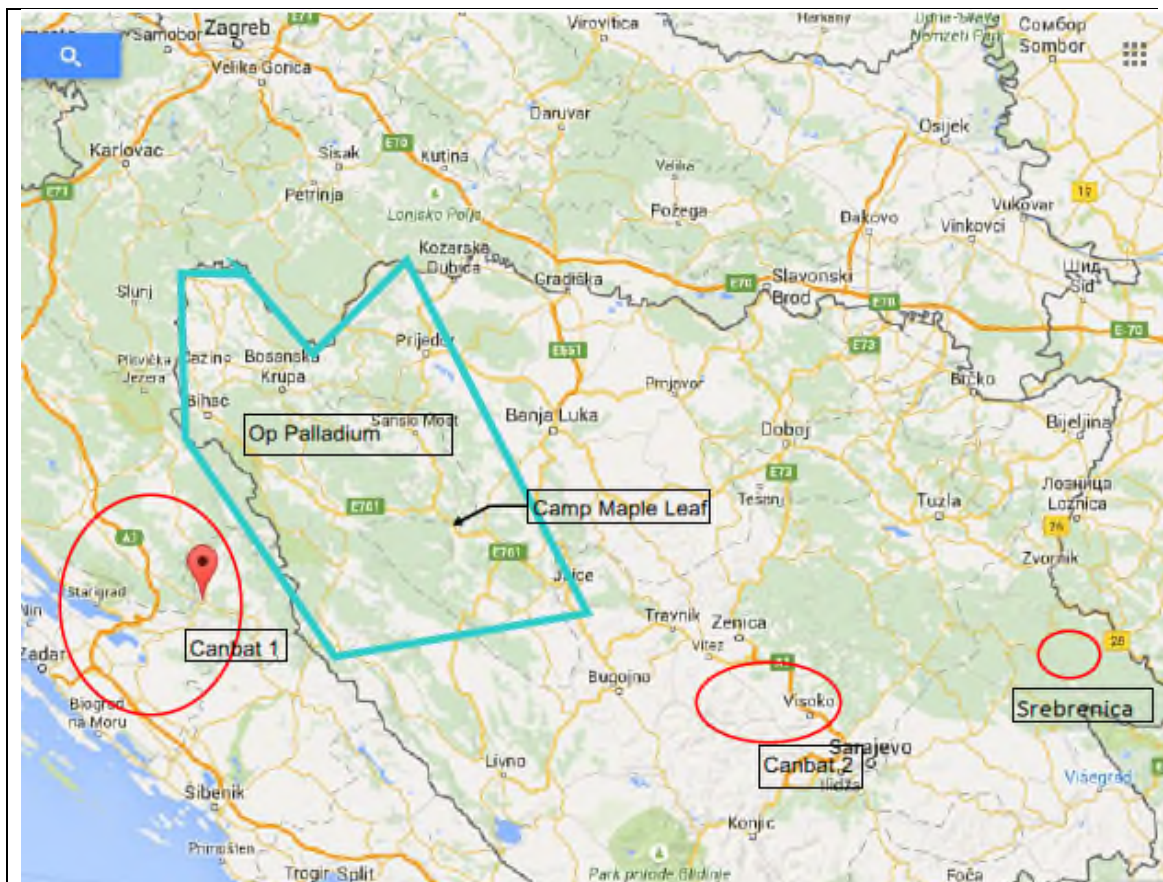
Operation Cavalier – CANBAT II

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 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, repaint them and divert 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 I'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 three 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

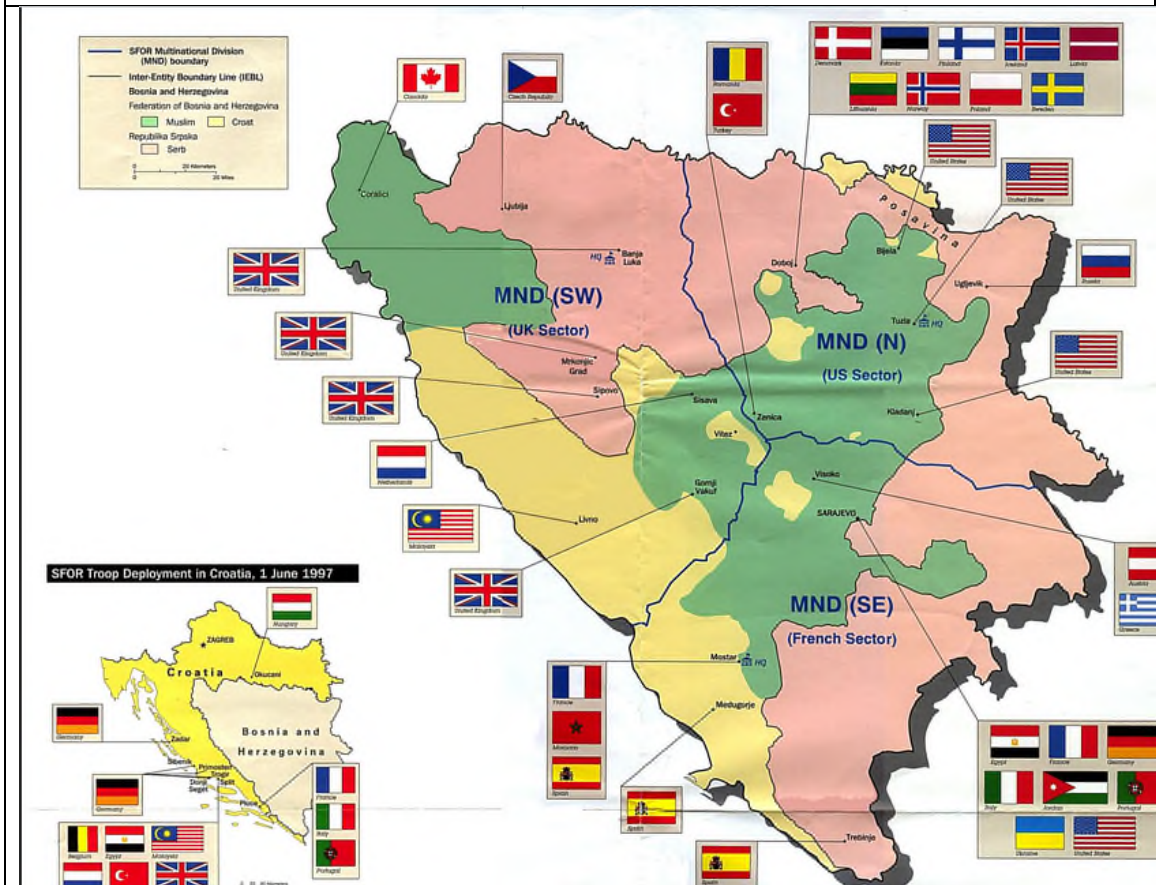
Operation Alliance - IFOR

With the December 14th, 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 resulted in a 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 NATO, 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.

Map provided by SFOR

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^e 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 <u>Cvr A. Roy (Tatoo)</u> Cvr Arseneault Cvr K Raymond
Cavalier, CANBAT II	3	1993-11 to 1994-05	9	MCpl M Stringer Cpl B Cobby Cpl Gaumont-Leclerc <u>Cpl Y Bilodeau</u> Cpl M Gazaille Cpl Legault Cpl Martel Cpl Paradis Cpl J Rioux
Harmony, Croatia	1	1993-10 to 1994-04	1	Cpl B Mowat
Alliance - IFOR	2	1996-07 to 1997-01	4	Cpl C Arnsby Cpl B Cobby Cpl M. Fex Cpl M Legault
Palladium- SFOR	5	1999-08 to 2000-02	2	Cpl E Duckworth 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	Cpl G. Bériau Cpl K. Ishmael
Palladium- SFOR	14	2004-03 to 2004-09	8	Lt R Thibault <u>Lt T Sykes</u> Lt M Bisson WO M Stringer Cpl Duplessis Cpl Liamine Cpl PJ Pilon 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 - **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.

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Jacques Rioux's story

1993-94 - Operation Cavalier with CANBAT 2 Battle Group in Visoko



*Picture of the compound at the CANBAT 2 Battle Group camp in Visoko – transport section is parked along wall at extremity of the camp
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

Authors' note

The principal authors of this text, aside from the individual recounting the story, are John Cochrane, a former member of the unit, and his niece Marina Tinkler, a Concordia University literature student. This record of events was prepared in 2015, many years after they occurred. The authors prepared this record principally using information obtained during interviews with the individuals involved. Where possible, this information was corroborated through interviews with others and a review of pictures and other publicly available information. The record presents the events as the individuals involved remember them several years after they occurred.

Jacques Rioux's story

Corporal Jacques Rioux was deployed to Bosnia from November 3rd, 1993 to May 5th, 1994. In Bosnia he worked as a driver of a 2½-ton truck in the regimental transport section of the *12^e Régiment blindé du Canada (12 RBC)*.

Preparation for the mission

After Jacques volunteered for duty in Bosnia, he was sent to Canadian Forces Base Valcartier in January of 1993 where he was attached to the 12 RBC transport section to start his preparatory training. His training group practiced driving, vehicle maintenance and minor repairs, the towing of broken down vehicles, and the actions to be taken if they had to abandon a vehicle. They also practiced working on convoys, on what to do if the convoy was ambushed, and on how to deal with locals. He still remembers attending a lecture warning the students to avoid undertaking amorous relations with the local women. He was still young and remembers being slightly embarrassed by this type of discussion. At the end of the training period, the transport section participated in a final confirmatory exercise where the course participants were asked to set up a mock camp. During this exercise, some soldiers who had previously served in Bosnia were asked to play the role of the belligerents. To the surprise of Jacques and his colleagues, these belligerents snuck up whenever the convoys were stopped and stole any piece of equipment that was not secured, including some jerry cans of gas that had been strapped to the sides of the vehicles. Once he was in Bosnia, Jacques realized just how realistic this roleplaying was.

Deployment to Bosnia

Jacques was deployed to Bosnia with the other elements of the 12 RBC that were rotating into the field and taking up the role of Canadian Battle Group 2 (CANBAT 2). CANBAT 2 was already established as the 2nd Canadian Battle Group operating in the Balkans. The first battle group (CANBAT 1) was operating in Croatia. Various units would rotate into CANBAT 1 and 2 for periods of approximately six months. On this rotation, CANBAT 2 was a battle group based on the 12 RBC. It included an infantry company from the *Royal 22^e Régiment (R22eR)*, as well as artillery, engineer and various support elements. It served in the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), Bosnia and Herzegovina. All these troops moved to Bosnia on several flights over a period of two weeks in the fall of 1993, replacing a group of soldiers who were already present on the ground.

Jacques and the other members of the transport section boarded a chartered Air Transat flight in Quebec City bound for Zagreb airport in Croatia. During a stop in Paris to refuel, a problem developed with the landing gear resulting in a 2-day layover. Unfortunately, because the delay would only last until the plane was fixed, the troops had to stay in close proximity to the airport and could not enjoy the city. Once they landed in Zagreb they were met by an administrative team who performed their in-clearance. They then boarded a Russian Ilyushin IL-76 Cargo plane for the flight to Sarajevo.

Night convoy to the Canadian camp

Upon arrival that night at the Sarajevo airport, the transport section was immediately put into service. The troops that they were replacing had driven their trucks to the airport and were now waiting to board

the airplane. The departing troops had left their blue helmets and flak jackets and Ziploc bags full of ammunition in each of the vehicles for the new arrivals. Once the drivers were assigned to a vehicle, each of them tried to find a helmet and flak jacket that fit them. Jacques remembers being stressed because he could not find one that fit his large body. The question of weapons also concerned him. The new arrivals had brought their rifles but they had been disassembled and packed in their barrack boxes. For security purposes, the bolts to the weapons had been shipped separately. Even though the soldiers IAS12 had their bags of ammunition, this ammunition could not be used until the weapons were reassembled.

Jacques remembers driving a 2½-ton truck in a convoy back to the battle group's headquarters and base camp near Visoko. This camp was approximately 32 kilometres to the northwest of Sarajevo. He remembers that as they left the airport, the mirror of his vehicle clipped another vehicle. However, in the rush to move out, he did not dare stop and fill out an accident report like he might have done in Canada. The convoy then moved along several smaller roads taking an indirect route to Visoko. This took over two hours. Jacques later found out that a nicer, straighter highway linked the two locations but that it was not used because it had not been cleared of mines and other obstacles. Since he did not know the route, he followed the vehicle ahead of him and hoped he would not get lost. On the way, he experienced another stressful incident. At one point, as the convoy was moving along the small roads, a motorcyclist turned onto the road and positioned himself between Jacques' vehicle and the one that he was following. Jacques could see that the motorcyclist was carrying an AK47 rifle that was strapped to his back. Jacques started to worry that this individual might be about to cause trouble and started to think about what he could do if this individual opened fire or took some other aggressive action. Fortunately, the motorcyclist turned off the road several kilometers later and the convoy carried on to the fortified camp.

At the base camp, they entered the main gate and turned into the parking lot that was to be the transport section's parking lot for the rest of the tour. There a small delegation welcomed them, gave them their baggage, showed them to their living quarters and dismissed them for the night. In all, it had been a stressful night for the newly arrived transport section. In short order, they found out they were expected to perform even if they had not had the time to familiarize themselves with their new location.

CANBAT 2 Base Camp at Visoko

The Canadian Camp at Visoko was to be their main home for the next six months. It was organised around two buildings, one was a large multi-story warehouse referred to as the megaplex. Inside this structure, large tents had been set up on the upper floors to provide segregated sleeping quarters for the different units posted there. Within each of the large tents, the soldiers hung sheets to have a little bit of privacy.

The second structure, which was referred to as the Crystal Palace, contained the work areas for the Headquarters, medics, administration, post office, logistic and transport sections. Around these structures were the different vehicle parks for the different sub-units.

The perimeter of the camp was secured by two rows of razor wire and a main gate. The main gate was lit up by spotlights and protected by soldiers armed with machine guns.



*View of Jacques' sleeping quarters inside a tent that was situated inside a building at the base camp
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*



*Jacques' habitual truck – 81H
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*

Also at the camp were two kitchens and dining areas, a shower tent, a laundry facility and several groups of portable toilets. To facilitate access in the winter, a large tent was erected over the portable toilets. For the laundry, each soldier was issued a mesh bag in which they put their dirty clothing. They would then take it to the QM and pick up the clean clothes several days later.

The camp had its own water supply that was adequate for washing but not good enough to drink. Consequently, the troops used bottled water for drinking and brushing their teeth.

While at the base camp, Jacques heard that local children would often come up to the guard post looking for a hand out. Some would bring weapons or ammunition that they had found to curry favour with the guards. Jacques heard that this was discouraged after one child had brought in a grenade that was missing its pin. It was a dud that had failed to detonate when its original owner had thrown it but there was still a risk that it could explode.

One of the key risks for the troops in Bosnia was the risk associated with mines. The drivers were required to regularly attend mine awareness training sessions. They heard that the opposing sides had laid minefields in many different locations and that many of them were unmarked. They learned how to recognize marked minefields and how to avoid those that were not marked. Generally, the rule that had to be followed was to avoid going into the fields or on the grass or anyplace where the road was not frequently traveled by passing vehicles. They also learned to recognize the different types of mines and how they functioned. This knowledge was provided not so that they could disarm them but so they could avoid getting harmed by them. Some types of mines had pressure plates that detonated the mine when a heavy vehicle passed over them. Other types of mines had a stick protruding upwards from the mine. The mine underneath was detonated when this stick was touched or moved or bent. Fortunately, none of the convoys in which Jacques participated encountered any problems with mines that detonated. This good fortune is probably due to the fact that the drivers stayed on the well beaten tracks and rarely moved off the road to park their vehicles except in the secured camps at the ends or along the convoy routes.

Transport section duties and resupply operations

The transport section provided drivers and vehicles for many types of missions undertaken at the request of the battle group headquarters. It was comprised of approximately 25 drivers and equipped with different vehicles including Iltis jeeps, 5/4-ton pickup trucks, 6-wheeled 2½-ton MLVW cargo trucks, 5-ton fuel trucks and 10-ton HLVW heavy cargo trucks. The section was also responsible to manage the fuel depot at the base camp.



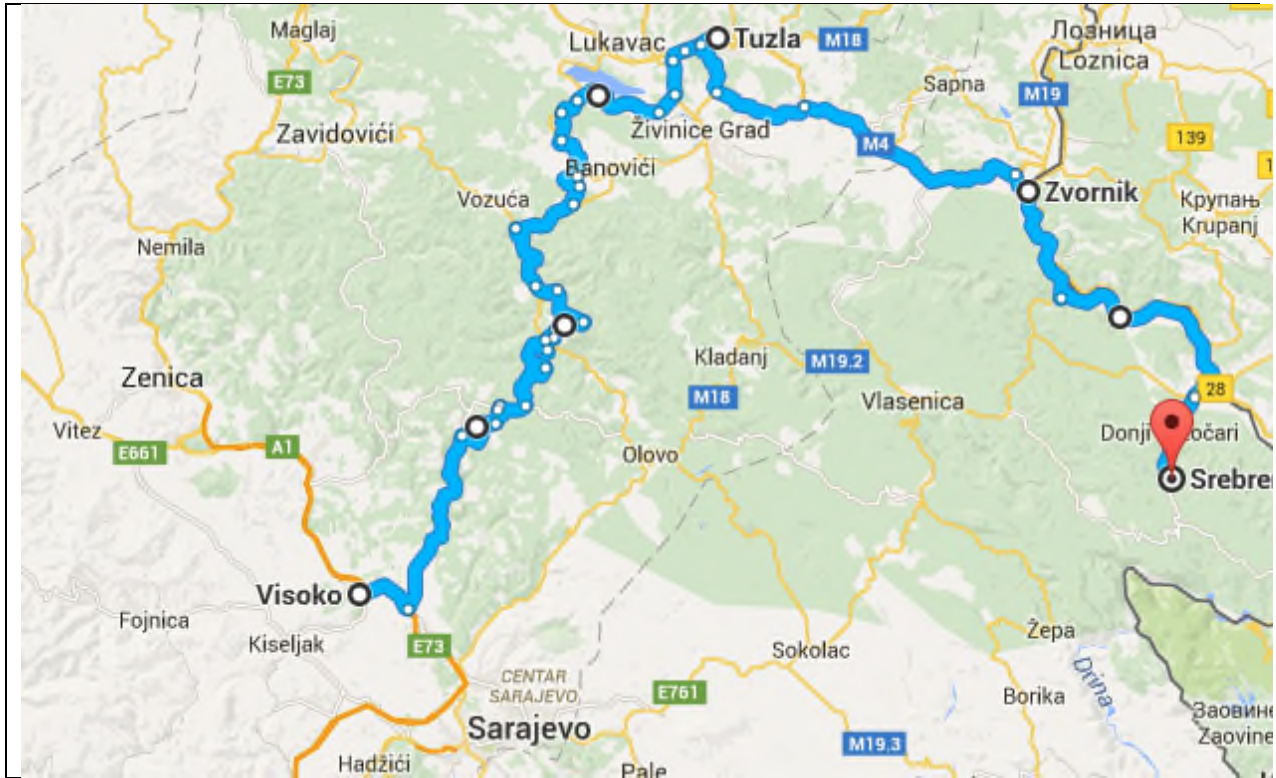
*View of Regimental transport section parking lot at the CANBAT 2 base camp
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*



*View of fuel depot at the CANBAT 2 base camp
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*

One of the principal tasks for the transport section drivers was to work on convoys that resupplied the forward operating bases. These convoys carried rations, fuel, ammunition, equipment, mail, soldiers departing or returning from leave and numerous other items.

The most important of these bases was in the town of Srebrenica, approximately 172 kilometers to the west. At this location, a company of the R22eR from the Battle group had been positioned to observe the peace in a town largely populated by Bosniaks, who were surrounded by the Bosnian Serb Army.



Approximate route followed by the 12 RBC transport section convoys between Visoko and Srebrenica – The convoys would head north from Visoko to Vares and then further north to Tuzla where they would spend the night at the NORBAT base. They would then proceed west to Zvornik, and from there, follow the border/river in a south-eastern direction to the UN-declared safe area in the Bosniak enclave of Srebrenica.

The convoys also travelled to deliver goods to a UK camp at Vitez situated approximately one hour north of Visoko and a Danish camp at Kiseljak, approximately one half hour to the south-west.

One of the other tasks that were given to the transport section was to shuttle personnel between the Canadian base camp and the airport in Sarajevo. This task usually involved the transportation of soldiers who were departing on or returning from leave. These convoys often only involved 10 to 12 vehicles including the security escort vehicles. The trip would usually take 2 hours, but the convoy commander was instructed to wait until the airplane had actually taken off before starting the return trip. When the flights were delayed, the drivers had to wait at the airport for periods of up to a day. When the convoys moved through the city to and from the airport, they crossed the road referred to as Sniper Alley. Jacques remembers having a strange feeling whenever he passed the damaged Holiday Inn building.



*Heavily damaged Holiday Inn on Sniper Alley in Sarajevo
- Picture taken while on shuttle run to airport.
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*



*Destroyed armoured vehicles littered the road to the
Sarajevo airport.
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

Other convoys organised by the transport section went to the port city of Split, Croatia. This route, which generally took close to twelve hours, was undertaken principally to transport troops who were going on leave. Split was a beautiful city along the coast and a popular spot for soldiers going on leave. Split was also a logistical hub for the Canadian forces in Bosnia and the principal source for their supplies. The National Support Element located at Split organised convoys from there to resupply CANBAT 2 in Visoko. The 12 RBC transport section was then used to transport smaller quantities of supplies to the outlying units and camps.

Jacques also remembers being asked to transport supplies to two health-care institutions in the area around Visoko where the UN forces from Canada and other countries were providing basic support to the patients after the local staff had been forced to abandon them due to the close proximity of fighting between the Bosniak and Croat forces. One of these institutions was a mental hospital for adults in Bakovici¹ and the other was an orphanage in Fojnica. Jacques remembers carrying fuel and other supplies to these locations so that the military personnel stationed there could operate a kitchen and an electric generator. While unloading his truck at the end of one of those trips he remembers discovering that one of the jerry cans he was transporting had emptied along the route after having been pierced by a bullet. Jacques was never directly involved in providing support within the institutions, but he was asked to perform guard duty over the Canadian equipment at one of them.

A friend perishes in a road accident

In late November 1993, very shortly after his arrival, Jacques remembers meeting Corporal David Galvin, a Sherbrooke Hussar, at the mechanics' bay in the basement of the Megaplex building. Both of them were there to get their respective vehicles serviced for some sort of mechanical problems. David was a gunner in a Cougar vehicle that was part of one of the 12 RBC squadrons. That squadron often provided the security vehicles that escorted the convoys where Jacques acted as a driver. The two of them had a conversation about what they might have to do if their vehicle broke down and had to be abandoned in hostile territory. Both agreed that they would not want the vehicles falling into the hands of a group of belligerents. The next day, Jacques heard that David had been killed in a road accident in Zenica when

the vehicle he was travelling in slipped on an icy road, hit the side of a bridge and flipped over into the riverbed below. Both the crew commander and the gunner had apparently been trapped in the turret which landed face down. Jacques was stunned to hear of the sudden death of a person who had put him so much at ease only the day before. He remembers participating a little while later in the emotional send-off ceremony with 100 or so other soldiers in the garage of the Crystal Palace. He took this incident as a serious warning about the sometimes treacherous conditions on the winding mountainous roads and adapted his driving habits accordingly.

Convoys to Srebrenica

Within two days of their arrival in Visoko, the transport section was assigned to their first convoy to Srebrenica. This convoy followed an indirect northern route along small roads through very beautiful and mountainous terrain. The convoy would move slowly and take up to 2 full days to get to its destination. It would then take a day to unload and reload and take two days to return to the base camp.



*Convoy at a halt high in the mountains
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*



*Mountainside trail
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

Along the way, the convoys would stop and spend the night at a secure camp in Tuzla maintained by a Norwegian battlegroup (referred to as NORBAT).

The convoys were quite large. When they left the main camp, they would often include 50 or 60 vehicles including the security vehicles, which were the wheeled armoured vehicles referred to as Cougars. All these vehicles would usually leave the base camp in smaller groups and then line up on the road outside of the camp, before proceeding in a long single line to their destination. The security vehicles normally escorted the convoy to the demarcation line between the Serbian army on one side of the country and the Bosniak and Croat armies on the other. The Serb forces objected to the presence of the armoured vehicles so the soft-skinned vehicles would carry on without security vehicles for the remainder of the mission. The convoy was led by a convoy commander in a jeep and followed at the rear by the 5-ton fuel trucks, the ambulance(s) and the recovery vehicle(s).

The convoy crews would generally get their orders the day before they departed. At the orders group they would learn the order of march and receive instructions for the loading of the vehicles. Jacques usually drove call sign 81H which was a 2½-ton truck equipped with a cage on the back that could be locked. This cage was used to transport more precious cargos, such as night vision goggles. After the orders group, the drivers would present themselves and their trucks to the different loading points. The drivers were also assigned a co-driver, who normally had another duty at the base. Jacques' co-driver was often the X-ray technician or a cook from the base camp. The co-driver was an extra pair of eyes on the road and was responsible to make sure that the driver did not fall asleep. This was an important duty since the driving periods for the convoy often lasted between 12 and 15 hours per day.

Before the convoys departed the drivers would report to the mess hall for breakfast and pick up a bag lunch and bottled water for the road. The first thing they did with the lunch was to divide it into two parts – one part which they would eat themselves and the other part that they would give out to refugees that they would encounter along the route or at the final destination. They also usually made sure they had a carton of cigarettes that could be handed out. Money had no value in the war zone, but cigarettes did.

The cabs of the vehicles were equipped with different means of communications. There was a radio set or a walkie-talkie for communications between vehicles. Some vehicles also had an extra radio set that could be used to call for air support if it was needed. A sergeant who was qualified to call in airstrikes usually travelled with each convoy.

On the second day of the convoys to and from Srebrenica, the drivers were usually issued boxes of German rations. Each box was designed to last a full day. The boxes contained a variety of items including the main dishes which were wrapped in foil containers that needed to be heated in a pot of hot water, using a small camp stove carried in each of the trucks. Since there were not many rest stops, the drivers often cooked and ate their rations while they were waiting for clearance at the checkpoints. The German boxes had only four different menus unlike the Canadian rations which had up to ten different menus. They did however have some delicious dark chocolate bars. Jacques remembers sorting the items in each box. He always tried to put aside certain items to give to refugees. Even the salt and sugar packages were coveted by the refugees, who largely relied on the barter system to survive.

Jacques vividly remembers giving some of his rations to a small boy who had approached him during one of the convoy stops. He distinctly remembers the boy because he was wearing a blue jacket with a white fur fringe around the collar. He was shocked later when the convoy passed the same area on the return trip when he saw the same jacket lying in a ditch with no trace of the boy. He immediately wondered if the young boy had been a victim of ethnic cleansing. This thought immediately came to mind because evidence of ethnic cleansing was visible everywhere along the convoy route. It was not uncommon to see houses that had been ransacked, with much of their contents thrown out the windows onto the ground below.

While travelling outside the base camp, the drivers were required to wear their blue helmets as well as their flak vests. As well as providing protection, these vests also served as magazine carriers. Two full magazines were carried on each side of the vest and a fifth one was kept in the soldier's rifle. For further

protection, the driver of each vehicle was given a six-foot long Kevlar blanket, which was to be laid on the bench in the cab, and two 2 by 3 foot Kevlar shields that were to be placed just inside the cab doors once the crew was in the vehicle.

Each of the soldiers kept what they referred to as a bug out kit, which was basically a sleeping bag carrier with all the items to be taken when they left on convoy, including notably a sleeping bag, air mattress, extra clothes, and a shaving kit. This was one of the items kept in the cab of the vehicle. Also, Jacques brought his Sony radio with a number of tape cassettes so that he could listen to music as they travelled through the hills. In his kit, he also carried a Nintendo GameBoy-type console, powered by 2 man-pack radio batteries which he wired together. One set of batteries lasted the complete tour. He was also sure to stock up on snacks such as chips, snicker bars, bottles of water and other treats. If he did not eat them himself, these snacks were always appreciated by a refugee or some other person.

The troops occasionally transported by the convoys developed the habit of bringing their camp cots and sleeping bags so that they could relax in the back of the vehicles. Also, because there were not very many rest stops during each twelve or so hour run, many of the drivers ran a plastic tube down through a hole in the floor allowing them to relieve themselves while on the run.

Along this route, the convoys were required to pass through various checkpoints and cross the lines of the opposing parties. They would often endure long waits while the convoy commander negotiated passage with the different levels of authority. Sometimes, even if the higher authority had approved the move, the personnel at the checkpoints claimed the papers were forged and refused passage, possibly just to harass the Canadian soldiers or to pressure them into handing over some gifts. Jacques had heard that at least one local commander had requested unsuccessfully that the Canadians provide him with a jeep. The belligerents manning the checkpoints would often want to inspect the vehicles claiming that the Canadians might be trying to smuggle weapons, munitions or refugees. Often, during these stops, the local belligerents would harass the Canadians by putting mines or other explosive devices under the tires or just outside the cab doors of the Canadian vehicles. The Canadians generally tried to move through the checkpoints early in the morning, because later in the day, some of the people at these checkpoints would start drinking and become more belligerent as time went on.



*Mines and obstacles at belligerent checkpoint
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*



*Mines and obstacles at belligerent checkpoint
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*

Occasionally, partisans on one side or the other of the conflict would fire their weapons at the passing vehicles. Jacques was told that they had generally learned not to fire at the armoured vehicles who were well equipped to fire back. They seemed to prefer shooting at the soft-skinned vehicles that passed in the convoys. Rarely did the drivers in the convoy see these people, but they found the evidence of their shooting when they reached their destinations. It was not uncommon to find bullet holes in the body of the vehicle, or in its cargo. On one occasion, Jacques saw a bullet hit the box-shaped air filter that protruded from the hood of his vehicle. On another occasion, when he got to his destination, he found several bullet holes in the cargo that he was transporting. Generally, these attacks did not stop the convoy or cause bodily harm. One exception to this occurred when a big truck driven by another Royal Canadian Hussar - Martin Gazaille - was disabled by mortar rounds that exploded very close to his vehicle. The shrapnel from the blast hit the truck and made it unserviceable. At that point, the vehicle was abandoned on the spot and recovered only several days later. When it was finally brought into the base camp, it was inspected and numerous pieces of shrapnel were found embedded in the skin of the vehicle and numerous bullet holes were found in the body of the truck and the gas tanks that it was carrying. To this day, Jacques has kept one of those pieces of shrapnel and several of the bullets that he recovered from the wreck as souvenirs.



*Picture of Martin Gazaille and his truck after it was eventually recovered – Note the bullet holes in the passenger door and the gas tanks on the rear of the vehicle.
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

The Canadian soldiers had received very restrictive rules of engagement that only allowed them to fire back if they could see the person who was firing at them. Jacques remembers one incident where someone started firing mortars close to a group of trucks that were stopped by the side of the road. The mortar rounds were exploding so close that Jacques remembers feeling the blast on his clothes and hearing the shrapnel hit the other sides of the vehicles. During that incident a group of British soldiers who were travelling with the convoy called for a show of force. Shortly thereafter, a British harrier jet flew over and buzzed the offending party putting a stop to the firing.

Jacques remembers another incident when the convoy had just stopped for an overnight rest at the NORBAT camp in Tuzla. He was walking around the camp after the convoy had been parked when someone started firing a weapon towards the camp from a distant wood line. Jacques took cover in an area protected by a wall of sandbags at the perimeter of the camp. One of the guards responsible for the security of the camp started firing back. The guard explained that he was firing over the head of the individual to try and get him to stop. The guard then invited Jacques to also fire his weapon. He explained that if more than one person was firing, it would be a more effective show of force. Jacques complied with the request and fired with the guard over the belligerent's head until the latter stopped firing. When all went quiet, the Norwegian soldier thanked Jacques and rolled his eyes and said one word – "Slivovitz".

During one of these convoy missions to Srebrenica, Jacques remembers seeing a very beautiful young lady driving a horse and buggy. She had long auburn hair and she wore a tweed jacket decorated with a broach. For weeks afterwards, he thought of her and the contrast that existed between her beauty and the destruction that surrounded her. Jacques was also often struck by the picturesque country side. It was very mountainous and the roads often wound through the hills and valleys. The large trucks lumbered up the steep hills and switchbacks and then sped down the other side trying to build momentum to climb the other side. In the winter, these hills could be very dangerous. During snowy weather, the convoy would often need to stop on the road so that the drivers could put chains on the tires of the vehicles.

During the convoys, the most frequent mechanical problem was flat tires. If the flat affected one of multiple rear tires, the drivers generally tried to drive on it to the next logical stopping point. If it was more serious, they had to request or report a halt. Flats happened frequently enough that the teams of drivers developed enough speed to be able to change the large truck tires within approximately 10 minutes. Jacques particularly remembers one incident where the tire-changing drivers lost control of a large tire which rolled off the side off the road and down the mountainside across several switchbacks and through an area marked as a minefield. None of the mines blew but the tire was never recovered.



*Changing tires on the road
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*



*Convoy passing a destroyed tank on a long hill
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

On the road to Srebrenica, the convoys often stopped or slowed down at a town that the drivers referred to as Canada village. Jacques could not remember the real name of the village or the origins of the affinity between the drivers and the local population. As they passed through this village some of the residents, mostly children, would stand by the road and wave small Canadian flags. The drivers would often stop and share the contents of their ration boxes with some of the people there. In return, the mothers of the families knitted sets of small woollen baby booties and sent them to the generous Canadian soldiers. The drivers used these booties to decorate the cabs of their large military vehicles.



*Convoys passing through Canada village during the winter
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*



*More winter driving high in the mountains
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*

Life in Srebrenica

At the end of the long convoy route was the town of Srebrenica. This was a principally Bosniak Muslim community that was located in the extreme eastern region of Bosnia. It was surrounded on all sides by hostile Serbian forces. The UN had declared it a safe zone and had posted a company of infantrymen from the R22eR there to observe the peace. The convoys arrived from NORBAT along a river that flowed

down from the north-west. They usually spent a day unloading and reloading and resting before undertaking the two-day return trip first to NORBAT and then to Visoko.

On one occasion in December of 1993, the Serb Army surrounding the community decided to cut off all passage to and from Srebrenica for a period of close to three weeks. When the passage was cut off, Jacques and the rest of the convoy had just arrived at Srebrenica. Rather than host a large group of idle drivers and give them time to get into trouble, the local company commander put the drivers to work as camp guards. This freed up his own troops to better deal with any potential trouble or other tasks.

During each of their visits to the camp at Srebrenica, the drivers established an informal system of passing their extra rations and other items such as gloves, pens and paper to the kids who hung around the camp gate. Each driver took it upon himself to favour a particular kid, who indeed was representing a local family. At that time, the local economy had virtually disappeared and the families had no or only meager sources of income. Not only did they have no income but the stores had no goods to sell. While this was a condition that prevailed throughout the country, it was even more extreme at Srebrenica because the Serb army was determined to choke off any movement of supplies. The UN refugee agency tried to deliver food and blankets to the town but this was not always possible. To heat their homes, the residents had stripped bare all the forests from the hills immediately surrounding the village. To feed themselves, the residents had ripped up their lawns and planted gardens. The local government had broken down and was no longer maintaining the roads, ensuring the water supply, providing electricity or collecting garbage. The items provided by the Canadian soldiers, no matter how meager, could possibly be used to barter for something more useful.



*Convoy parking area at Srebrenica
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

*Atief Mohammed and Jacques near the gate of the
camp at Srebrenica
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

Jacques set up a support system with a Muslim teenager whose name was Atief Mohammed. This young man and his quiet younger brother would present themselves at the gate whenever the convoys entered town. Jacques never failed to have items that he could pass on to the young man and his family. Jacques understood the importance of these gifts one morning when he was assigned to guard the main gate to the camp. Atief's mother sent him a small loaf of fresh bread that she had just baked herself.

Atief brought it to him while he was manning the camp gate on that brisk wintery morning. Not only was it delicious but it was a huge sacrifice for a family who probably had very little food to feed themselves. This symbolic gesture made Jacques realize even more the importance of his small gestures to these people.



*Pictures showing how the military base was positioned right in the town of Srebrenica
Note how the hills have been stripped of all vegetation
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*

More aggression near the end of the tour

At the beginning of the tour, the battle lines separating Serbs, Muslims and Croats had generally been established. The fighting had lulled and engagements were limited. Occasionally, soldiers from one faction would take pot shots to harass one of the other factions. In or around March 1994, the negotiations for a more permanent settlement started. This resulted in an increase of activity when each faction tried to jockey for a better position before the final lines were drawn. During this period, the drivers of the transport section were asked to transport personnel who were trying to verify cease fire lines.

In the days leading up to the negotiations, Jacques heard about some incidents that arose from the posturing.

On one occasion, a convoy got trapped at the Danish base when the Croat forces blocked the road. The drivers returned to the Canadian Base camp by helicopter and worked on other tasks until the road was reopened. On another occasion, one of the check points established by the battle group in the area around Visoko was surrounded and cut off by elements of the Croat forces. Jacques heard that the CANBAT 2 commander had deployed troops from the camp in a show of force to get the Croats to back off.

A third incident occurred when a convoy was travelling between the NORBAT camp and Srebrenica. Security vehicles from NORBAT were escorting the convoy. At one of the checkpoints, the Serbs blocked the convoy's progress and apparently became aggressive. Jacques remembers seeing the NORBAT security teams get out of their vehicles and deploy their anti-tank Carl Gustafs so as to be ready to respond, if they were attacked. Eventually, the belligerents at the checkpoint calmed down and allowed the convoy to pass.

In response to the increased level of aggression, additional protection was added to the camp perimeter by filling hessian cloth frames with earth to build a thick wall.



*View of the earthen walls that were erected around the base to provide more protection. Frames of hessian cloth are filled with earth
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*



*Fortified entrance to the camp at Visoko
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

Camp life

Camp life at Visoko was reasonably good. After the initial shakeout, the soldiers stationed there generally worked six days a week and had only light tasks on the seventh. The camp was equipped with a good kitchen, a mess and a TV room. The camp had a reputation for having good food, a good mess and good accommodations. Consequently, it was often visited by soldiers from other UN contingents. The soldiers who were not on duty were entitled to consume two beers per day. A favourite pastime for them was to hang out and sing songs while one or more soldiers played guitar. This was often done by candlelight when the camp was low on fuel and tried to limit its consumption by turning off some of the generators that provided the camp's electricity. Another pastime was watching hockey games in the TV room. Jacques remembers one night when some Swedish soldiers were visiting the camp, they all sat

down and watched the Swedish-Canadian hockey match from Lillehammer 94 Winter Olympic Games. That night the Swedish team won the gold medal and the Canadian team had to settle for silver.



*Drivers relaxing at the mess after hours
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

*Christmas dinner at the base camp
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

The unit spent Christmas at the camp. A large dinner was attended by some senior officers visiting from Canada. Gifts were received from home and from various military support organisations mostly from western Canada. One of the Hussars noticed that he had received nothing from the unit back home and wrote a letter to the commanding officer expressing his surprise at the absence of any communications or tokens of appreciation. Jacques' mother kept in touch. She often sent packages and mail. On occasion, she would send a clipping from a Canadian newspaper that provided vague details about injured soldiers asking him whether or not it was he or if he was involved. Jacques very much appreciated the letters and goods he received and he always tried to answer in a way that would keep his mother from worrying.

Jacques remembers feeling very vulnerable at camp one morning while visiting the portable toilets located outside the Crystal Palace. He was sitting there calmly reading some interesting material that he had received from home when a belligerent started firing at the camp from the surrounding countryside. What a time to get caught with his pants down, he thought. He quickly put down his reading and moved to a more secure location while the camp guards responded to the threat.

Unfortunate accident

On April 9th, 1994, Jacques had a very unfortunate accident when completing one of his transport tasks. It occurred while he was driving on what was referred to as the "Civi Run". This was a truck that drove through the area surrounding the Canadian camp in Visoko to pick up or drop off local civilians who were employed at the camp serving as cooks, laundry workers or cleaners. As he approached a curve, he slowed down because he saw children playing on the side of the street. Just as he arrived at the curve, a young man barrelled around the corner on a moped from the opposite direction. The young man saw the truck at the last moment, tried to avoid it and lost control. His moped fell on its side and slid under the truck but the young man hit the front bumper of the truck standing up. Even though the truck was travelling at a slow speed, the momentum and the force of the impact were great enough to inflict

serious injuries to the young man's body. Jacques and his co-driver immediately jumped out of the truck, sent an accompanying truck for help, and proceeded to apply first aid to the young man. The victim was quickly evacuated to the hospital at the Canadian base camp and then to a larger hospital at Sarajevo University. He was suffering from a broken hip, a broken collar bone, a fractured skull, a ruptured spleen and multiple other injuries. During the night he passed away. After spending some time with the accident investigators and the Padre, Jacques returned to his accommodation still very much in shock because of the accident. He could not think of anything he could have done to avoid it, other than not be at that location. By the time he arrived, the kitchen was closed so he had missed his supper. However, some of the other drivers in the transport section had saved him some hotdogs and they tried to boost his morale by sitting down with him while he ate them. Jacques was eventually informed that this young man was the son of a Brigade commander in the Bosniak forces and that there was a rumour that the commander was looking for revenge. This rumour was treated as a reasonably credible threat given the history of the region. As a precautionary move, Jacques was not assigned to any tasks that involved movement off the base for the following five days.

Vacation and leave

During his two-week leave period, Jacques opted to visit his parents, who at that time were living in Hawaii. It was a long voyage but the reunion with the family and the weather were very nice. Jacques remembers receiving a number of questioning looks, first when he announced his intended destination to the clerk making the travel arrangements and second when he arrived in Hawaii in a Canadian Army Fatigues wearing a blue United Nations beret.

In March of 1994, Jacques participated in an organised recreational visit to Rome with numerous other soldiers. The trip started aboard a military transport plane that flew from Sarajevo to the Italian port city of Ancona on the western coast of Italy. Jacques remembers that it was a very unusual flight. Since the cargo airplane did not have any passenger seats, the departing soldiers were asked to sit in a line on the floor beside the cargo containers. The airplane crew then stretched a long strap over the laps of the sitting soldiers and secured it to a hook at the other end of the floor. The plane then performed what could be referred to as a combat take off, gunning the engines and entering into a very steep climb. Once in the air, the pilots discharged a number of flares as a preventative measure to act as diversions in case any heat-seeking missiles were fired at the plane. Seeing the flashes, Jacques started wondering if they were being shot at. Since no one had forewarned the passengers of these procedures, they found it quite stressful. At Ancona, the soldiers boarded a bus that carried them to Rome. Once in Rome they visited the Vatican in uniform, attended a special mass and actually had a private audience with the Pope. This trip had been organised in this way because the Pope had apparently expressed an interest in meeting some of the "blue hatted" soldiers working on the UN mission in Bosnia. While on the bus on the way to the Vatican, Lieutenant-Colonel Moore, the commanding officer of the 12 RBC, made an announcement that the Canadian contingent in the UN safe area around Srebrenica would soon be replaced by one from another country.



*Leaving Sarajevo airport for Italy
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*



*Jacques meets the Pope on visit of UN troops to
the Vatican
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

Return to Canada

At the end of his tour, Jacques and the other transport drivers flew back to Canada. Jacques remembers taking the bus back from the Quebec City airport to Valcartier before moving back to Montreal. The thing that he remarked the most during the trip was that none of the houses had been damaged by war. His mind was so used to seeing damaged houses that he seemed to have difficulty adapting back to a normal situation. Another difficulty Jacques had in adapting was related to the risk with mines. While in Bosnia he had trained himself never to stray off the well-used road as means of avoiding minefields. He then had to condition himself to walk on the grass at home without feeling threatened.

Subsequent to his tour

Over a year after Jacques had returned to Canada, he heard about the massacre at Srebrenica² through the media. The massacre occurred in 1995, as peace negotiations were moving towards a formal division of the country into two parts. Each side was interested in controlling contiguous areas that contained only people from their respective ethnic groups. The Serbs were not interested in having a Bosniak enclave deep within their portion of Bosnia. At that time, a large force of Bosnian Serbs had surrounded the enclave of Srebrenica and was preparing an attack. At the request of the Bosniak Forces, who were prepared to relinquish Srebrenica, the UN peacekeepers on site negotiated with the Serbs to have the 30,000 or so civilian residents evacuated by bus to Tuzla. When this occurred, despite promises of safety made by the Serbian general in charge, most of the 1,700 or so men who boarded the busses were separated from the women and children and killed along the way. Because they were either combatants or because they did not trust the Serbs, many other Bosniak men chose not to board the busses but to travel by foot cross-country. Many of them were hunted down and killed in the woods along the way. In all it is believed that over 8,000 people were killed, mostly men and boys. When Jacques heard this news, he became deeply concerned about the welfare of the teenager and the family that he had tried to help. He had no way of confirming whether one or more of them were included in the victims of the

massacre. He also developed an internal fury that led him to write two letters to the newspaper recounting his experience at Srebrenica and expressing his feelings. Seeing his letters, a friend of his decided to write a novel³ around the incident and some of Jacques' personal experiences. After doing extensive research for her book, that friend reported to Jacques that she did not see Atief's name among the deceased so there may be hope that he and his family survived. To this day, Jacques does not know whether Atief or his family survived or not.

Life thereafter

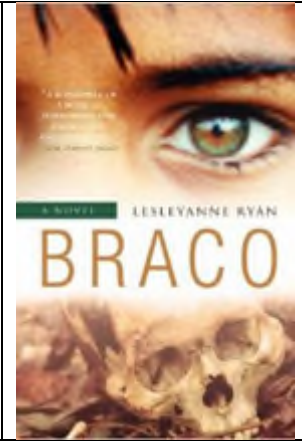
At the time that Jacques was interviewed for the purposes of preparing this document, he was working in the sales department of a leading provider of IT products, services, and solutions to government agencies, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities. He also worked as a volunteer first-responder in the cities of Cote St-Luc and Ile Perrot.

Foot notes

¹ At the end of the tour, a board of inquiry investigated the misbehaviour of certain Canadian soldiers at the Bakovici Hospital including misuse of alcohol, abuse of patients, and sexual misconduct. It found that there had indeed been unprofessional conduct on the part of certain individuals and that appropriate disciplinary action had not been taken at the time. The board of inquiry also found that the majority of the soldiers at the location had acted appropriately and provided an invaluable service to the patients.

²Source Wikipedia: The Srebrenica massacre was the genocidal killing, in July 1995, of more than 8,000 Bosniaks, mainly men and boys, in and around the town of Srebrenica during the Bosnian War. The killing was perpetrated by units of the Army of Republika Srpska under the command of General Ratko Mladić. The Secretary-General of the United Nations described the mass murder as the worst crime on European soil since the Second World War. A paramilitary unit from Serbia known as the Scorpion, officially part of the Serbian Interior Ministry until 1991, participated in the massacre, along with several hundred Ukrainian and Russian volunteers. In April 1993, the United Nations declared the besieged enclave of Srebrenica in the Drina Valley of northeastern Bosnia a "safe area" under UN protection. However, in July 1995, the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), represented on the ground by a 400-strong contingent of Dutch peacekeepers, Dutchbat, did not prevent the town's capture by the VRS and the subsequent massacre. Serbia and Montenegro were cleared of direct responsibility for or complicity in the massacre, but were found responsible for not doing enough to prevent the massacre and not prosecuting those responsible, in breach of the Genocide Convention. The Preliminary List of People Missing or Killed in Srebrenica compiled by the Bosnian Federal Commission of Missing Persons contains 8,373 names. As of July 2012, 6,838 genocide victims had been identified through DNA analysis of body parts recovered from mass graves. As of July 2013, 6,066 victims had been buried at the memorial Centre of Potočari.

³Source Amazon.com - WINNER OF THE 2011 Fresh Fish Award for Emerging Writers, Lesleyanne Ryan's debut novel, *Braco*, takes place over the five days following the fall of Srebrenica in 1995. The narrative follows the perspectives of Bosnian civilians, UN Peacekeepers, Serbian and Bosnian soldiers, as well as a Canadian photojournalist. A retired veteran and former Bosnian Peacekeeper, Ryan vividly captures the visceral tension and horror of Bosnian refugees fleeing Srebrenica, the ensuing massacre of Bosnian men, and the inability of the Dutch peacekeepers to protect them. The award judges acclaimed the debut novel as a "compelling, captivating, and fast-paced novel, from its vivid and intriguing prologue set in Srebrenica to an ending that fits, if not satisfies."



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Bethan Mowat's Story

1993-94 - Operation Harmony in Croatia



*Buildings in Croatia showing war damage
Photo provided by Bethan Mowat*

Authors' note

The principal authors of this text, aside from the individual recounting the story, are John Cochrane, a former member of the unit, and his niece Marina Tinkler, a Concordia University literature student. This record of events was prepared in 2015, many years after they occurred. The authors prepared this record principally using information obtained during interviews with the individuals involved. Where possible, this information was corroborated through interviews with others and a review of pictures and other publicly available information. The record presents the events as the individuals involved remember them several years after they occurred.

Bethan Mowat's Story

Background

Cpl Bethan Mowat deployed to Gračac, Croatia with the *1^{er} Bataillon, Royal 22e Régiment (R22eR)* from October 1993 to April 1994. The battalion was being deployed to Croatia under Operation Harmony in order to fulfill Canada's commitment to provide a battalion-sized formation (CANBAT 1) for the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR).

From February 1992 to August 1992, Bethan had deployed with the same battalion on a UN peacekeeping mission in Cyprus and her previous boss, knowing her level of competence and extensive experience, was interested in having her return to work in a similar role. She recalls that the situation in Cyprus was quite relaxed. She was based at an airport in Nicosia and the troops were deployed along the demarcation line between the opposing Greeks and Turks. The weather and beaches were beautiful and the conflict was dormant. She liked it so much that at the end of her six-month tour, she requested and was granted an extension for another six months. She then served at the same location from August 1992 to February 1993, working with the replacement unit - the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery from Shilo, Manitoba.

When her tour in Cyprus came to a close, she used her accumulated leave to travel extensively in Europe. Upon her return to Canada, while she was still on post-deployment leave, she received a phone call from the R22eR chief clerk. Assuming that the experience might be like Cyprus, she immediately stated that she was interested in participating in the CANBAT 1 tour. After this phone exchange there were, however, several hurdles to overcome before her participation in the rotation could be confirmed. Someone at the unit resisted approving her deployment giving as a reason that the request had not come through the proper channels. In order to overcome this resistance, several telephone calls had to be made between the units and the various headquarters. Once approval was obtained, Bethan was called to Valcartier in August 1993 to prepare for deployment to Croatia in October.

Preparation

At Valcartier, Bethan underwent 8 weeks of pre-deployment training and preparation. Concurrently, she was assigned to work as part of the administration team.

Her training focused principally on weapons. She practiced cleaning, loading and firing her rifle. She also participated in physical fitness training, including a 13-kilometer route march. She was also issued all the necessary kit. Unlike the infantry soldiers, the administration staff did not receive a briefing on the political situation, so she did her own research, which was not hard because the war in Croatia was always on the news.

The administration team worked out of the Battalion HQ on the base in Valcartier. Bethan was given the responsibility for making sure that all of the files for the 179 or so reservists going on the mission were complete. She had to make sure that each reservist had gotten their vaccinations, prepared their last wills and testaments, received their class C memos authorising their pay, and filled out their life and medical insurance papers. Also, she had to talk to each person to ensure, if applicable, that their families

would be taken care of, their goods had been put in storage and arrangements had been made to pay their bills. She had a checklist that she reviewed with each person. During these interviews, the younger soldiers started to realize the gravity of the mission and that they were not going on vacation.

The battalion was comprised of approximately 580 soldiers. A battalion parade was held twice a week with all the soldiers in their respective units allowing announcements to be made by the commanding officer. With all the supporting elements, a total of 792 soldiers, including approximately 20 women, were eventually deployed to the field.

Move to Croatia

For the move to Croatia, the battalion was divided in 3 groups – an advance party, a first main party and a second main party. Bethan was part of the first main party. She left at the beginning of October on a Boeing 747 that flew non-stop to Zagreb. Bethan slept most of the way. They disembarked in Zagreb and were loaded onto a bus that met them on the tarmac and drove them to a nearby parking lot.

There they found that the outgoing soldiers had formed up, removed their blue steel helmets and flak vests and laid them on the ground. The arriving troops were formed up in roughly the same formation and instructed to pick up and put on the equipment. Bethan found the experience of putting on equipment that someone else had worn for the last 6 months to be very strange. She remembers that the used vest she chose was still warm from the body heat of its previous owner.



*Bethan and others travelling to Croatia
Photo provided by Bethan Mowat*



*Heavily damaged buildings seen along the road to
camp
Photo provided by Bethan Mowat*

The bus then travelled 5½ hours to the Canadian Base Camp at Gračac, Croatia. Bethan remembers that the view along the way was very depressing. Most of the villages and houses on the sides of the road were damaged to the point that they looked like they had been through an earthquake. Many roofs were heavily damaged or completely destroyed.



*Heavily damaged house seen along route to camp
Photo provided by Bethan Mowat*



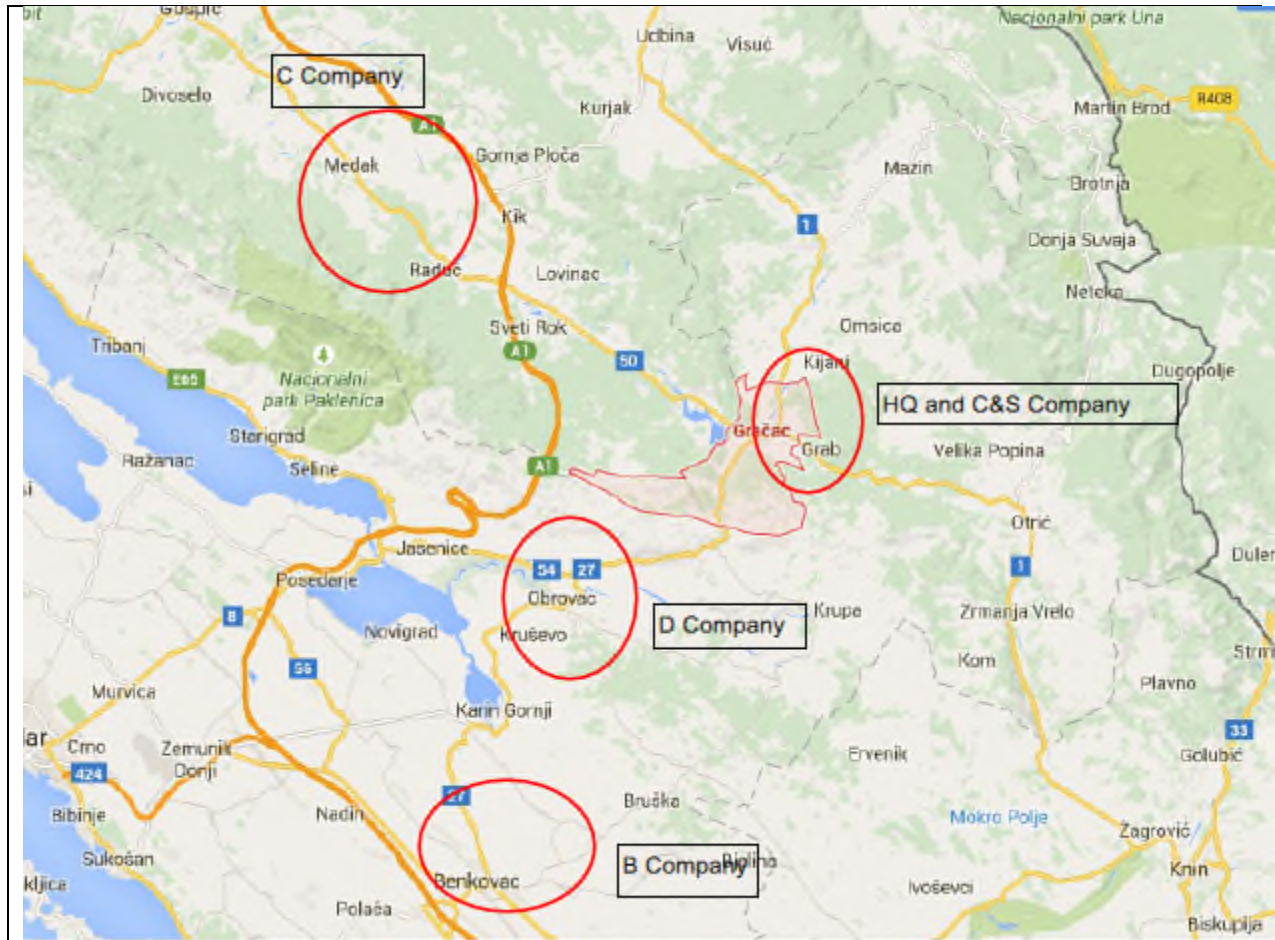
*Heavily damaged house along route to camp
Photo provided by Bethan Mowat*

Deployment and mission of the Battalion

Once on the ground, the Battalion took over the role of CANBAT 1 which was stationed in the southern part of Croatia near the coast. The position had previously been held by the 3rd PPCLI.

The Battalion was responsible for controlling the buffer zones between the Croat forces and the Serbian Forces. The Serbian Forces were occupying an area predominantly populated by Serbs. The Battalion manned 17 observation posts along the confrontation lines. It was also responsible to observe and report ceasefire violations, ensure the freedom of movement of UN forces and personnel, and maintain daily contact with the two belligerent forces. It was also asked by the UN to help support its humanitarian initiatives by delivering clothing, food, and diesel fuel (to be used only for agricultural purposes) to the Serb enclaves in this area of the country.

The Battalion's area of responsibility covered approximately 680 square kilometers. This area was cut in two by a chain of mountains. The company locations (B and D) that were situated to the south of these mountains were at lower elevations and had a Mediterranean-like climate. The Battalion headquarters and C Company to the north of the mountains were located at higher elevations and had a climate similar to Quebec.



Map shows approximate locations of the headquarters of each of the companies

The Battalion¹ was deployed as follows:

- B Company and the anti-tank platoon were stationed in the area around BENKOVAC to the south;
- C Company and the recce platoon were stationed in the area around the Medak pocket to the north;²
- D Company was deployed in the area around OBROVAC – between the two other companies; and
- Command and Services Company was situated at the camp in GRACAC.

When the companies moved into their positions, they immediately set about fortifying and reinforcing the observation points, the living quarters and the control points. Over 100,000 sand bags were filled and installed during this period. The living quarters for the soldiers were often inside abandoned farm houses and outbuildings along the line. When they first arrived, ceasefire violations were frequent, as were artillery and mortar bombardments. Bethan heard that B Company had it rough because they

often received incoming mortar fire. She is aware that one or more people from that company later suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Shortly after she arrived, Bethan heard of an intelligence report that stated that the Croats might be planning a big offensive before the end of November and that the Battalion might need to move. This move was never required during the tour.

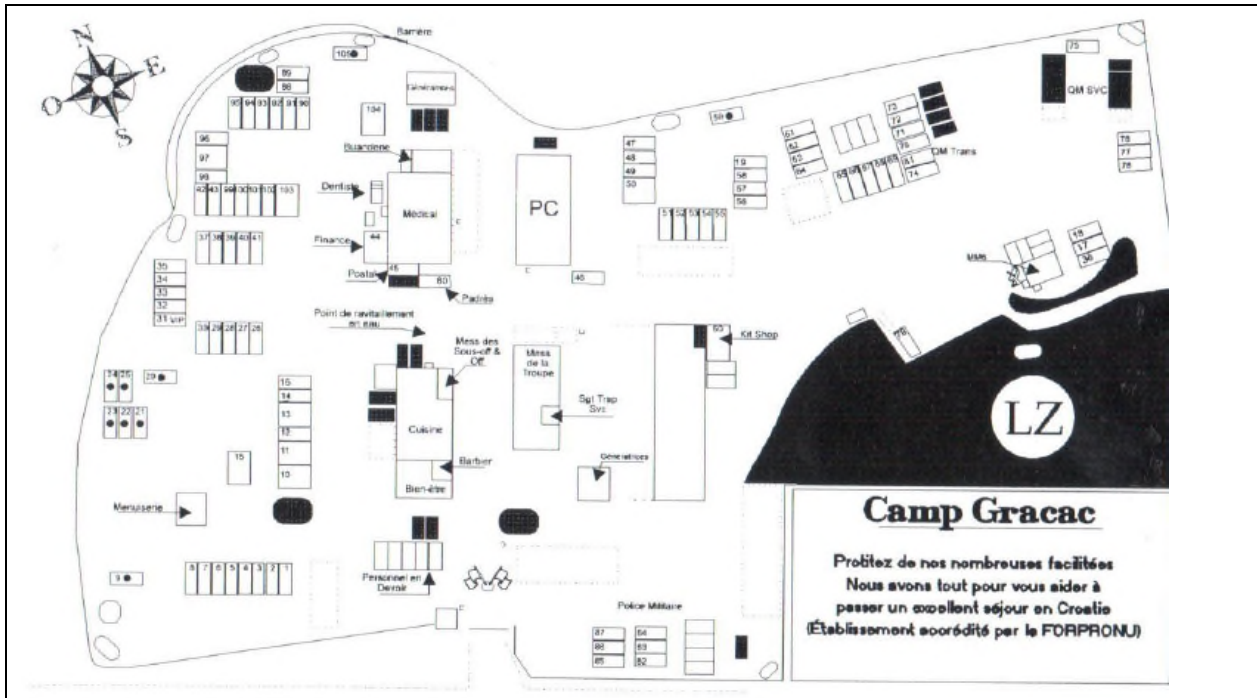
The situation calmed somewhat after a ceasefire agreement was signed between the opposing parties in December and was renewed at the end of January. The last two months of the tour were much calmer. When the situation calmed down, C Company was replaced at the Medak pocket by a contingent of Jordanian soldiers. C Company then moved to a new location in the south to start building a new location for the Battalion Headquarters. This new camp was only to be finished by the 1 PPCLI who would be taking over in April of 1994.

Base Camp

The base camp at Gračac accommodated somewhere between 100 to 150 people, including the battalion commander and his staff, the military police, the intelligence section, and the administration and logistics groups. The mechanics section was off the base, but not far away.

The camp had an army field kitchen that always had fresh food that was imported from Germany or Hungary. The food was delivered by military supply trucks so the camp personnel did not have to eat ration packs. The camp also operated two messes, one for the junior ranks and a combined mess for the officers and Senior NCO's. The soldiers were allowed one drink per day.

The Camp layout was as follows:



Bethan's sleeping quarters were in trailer 10 just to the west of the Welfare platoon's office and the dining hall (lower left).



Welfare platoon

At the camp, Bethan was the clerk for the Welfare platoon. This platoon was responsible to organise the travel for each soldier's home vacation (referred to as HTLA), to make arrangements for their two 96-hour leave periods, to organise the distribution of videocassettes, magazines and newspapers, to ensure the availability of sports equipment, to resupply the different canteens, to maintain and loan electronic equipment such as videos, TVs and cameras and to run the battalion kit shop. They focused on the activities of a soldier when he or she was not on duty.



CIE SVCS PELOTON DU BIEN-ÊTRE

De gauche à droite:

1ère rangée: sgt Pelletier, sgt Ratté, capt McLean, adjum Thibodeau, sgt Côté

2ème rangée: cplc Prevost, cpl Quinn, cplc Bateau, cpl Bélanger, cplc Renaud

3ème rangée: cplc Simard, cpl Pelletier, cpl Gagné, cpl Mowat.

Absent: sgt Fournier

The platoon was comprised of 17 officers, NCO's and junior ranks, including 15 who were on site and two who were stationed at the vacation coordination centre in Graz, Austria.

The Welfare section had an office beside the dining hall and just across the road from Bethan's sleeping quarters. The Welfare section operated from 7am to 7pm, seven days a week.

Organising travel for leave and R&R

Bethan's principal job was to plan and coordinate all the travel for the 18-day vacations (HTLA) and the 96-hour R&R trips. She also oversaw the operations of the leisure centre.

During the Battalion's stay in Croatia, each soldier was entitled to take a vacation of sufficient duration (generally 18 days) that would allow him or her to return home and visit with their family. The travel costs for such a trip were assumed by the Canadian Forces. This was a very important entitlement for those who were married and had children. The military life often took them away from their families, be it on exercise or deployment, so it was easy for them to lose touch. If the absences were too long or too frequent, many of them had difficulty maintaining their relationships and their marriages – even more so than the difficulty experienced by a civilian couple. For the younger and unattached soldiers who did not need to go home, this leave provided them with an opportunity to take a trip anywhere they wanted to go as long as the cost did not exceed the cost of a trip home. It was their chance to get out and see the world.

Each of the soldiers was also entitled to take two 96-hour leaves. These leaves were designed to compensate the soldiers for the fact that they were expected to be on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week for an extended period of time. Furthermore, they worked in stressful, uncomfortable conditions with little or no privacy. Also, they were not allowed to relax or mix with the local population for fear that they might get into trouble or appear to lose their impartiality. The 96-hour leaves were intended to have them to think about and do something else, to relax and to recharge their batteries before getting back to their duties.

To organise the logistics of these trips, Bethan met with each person at the beginning of the tour to determine their preferences. If a soldier wanted to go home, the Welfare platoon generally worked with people in Valcartier who made arrangements for group travel. Otherwise, Bethan would prepare individual files and give them to the Welfare Platoon Warrant Officer who would then contact the designated travel agents to book the necessary arrangements. Bethan had to prepare all the plans and documents when the camp had electricity. When there was none, she could not work.



*Bethan at her office hard at work making travel arrangements
Pictures taken from the Operation Harmony
CANBAT I 1993-94 Souvenir Book*



*Bethan and co-workers at the Christmas dinner in the dining hall
Pictures taken from the Operation Harmony CANBAT I
1993-94 Souvenir Book*

The leaves were generally organised in blocks so that groups of soldiers left and returned at the same time. They would always leave from the base camp and travel by UN bus to Zagreb and then take a train or plane to some further destination. The 96-hour leave period included the 5½-hour bus trip to and from Zagreb, so the 96-hour vacations had to fit into the remaining time.

Generally, the soldiers profited well from these trips. However the younger ones sometimes got into trouble. Bethan remembers one group of young soldiers who went to Hungary and overdid things. They apparently went to a few strips bars, got very drunk, got into fights and were arrested and thrown in jail. They were young and naive and could not understand why the bars were trying to charge them the equivalent of \$100 per drink. They returned late from their leave only after the Canadian embassy intervened to get them released. The headquarters only became aware of the problem when the young offenders did not show up on the bus that the Welfare platoon had organised from Zagreb.

Sometimes Bethan would learn about soldiers being repatriated to Canada when she was asked to cancel the arrangements that had been made for their leave. She remembers 2 soldiers being sent home early on the tour, one who broke a leg in a road accident when his vehicle collided with 3 horses and another who was having trouble dealing with the level of stress.

One event that disappointed Bethan occurred when a UN helicopter landed at the camp with the UN commander from Zagreb. The countryside was completely snowed in and the roads were not plowed because the local governments were not functioning effectively. A soldier with a heart problem needed to be transported to the hospital in Zagreb. The welfare section tried to get the helicopter crew to take the patient on the return trip but the pilots refused and the patient was only evacuated the next day. Bethan remembers that while there may have been circumstances that warranted this refusal, she was never informed of them.

The Leisure centre

The leisure centre had a room full of videos that soldiers could sign out. Each of the outlying locations was equipped with a TV and a VHS player, so when the companies sent people back to the headquarters for mail and other supplies, they had them pick up and return videos as well. The leisure centre also had sports equipment and a library. The centre had been set up by the previous rotation and the video room was staffed by a local civilian, whose name was Edwina.

Guard and picket duties

Aside from their regular work, each of the soldiers at the base camp performed guard duty and general duties on a rotating basis.

When on guard duty they would work shifts of 2.5 hours per night during which they would patrol the inside of the perimeter of the camp, which was secured by barbed wire. They did not have to guard the main gate as it was secured by the military police. While they were on guard duty or whenever they left the compound, they had to carry their rifles and wear their helmets and bulletproof vests. Otherwise, they just needed to keep their rifles with them.

When on duty picket, they would stay at a building reserved for duty personnel where they were on standby from 6 pm one night until 6 pm the following night. On one of these days, Bethan was asked to get kitted up and go to the camp gate with her weapon. There she was asked to go outside the perimeter and guard a convoy of vehicles that was parked on the road while the drivers entered the camp and ate dinner at the dining hall.

The camp perimeter was secured with coils of barbed wire. Locals often presented themselves on the other side of the fence begging for food or other items. She heard that on several occasions, one or more individuals had cut through the barbed wire in order to siphon gas from the military trucks. Bethan remembers this because she and the others were called out several times, often in the pouring rain, to sweep the camp and ensure that no locals were still within the perimeter.



There was never a serious confrontation at the camp while Bethan was there. Still, it was sometimes scary and unpleasant, especially when she could hear weapons being fired outside the camp. On those occasions, she felt somewhat vulnerable. The front gate was secured by the military police and protected with sandbags, but it was not a fortress.

She heard that the some of the outlying companies had a worse time with occasional incoming fire.

General duties

The junior ranks that worked at the base camp were often assigned to general duties such as cleaning or loading vehicles. Bethan jokingly referred to this activity as forced labour. For example, one day the soldiers on duty had to load large tents into trailers. On other days, they had to unpack containers of supplies that had been shipped to Croatia from the bases in Germany that had recently been closed. Many of the things in the containers were no longer needed and were taken to the dump and destroyed. The Battalion did not want to distribute these items locally for fear of being accused of favouring one faction or the other. Bethan always performed what was asked of her but she sometimes she felt angry, especially when others found reasons not to work. Being responsible to organise the travel arrangements for over 2,000 trips, she felt she had as much to do as anyone else.



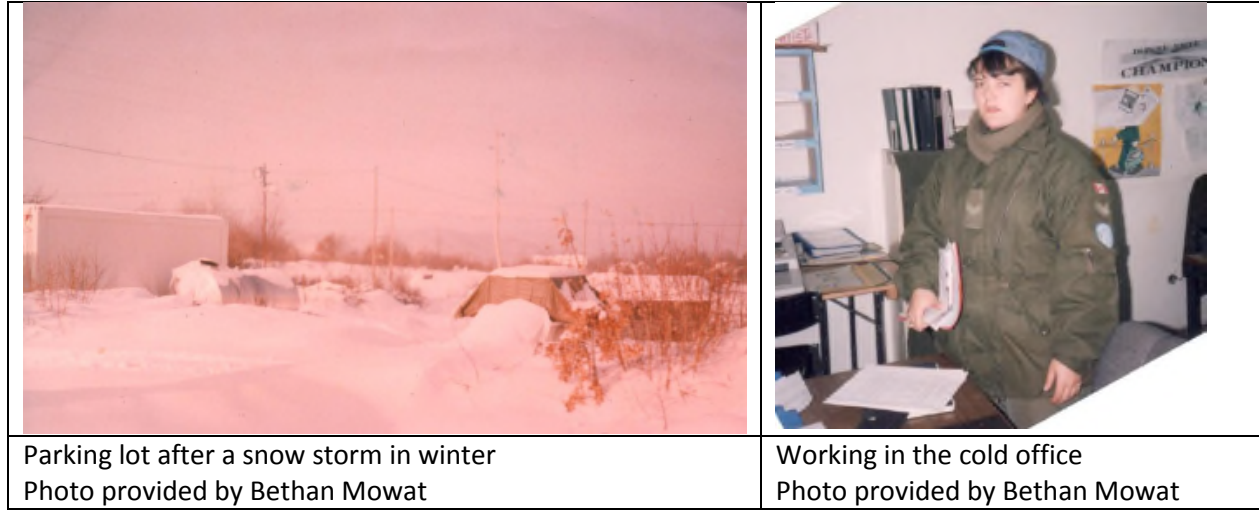
*Winter Volleyball game in camp parking lot
Photo provided by Bethan Mowat*

*Dump where trash and unneeded items from
Germany were burnt
Photo provided by Bethan Mowat*

Camp life

Bethan slept in a large room formed by joining two Atco construction trailers. She shared these quarters with three other women, who were employed at the headquarters. It was a tight knit group of women who looked after each other. Bethan does not remember experiencing any form of sexual harassment from her coworkers except for one instance of verbal harassment. During this isolated incident she informed the inebriated offending party that she would file an official complaint if he continued his inappropriate behaviour. After this incident she did not experience any additional harassment from this individual or from any others during the rest of her tour.

Their camp was in a valley high in the mountains where it was very cold in the winter. Camp life was okay if the electricity was on, otherwise they would freeze. Electricity for the camp was provided by generators and could be interrupted if they were undergoing maintenance or repairs or if they were lacking fuel. As it got colder, Bethan felt her morale and patience drop. It didn't help when they lost electricity for two days.



At the main camp, Bethan always felt she was being watched namely with respect to the dress code which seemed overly strict. As well, she felt compressed with other people. There was no place for privacy when she wanted to be alone and relax. In spite of this, at the office the team shared many jokes and laughed often. The Platoon Warrant Officer did a funny thing whenever someone would ring the bell on the counter. He would jump up and prance to the counter singing or humming the theme song from the movie Rocky 4.

Being restricted to the camp, Bethan missed physical activity and spent 30 minutes on the leisure centre's stationary bike each day.



One of the privileges that the soldiers appreciated was a weekly phone call home which lasted a designated number of minutes. The Army had subscribed to a certain number of satellite telephones for

this purpose. At the main camp, the staff regularly used the phones for administrative purposes and had access to them 24 hours per day. For instance, the Welfare Platoon had to call travel agents to book flights for the soldiers. Bethan remembers that the rear party in Valcartier got a huge bill and sent the invoice over to get more information. The bill was circulated around the entire camp with a note asking people to indicate which calls were their personal calls. She remembers getting it back with only a few of the calls being claimed as being personal.

At one point, Bethan decided to start attending church. She was not sure why, as she never attended church at home, possibly because there was so little to do at the camp. The church was located over in the mechanics area outside of the camp. To get there she needed to hitch a ride with the Padre.

Receiving mail from family and friends always made her happy, like when her grandmother sent marzipan and someone else sent cookies. At Christmas, her mom sent a whole kit with a small tree and various other decorations and her grandmother sent Christmas cake. She received many other gifts.

Bethan also noted that the members of other reserve units received care packages from their units but that she received none from the RCH. The RMR soldiers received Rugby shirts and others received letters or cards. Bethan was unimpressed by the lack of consideration and made a mental note to bring this up with the unit when she got home.

Christmas dinner at camp was a sombre event. They were allowed more than one drink but the effect was spoiled for Bethan when she went to the washroom. For some reason, the electricity was not working around the area of the portable toilets so it was very dark. Consequently, she did not notice that it was full to the rim until after she sat down.

Travel to company camps and breakdown on the road

Bethan had the opportunity to visit the company camps and even visited an observation post (OP). She thought those to the south were better off than the HQ, where the weather was volatile and there was a lot of snow. Going to the company camps in the south near the coast was like going to heaven. Travellers would emerge from the overcast mountains and see the sunshine.



*Picture of an OP in C Company's area of responsibility
near the Medak pocket
Picture provided by Bethan Mowat*



*Road over the mountains to the positions held by the
southern companies
Picture from Google street view*

On one of the trips, the vehicle that Bethan was travelling in suffered a breakdown along the way. A sergeant and Bethan were travelling in a jeep to B Company to deliver something. It was approximately a 2-hour drive and radio communications were not possible because the winding roads passed through some very mountainous terrain. Consequently, when the vehicle broke down, they could not call for a recovery vehicle or any other type of help. While the Sgt tried to repair the vehicle Bethan got out her rifle and stood guard. When night fell it became cold and Bethan heard shooting off in the distance. Bethan thought it was the perfect situation for them to get hurt or robbed or kidnapped. The Sgt finally got the vehicle going around 11 pm and they continued their trip to the B Company camp. That night, Bethan felt very lucky knowing that things could easily have gotten worse. Once they arrived, they had to stay at the B Company camp for 48 hours due to mortar bombardments around camp. Bethan did not bring an overnight bag and learned to do so as a precaution on subsequent day trips.

Visitors

The base camp was used as a rest stop along a route between Zagreb and other places, like the port city of Split. Soldiers from countries participating in UNPROFOR would often stop along the route to eat, wash or rest. Bethan remembers hearing that one group of soldiers from a foreign country had stopped and used the showers. She heard that some of them had apparently kept their boots on when they showered. She heard this from the people who had to clean up after they left.

She also remembers hearing stories that circulated around the camp about soldiers from other countries who had been sent to Croatia woefully unprepared for the winter climate. The soldiers from one country arrived in sandals and shorts. The soldiers from another country were not equipped with winter dress and had their vehicles stolen during the night while they all huddled around nearby gas-powered heaters.

Exposure to the despair of the locals

Bethan remembers experiencing a severe culture shock seeing the state of the country and meeting the local people who worked on the base. During the ongoing war, their lives, careers and homes had been totally destroyed. She felt that the extent of the destruction brought things into perspective and she kept wondering if a war of this type was really worth it in the end.

The camp employed some local staff to work as barmaids and kitchen staff. In addition to earning a small salary, they were allowed to buy goods at the canteen and to take home plastic pails full of leftover food from the mess. This privilege was a big motivator, almost more important than the money.

In October, Bethan remembers going with one of the other Canadian soldiers off the base to drive one of the barmaids home. At their destination, they were invited into the barmaid's home and offered cigarettes, lemonade and hot buns. The barmaid's father was a soldier who at the time was home on leave from the front. Bethan realized how hard it was on the children when they found the barmaid's 12-year-old brother asleep on the living room couch, waiting for her. He refused to go to bed each night until he knew she had arrived home safely.

Near Christmas, Edwina, the local woman who worked for Bethan at the video centre, invited Bethan and the platoon Warrant Officer to her father-in-law's house, where she and her family were now living. Edwina was a Croat woman who had married a Serb man. Before the war, she had been an architect and her husband had been an engineer. Their successful professional careers and their beautiful family home had been totally destroyed by the conflict and they, like many others in the surrounding region, were living in poverty and uncertainty. For supper, they served fish and potatoes. Bethan wondered how they found the food to serve their guests. During supper, she got to sample the Slivovitz drink. After supper, Edwina asked for a favour which was to buy Edwina's daughter a Barbie doll the next time that Bethan went on leave. Before the war, Edwina used to frequently go on buying trips to Italy but now she no longer even had a passport. Edwina offered to provide money for the doll which Bethan could not accept. On one of her leaves, Bethan did indeed buy the Barbie and gave it to the mother as a gift for her daughter. Edwina was very appreciative.

A number of times, Bethan went with the Padre into the local community to distribute goods that had been sent to him from Canada. He was very active doing this and he received many parcels from his network in Canada. At this time, Canadians could ship goods to soldiers at a Trenton address and the Army would transport them to Croatia or Bosnia. Subsequently, this practice was discouraged because the Canadian Armed Forces did not want to be perceived as a relief agency and did not want the locals to expect this of its soldiers.

On another occasion, Bethan was reading a magazine at the leisure centre and commented on a wool sweater in one of the photographs. Edwina asked to see the picture and offered to have one knit for the equivalent of \$20. Two weeks later Bethan was presented with a perfect copy of the sweater which she still had more than twenty years later. She also received beautifully embroidered napkins and doilies as gifts. Through this incident, Bethan realized that the local people were very talented but desperate for cash. They were virtually without any means of supporting themselves because their economy had been totally destroyed.

Based on her few visits to local homes and her observations when passing on the road, Bethan noted that many locals were living in damaged houses. Often, one of the walls was shot out and the door to that room was kept closed.

She noticed she was more sensitive to the plight of the locals than several of her colleagues who tended to appear more disconnected from the circumstances. She found this disparity in their experiences to be frustrating at times.

She was confronted with this insensitivity on one occasion when she was asked to serve at a mess diner where imported lobster was the main course. She remembers thinking that such an elaborate feast in their current context seemed like an injustice to the suffering locals surrounding the base. Others must have thought the same way because she not asked to perform such a duty more than once.

Drinking problems

Numerous times Bethan heard gunshots coming from just outside the front gate of the camp. She assumed that this was someone who was drunk and was expressing their frustration with the situation. She knew that the locals would often get drunk on the weekend and fire into the air. Their level of frustration was high because they had little food, no fuel, no electricity, no police force or local government and were living in an environment full of anarchy and fear. All this was in contrast to their normal, peaceful lives before the war.

Bethan also remembers hearing about an incident where drinking with the locals turned counterproductive. It occurred when a lieutenant from the Battalion was sent to maintain contact with one of the warring factions and had unwisely accepted to have a drink with his hosts, in an attempt to establish a relationship of confidence. This measure apparently backfired as the individual got drunk and aggressive and started insulting the person he was sent to meet.

Vacation and leave

When she first arrived in Croatia, Bethan worked hard organizing the first set of 96-hour-leave trips. Consequently, she took her own leaves late in the tour after she had ensured everyone else's arrangements had been properly made.

For her 18-day vacation (HLTA), Bethan travelled to Hong Kong where she spent New Year's Eve with a friend from the Black Watch. She left camp on December 29th and arrived in Hong Kong on December 31st at 8 pm with virtually no transition time from a war zone to a party zone. Despite this brief transition, she greatly enjoyed the time she spent in Hong Kong. While waiting in line to visit a Buddha exhibit, Bethan heard the couple behind her talking about how one of their cousins from Saskatchewan had served in a UN mission in Cyprus. Bethan thought that the conversation was prompted by the UN patch on her bag, so she introduced herself and found out that the stranger's cousin had been one of her roommates, whom she knew very well.

Bethan returned to Croatia in January at the halfway mark of the tour. She found herself reticent to return to the warzone but was eager to see the people there, who had become her friends.

As for Bethan's 96-hour leaves, she first went by train to Triest, Italy, in February and later by airplane to Rome, Italy. On her second trip, she and some of her friends were thinking of going to Hungary, but they decided to wait until they arrived at the Zagreb airport before booking their flights. When they got there, the flight to Rome was cheaper, so they travelled to Rome on an improvised trip where they visited the Vatican and the coliseum, had a nice meal, and went dancing. They very much appreciated the freedom and the lack of structure.

Return to Canada

In April 1994, the Battalion was replaced by another unit. The departing soldiers packed up their gear and returned to Canada. The first step was the 5½-hour bus ride to the airport at Zagreb. They then got on an alcohol-free flight to Quebec City which took approximately 12 hours including a stop in Germany.

From Quebec to Montreal, Bethan had organised a minibus rather than ask her family to meet her. She felt strange going from a war zone to a peaceful setting at home. She remembers looking at the houses along the route and noting that none of them were damaged and that the roofs were all intact. Along the road she started comparing Croatia and Quebec and started wondering if the ethnic communities in Quebec might ever embark on a similar enterprise and end up losing as much as the former residents of the Gračac area.

She found the return difficult. She was happy to be home but she felt like she was letting the people in Croatia down by returning to her privileged life and leaving them in a wartime context. As she arrived she realized she had been running on adrenaline for six months. She had worked 7 days a week, always alert and on duty, never relaxed. She remembers living through a difficult emotional adjustment and seeing a civilian psychologist to help her adapt to life after her tour. She never realized how exposure to such a situation negatively affects people, how much it takes out of them and leaves an empty feeling. She recognized as well that others had had much more intense experiences than she did and that each person has a different tolerance level. Approximately eight months after the Battalion returned, one

member of the Welfare platoon committed suicide. Bethan attended his funeral with the other members of the platoon. Bethan heard as well that several of the soldiers' marriages did not survive the deployment.

Since Canada's involvement in the UNPROFOR Peacekeeping mission, certain additional measures have been put in place by the Canadian Armed Forces that help to support the mental and physical health of the troops. For example, efforts have been made to give soldiers longer periods at home between deployments. Furthermore, short decompression periods and counselling sessions were introduced to ease the transition between soldiers' departure from their overseas tour and their arrival in Canada.

Life thereafter

After returning from her deployment in Bosnia, Bethan returned to school as a mature student and in 1995 obtained a bachelor's degree in Political Science at Concordia University. She also worked for a year as an intern in the offices of Alcan. It was there that she realized that office work was not for her – she missed the adrenalin and esprit de corps she had experienced in the army. Her Godfather helped her get a job as a trainee on a movie set and she has been working in the film industry ever since, in a variety of roles, principally as a freelancer. She found that work in the film industry had a level of intensity similar to that of the Armed Forces. Through her networking she has been able to land many successful mandates around the world. At the time she was interviewed for this document, she was employed as Assistant Director for the production of the movie *X-Men: Apocalypse* that was being filmed in Montreal.

Footnotes

¹ During this period, A company was detached to CANBAT 2 in Bosnia and was deployed to Srebrenica.

² The Medak pocket was the site of an intense confrontation between the Croat Army and the UN peacekeepers from the 3 PPLCI stationed there during the previous tour. According to Wikipedia, Operation Medak Pocket was a military operation undertaken by the Croatian Army in September 1993, in which a salient reaching the southern suburbs of Gospić, in the south-central Lika region of Croatia, then under the control of the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina, was attacked by Croatian forces. The pocket was named after the village of Medak. The Croatian offensive temporarily succeeded in expelling rebel Serb forces from the pocket after several days of fighting. However, the operation ended in controversy after a skirmish with United Nations peacekeepers and accusations of serious Croatian war crimes against local Serb civilians. Although the outcome of the battle was a tactical victory for the Croatians, it became a serious political liability for the Croatian government and international political pressure forced a withdrawal to the previous ceasefire lines. According to some Canadian sources, UNPROFOR personnel and Croatian troops exchanged heavy fire. In Canada, at the time, the battle was considered to be one of the most severe battles fought by the Canadian Forces since the Korean War.

L'histoire de Antonio-Luc Pelchat et Stéphane Morin

1993-94 : arrière-garde à Valcartier



Commentaires des Auteurs

Les auteurs principaux de ce texte, autre que l'individu qui a raconté ses expériences, étaient John Cochrane, ancien membre de l'unité, et Marina Tinkler, sa nièce et étudiante à l'université Concordia. Cette version historique des événements a été préparée en 2015, plusieurs années après leur déroulement. Les auteurs ont préparé le texte en utilisant principalement les informations qui leur ont été fournies lors des entrevues avec les personnes concernées. Lorsqu'il était possible, cette information a été validée via des entrevues avec d'autres participants, et par un examen des photos, textes, et vidéos qui étaient disponibles. Les présentes textes sont des récapitulatifs, comme les individus concernés rappellent les événements quelques années après leur déroulement.

L'histoire de Antonio-Luc Pelchat et Stéphane Morin

Antonio-Luc Pelchat et Stéphane Morin ont évolué comme membres de l'arrière-garde du 12^e Régiment blindé du Canada (12 RBC) à Valcartier. Le Régiment a été déployé durant Opération Cavalier, en Bosnie, entre les mois de décembre 1993 et de juin 1994.

En septembre 1993, Luc et Stéphane ont été appelés à Valcartier afin de se préparer pour leur déploiement en Bosnie en décembre. Lors de la période de préparation, ils ont suivi un programme de mise à niveau sur les véhicules, les armes et les communications. Ils ont également assisté à des présentations au sujet de la situation politique en Bosnie, des règles d'engagement mises en place par les Nations Unies, etc.

Luc et Stéphane voulaient vraiment partir en Bosnie avec les autres troupes : ils voulaient vivre une aventure militaire à l'étranger comme celles vécues par plusieurs de leurs amis du Régiment.

Contexte

Stéphane était membre du corps des cadets RCH à St-Constant avant de s'enrôler au Régiment en décembre 1991. Il s'est enrôlé à St-Hubert, car il habitait sur la Rive Sud. Il se souvient des rivalités d'escadron à l'époque, mais il n'y a jamais vraiment adhéré. Il était membre à part entière de son régiment et très fier d'être militaire canadien. Il se souvient d'avoir reçu plusieurs commentaires sur sa fierté régimentaire lorsqu'il était instructeur au rang de caporal-chef à l'école de combat de la brigade.

Luc faisait partie d'un cercle amical de trois soldats qui étaient quasiment inséparables. Les deux autres étaient André « Tatou » Roy et Sylvain « Slide » Bourque; ils avaient convaincu Luc à se joindre à l'escadron B à St-Hubert. Luc se rappelle que tous les trois étaient très fiers de leur appartenance à l'escadron B, à un tel point que leur sergent, Denis Gilbert alias Pôpa, leur avait demandé d'atténuer leur fierté afin de ne pas créer une trop grande rivalité entre l'escadron B et les autres escadrons du Royal Canadian Hussars. À cette époque, l'escadron B était installé dans le hangar numéro 1 de la base militaire de St-Hubert.



*Le hangar numéro 1 est le premier à droite
Photo obtenue sur le site web du Bomber
Command Museum*



*Le bâtiment était construit en bois.
Photos fournies par Michel Abourousse*



Projet de documentation historique des Royal Canadian Hussars
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La pièce principale - une ancienne aire d'entreposage d'avions - et les salles de classe du hangar étaient des espaces partagés avec plusieurs autres organismes de la base dont un corps de cadet et la force de défense de la base.

Plusieurs bureaux et salles dans le coin nord-est du hangar étaient réservés à l'escadron. Puisque le plancher du hangar était aussi le terrain de parade pour le commandant de la base, les véhicules étaient stationnés à l'extérieur en face du hangar.

Lors des séances de formation sur les techniques de défense contre les attaques nucléaire, biologiques et chimiques, un petit garage à l'extérieure a été utilisé comme chambre à gaz permettant aux soldats de subir les effets de gaz lacrymogène et de se familiariser avec les masques à gaz.



Photo de Philippe Chevalier devant le hangar numéro 1 à St-Hubert. Les véhicules de l'escadron sont stationnés à gauche.
Photo fournie par Philippe Chevalier



Photo de plusieurs Hussards devant la chambre à gaz à côté du hangar numéro 1 à St-Hubert après avoir été exposés au gaz lacrymogène.
Photo fournie par Denis Gilbert

La plupart des membres de l'escadron étaient des résidents de la Rive-Sud de Montréal. C'était une tradition de se donner un surnom, quoique certains fussent un peu discutables et décidés dans la légendaire cantine de l'escadron. La cantine était une petite salle qui ressemblait à un mess, mais qui était ouverte à tous les grades. Le surnom de Luc était « Shovel Cat » qui était un jeu de mots proche de la traduction anglaise de son nom.

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La cantine à l'escadron B et le réfrigérateur signé par plusieurs membres de l'escadron B
Photos fournies par Denis Gilbert

Préparation

À Valcartier, le nombre de soldats qui se préparaient pour le déploiement excédait le nombre requis pour la mission. Cependant, les dossiers de tous les soldats ont été préparés comme s'ils partaient en la mission. Luc se souvient qu'il fallait notamment déterminer le montant de l'assurance-vie à souscrire. Après en avoir discuté avec un de ses confrères, il a opté pour un montant de 220 000 \$: 20 000 \$ pour ses funérailles et 200 000 \$ pour ses héritiers.

En préparation pour le départ, les membres des différentes unités de la Réserve ont été placés au fur et à mesure dans les différentes postes pour la mission. Ceux qui n'avaient toujours pas de poste fixe devaient se présenter à l'escadron de commandement et services. Lorsque tous les postes étaient comblés, les ressources en surplus sont devenues officiellement membres de l'arrière-garde.

Tôt dans le processus, on a informé Luc qu'il partirait avec le Régiment en tant que chauffeur de la jeep du Padre. Selon la personne qui lui avait informé de son nouveau poste, il a été choisi parce qu'il avait un bon comportement, son uniforme était toujours impeccable, il était toujours poli et il parlait bien. Sa tenue exemplaire a été notée notamment lors d'une pratique pour une parade formelle. Puisque l'escadron de commandement et service avait trois soldats en trop pour l'espace qui lui avait été attribué pour la parade, il fallait exempter trois soldats lors de la parade réelle. Pour choisir les trois soldats, l'adjudant maître de l'escadron a passé dans les rangs et a inspecté les uniformes de chacun. Les trois soldats avec les meilleurs uniformes, dont Luc, ont été exemptés de la parade.

Deux semaines plus tard, un sergent est venu l'informer qu'il ne partirait plus en mission : le sergent en question avait convaincu la personne responsable des affectations de placer un de ses amis personnels à ce poste plutôt que Luc. Luc était étonné par la façon dont la mauvaise nouvelle ainsi que la raison du changement lui avaient été communiquées.



Stéphane (au centre) et quelques autres Hussards près de l'aéroport à Valcartier lors de la concentration.
Photo fournie par Stéphane Morin



Lors d'un exercice à Gagetown NB, Luc (à gauche) a rencontré un soldat américain, qui venait de l'état de Maine et qui avait le nom de famille Leveseur.
Photo fournie par Antonio Luc Pelchat

Puisqu'ils venaient de vivre une très grande frustration, la presque totalité des réservistes restant à l'arrière-garde ont progressivement négocié la fin de leurs contrats et ont quitté Valcartier. Luc et Stéphane sont restés pour la durée de leurs contrats, car ils croyaient malgré tout qu'ils pouvaient être déployés à tout moment.

Travail de l'arrière-garde

Le rôle de l'arrière-garde était de supporter les troupes déployées et représenter le Régiment, accomplir les tâches que les officiers et sous-officiers avaient de la difficulté à accomplir depuis la Bosnie, et maintenir les actifs du Régiment sur la base Valcartier pendant l'absence du Régiment. Il fallait notamment veiller à la sécurité et à l'entretien de la bâtisse 310 qui était le quartier général et le centre d'opérations régimentaire lorsque le Régiment n'était pas à l'extérieur. Aussi, il fallait supporter localement les familles des soldats déployés, en faire le plus pour les aider dans tout le sens du terme. Les membres de l'arrière-garde devaient demeurer prêts à toute éventualité et faire toute tâche connexe requise par le 12 RBC.

En plus, il fallait être prêt à se déployer à tout moment advenant un besoin en personnel supplémentaire ou en personnel de remplacement suite à une blessure grave ou un décès d'un soldat sur le terrain. Les ressources de remplacement ont été déployées en ordre alphabétique. Lors d'un premier remplacement, un soldat au nom de Levesque est partie vers la Bosnie. Les prochaines en ligne était Morin et en suite Pelchat. Le travail de l'arrière-garde était important même si ses membres ne

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voyaient pas toujours le fruit de leurs efforts sur le moment. Le travail était parfois valorisant, parfois ingrat, comme celui d'un pompier qui doit être prêt à toute éventualité.

Luc est devenu préposé au quartier-maitre (QM) et Stéphane est devenu membre de la police régimentaire, sous les ordres de Caporal-chef « Coco » Coté du 12 RBC qui était responsable de la sécurité du quartier général du régiment (le bâtiment 310). Comme les deux soldats voulaient vraiment rejoindre les troupes en Bosnie, ils ont toujours fait attention pour avoir un comportement exemplaire. Ils se sont portés volontaires pour toutes les tâches, même celles qui n'étaient pas très intéressantes. Ils se souviennent d'avoir lavé de nombreuses pièces d'équipement et des véhicules qui ont été livrés au Régiment depuis l'Europe et ailleurs. Avant de les entreposer ou de les stationner, il fallait les nettoyer intégralement. Également, les deux ont été affectés souvent aux cuisines où il fallait laver des chaudrons et nettoyer les installations. Durant toutes ces périodes, ils ont essayé de maintenir le moral et de démontrer leur enthousiasme au cas où ils auraient la chance d'être déployés.



Photo de Stéphane en train de laver un véhicule à la base Valcartier
Photo fournie par Stéphane Morin

Photo de Luc devant la photocopieuse, où il a copié des milliers de documents lorsqu'il était membre de l'arrière-garde
Photo fournie par Antonio Luc Pelchat

Luc et Stéphane ont été affectés à plusieurs autres tâches ponctuelles. Lorsque le Régiment devait expédier des armes additionnelles en Bosnie, ils agissaient à titre de chauffeur et escorte de sécurité pour transporter les armes à l'aéroport du Québec. Lorsque l'arrière-garde avait organisé des journées récréatives pour les familles des soldats en Bosnie, Luc et Stéphane ont divertie les familles aux glissades du mont Castor. Le mont Castor était une petite pente de ski située à l'intérieur de la base, près du

champ de tir grenade et face au golf. Luc a été touché par le fait que plusieurs des enfants comptaient le nombre de «dos dos» avant que leurs pères arrivent en congé depuis la Bosnie. Lorsqu'il y avait une grande tempête à Valcartier, plusieurs membres de l'arrière-garde ont déneigé les entrées de plusieurs familles habitant dans les quartiers résidentiels des soldats mariés (les PMQ's). À quelques reprises, ils sont allés accomplir d'autres tâches diverses sur la base.

Au QM, Luc travaillait pour un sergent qui avait la réputation d'être un patron très exigeant. Avant que Luc arrive, le sergent avait refusé plusieurs autres candidats. Lorsque Luc est arrivé, il s'est mis en position de garde-à-vous devant le sergent en claquant sa botte très fortement sur le plancher. La réaction du sergent n'était pas très enthousiaste, mais il n'a pas mis Luc dehors. Il avait plutôt mentionné qu'il n'avait au moins un qui avait de la «drive». Lorsque Luc ne travaillait pas à laver les équipements, les véhicules ou les chaudrons, il travaillait dans le QM pour améliorer les installations. Plus spécifiquement, il fallait construire un tableau de contrôle des numéros de série et des nouvelles montures pour l'entreposage des armes dans la voûte, notamment pour les rendre plus sécuritaires. Après que Luc avait travaillé comme menuisier pendant plusieurs semaines, le sergent semblait être très satisfait du résultat.

Un jour, le sergent est arrivé avec une arme qui venait d'être retournée au Canada par la suite au décès d'un soldat en Bosnie. Le sergent avait demandé à Luc de la nettoyer et de la ranger dans la voûte d'armes. Après l'avoir nettoyée et placée à l'endroit approprié, Luc devait aussi enlever le nom du soldat qui apparaissait sur le tableau de contrôle des numéros de série. Cette liste était sur un grand tableau à l'intérieur de la voûte. Les noms étaient inscrits sur des petits morceaux de rubans verts placés à côté du numéro de série de l'arme attribuée. Cette journée, lorsqu'il a enlevé le nom du soldat, Luc s'est senti très sombre.

L'officier responsable de l'arrière-garde a tenté de compenser certains membres de l'arrière-garde pour leur dévouement en les nominant à un cours de parachutisme. Cependant, cette idée a surtout eu l'effet opposé. Le geste n'a créé que de la frustration puisque leurs candidatures avaient été refusées. Ni l'arrière-garde, ni les Royal Canadian Hussars, ni le Secteur du Québec de la Force terrestre n'avaient suffisamment de budget pour payer pour ce type de formation.

Stéphane et Luc se souviennent d'avoir participé, avant la réception des avis de refus de leurs candidatures, à un cours préparatoire pour le cours de parachutisme d'une durée de 2 ou 3 semaines. Durant ce cours, Stéphane a réussi à gagner le respect des instructeurs du R22eR malgré le fait qu'il était un réserviste et avait un béret noir.

Alors, toujours à la recherche de l'aventure, Luc et Stéphane se sont inscrits eux-mêmes dans un cours civil de plongée sous-marine qui était offert à la piscine de la base.

Retour de la Bosnie

Au mois de juin, le Régiment était de retour à Valcartier. Chacun des membres devait venir au QM afin de prendre une veste souvenir préparée pour ceux qui avaient participé à la rotation. Ces vestes avaient été fabriquées par une entreprise d'équipements sportifs à partir de mesures prises avant le départ. Le sergent responsable du QM avait chargé Luc d'effectuer la distribution.

Luc se souviendra toujours de l'histoire d'un pauvre soldat qui lui a raconté qu'il avait constaté, dès son arrivée à Valcartier, que sa famille n'était pas présente pour l'accueillir. Lors de son arrivée à la maison, il l'a trouvée vide. Il était traumatisé puisque sa conjointe ne l'avait jamais averti de leur départ. Ce soldat a été déployé trois fois dans un laps de temps relativement court, trop court pour sa famille. Luc se souvient que le soldat a fait une blague amère lorsqu'il a reçu sa veste. « Eh bien! Je suis parti en Bosnie et j'ai perdu ma femme, mes enfants, mes meubles et mon auto, mais j'ai reçu un jacket souvenir. Eh bien ». Ça a fait une double peine pour Luc parce qu'il serait parti volontiers à la place de ce soldat sans la moindre hésitation.

La vie par la suite - Stéphane

Lorsque Stéphane a passé une entrevue dans le cadre de la préparation de ce document, il habitait la Montérégie. Après avoir travaillé au sein de l'arrière-garde, il a décidé de retourner aux études et il a obtenu un BAC en polytechnique. Depuis 15 ans, il était pompier à la ville de Montréal et membre de l'équipe de sauvetage en hauteur de la caserne 27 de Côtes-des-Neiges (l'équipe Spiderman). Il était toujours très dévoué et actif dans l'armée. Il est resté au Régiment comme caporal-chef jusqu'en 2002. En 1997, Stéphane a participé à une séance de formation à Fort Knox sur les systèmes de tirs utilisés dans les chars américains M1. Fort Knox est une base militaire du corps blindé américaine où on y retrouve également le musée Général Patton et la réserve d'or américaine. Plusieurs membres des Royal Canadian Hussars étaient présents sur ces cours, incluant un individu qui jouait la cornemuse dans les quartiers à l'extérieur des heures de travail. Stéphane est tombé en amour avec cette musique et a demandé au musicien de ne pas arrêter. Ce dernier a encouragé Stéphane de s'enrôler dans la musique du Black Watch of Canada où Stéphane détient actuellement le grade de caporal et il agit à titre de musicien de cornemuse.

La vie par la suite – Luc

Peu de temps après la fin de son affectation à l'arrière-garde, Luc s'est porté volontaire pour remplir temporairement une position vacante au sein de l'escadron des chars du 12^e RBC. À l'automne 1984, l'escadron s'est déplacé à Gagetown afin de s'entraîner dans les vastes secteurs disponibles à cet endroit. Au cours de cette période d'entraînement, Luc s'est blessé lors d'un accident grave. Lors de l'accident, le char dans laquelle Luc voyageait est sorti de la route et s'est viré sur le côté. Par la suite à l'accident, Luc, malgré ses blessures personnelles et ses craintes que le véhicule ne bascule encore plus, a fait son devoir en aidant deux autres membres de l'équipage à sortir du véhicule.

Malgré cet incident, Luc n'avait pas perdu son grand intérêt dans l'armée et le corps blindé. Il a passé plusieurs années additionnelles dans la Réserve puis il s'est enrôlé dans la Force régulière pour servir avec les Royal Canadian Dragoons à Petawawa. Il est sorti des Forces en 2004. Il a été atteint par le trouble de stress post-traumatique dû notamment au choc vécu lors de son accident de char. Il s'est inscrit dans un programme offert par Anciens Combattants Canada lui permettant de se faire soigner et d'avoir une vie stable. Luc habitait à St-Jacques-le-Mineur avec sa conjointe, leurs enfants et leurs deux chiens.

Brian Cobby's story

1993 – 1994 – Operation Cavalier at Visoko

1996 – 1997 – Operation Alliance at Zgon



*Cougar escort vehicle in the hills of Bosnia
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*

Authors' note

The principal authors of this text, aside from the individual recounting the story, are John Cochrane, a former member of the unit, and his niece Marina Tinkler, a Concordia University literature student. This record of events was prepared in 2016, many years after they occurred. The authors prepared this record principally using information obtained during interviews with the individuals involved. Where possible, this information was corroborated through interviews with others and a review of pictures and other publicly available information. The record presents the events as the individuals involved remember them several years after they occurred.

Brian Cobby's story

Brian Cobby deployed to Bosnia from November 1993 to May 1994 with the *12^e Régiment blindé du Canada* (12 RBC) on Rotation 2 of Operation Cavalier. The 12 RBC Battle Group (BG) was deployed to Bosnia to respect Canada's commitment to provide a battalion-sized force (CANBAT 2) to the United Nations Protection Force in Bosnia (UNPROFOR II). The 12 RBC was stationed at Visoko, where Brian worked in the Regimental Headquarters as a driver for the Tactical Air Control Party (TACP).

Brian deployed to Bosnia a second time from July 1996 to January 1997 with A Squadron of the *12e Régiment blindé du Canada* (12e RBC) on Rotation 2 of Operation Alliance. A Squadron was part of a group of soldiers that were fulfilling Canada's commitment to provide troops for the NATO-led Dayton Peace Agreement Implementation Force (IFOR). On this rotation, A Squadron was stationed at Camp Maple Leaf near Zgon, where Brian worked as the cougar gunner in call sign 13C.

Personal Background

Brian was still in high school when he joined the Royal Canadian Hussars (RCH) in February 1991. He was referred to the unit by the personnel at the downtown recruiting office after he expressed an interest in joining an armoured reserve unit. He lived in Brossard, so he joined B squadron in St Hubert. He attended his basic training at the unit and his trade training in Valcartier during the summer of 1992.

Preparation

Brian volunteered to go to Bosnia in the summer of 1993. In August, after the annual militia training exercise in Gagetown, he reported directly to the Worthington Tank Park where the 12 RBC was also conducting training. From there, he travelled back to Valcartier with the 12 RBC convoy. The Battle Group that was preparing for deployment included a command and services squadron, two squadrons of Cougars, one infantry company, an anti-tank platoon, a mortar platoon, a troop of Engineers, a field surgical unit, and a tactical air control party (TACP).

Brian was initially assigned as a driver for the regimental command post (CP), but then he was moved to the Tactical Air control party (TACP), where he became the driver for one of the Forward air control parties (FAC's). He drove an M113, which was a tracked armoured personnel carrier. During the two months of preparatory training in Valcartier, he was assigned living quarters in Building 531, along with the other reservists who were preparing for deployment.

The FAC training was interesting. Brian moved the vehicle or held it stationary while one of the forward controllers (FAC's) directed aircraft to attack different targets. The pilot would leave the air base, fly to the area of operations, contact the FAC and confirm his or her identity by exchanging pre-established code words, proceed to a previously agreed-upon initial point (IP), then travel a specific distance along a specific trajectory to the target area. The pilot would then turn or bank the aircraft to be able to see the ground and have the FAC describe the target. When the target was clear, the pilot would reconfirm and engage the target. Alternatively, a laser designator could be used to illuminate or "paint" the target, allowing the FAC to guide laser-guided bombs, dropped by the aircraft, to their targets. The training in

Valcartier was conducted principally with helicopters, but jets were used on the final exercise. On one occasion, the drivers were allowed to direct a fire mission.

The TACP had four M113 Armoured Personnel Carriers and the party was led by an Air Force major. In each M113, there were four crew members - the mission leader, who was usually an officer, the mission second in command (2ic), who was usually a warrant officer, a sergeant-gunner and a driver. All TACP members, except the drivers, were qualified to direct air strikes. The gunner was responsible for the weapons, ammo, communications, rations and water. He also oversaw the driver maintenance. The driver was responsible for vehicle maintenance, fueling, storage of equipment and assisting the gunner in local defense when employed. When on the move, the gunner would take up a position in the cupola while the mission leader and the 2ic would ride in the cargo area with the hatch open. Only the drivers were assigned permanently to their vehicles; the other members of the crew were assigned for each mission.



*Portrait of the TACP at Visoko
Photos provided by Brian Cobby*



*Brian in front of his vehicle
Photos provided by Brian Cobby*

During the preparatory training, the Battle Group experienced its first casualty. It occurred when the headquarters personnel were taken to a range at night to practice their skills in identifying different types of incoming fire. Soldiers were sent out onto the Termoli range, where they took cover in trenches. Different types of live ammunition were then fired over their heads, with the tracer rounds lighting up the night sky. Soldiers were asked to listen to the crack and the thump of each round and identify the weapons being used, the distance to the firing point and the direction of the fire. During this exercise, one soldier – Master Corporal Bureau was hit in the neck by a live round. Alex Martel, a medic from the RCH, who was participating in the exercise, rather than acting as a medic at the time, provided first aid. He reacted quickly and tried to save the man's life, but Bureau's injury was too severe. The range exercise was immediately stopped and the troops were told that an accident had occurred and that they were to stand down for the night. The next morning, all the troops in the Battle Group were formed up in a large parade. The Commanding officer took over the parade and made a short speech stating only that the Battle Group had suffered its first casualty, and that, in Bosnia, there would be more. Later, Brian read that the accident was attributed to an ammunition problem, in that there had

been insufficient powder in one of the rounds, resulting in its falling short into a trench rather than going over it.

Arrival in Bosnia

The group that Brian travelled with flew from Quebec City to Paris and then to Zagreb. From Zagreb, the members of the TACP flew on a small 2-engine Russian plane to Sarajevo. Due to frequent shelling by the Serbs¹ of the nearby Bosniak quarter of Dobrinja, planes rarely stayed at the Sarajevo airport longer than 15 minutes. Cargo pallets were rolled out the back door and the troops were instructed to run to shelters along the side of the runway. The group then had to wait in the shelters for several hours because their convoy had orders not leave for the camp at Visoko until the group that the convoy drivers had brought to the airport had successfully departed.

The group then travelled to the Canadian camp at Visoko in the back of 2½-ton cargo trucks. These trucks had reinforced metal panels in back that provided some protection for the passengers. The travellers did not have weapons or protective clothing as these items were only accessible upon arrival at the camp. On the way to the camp, something, possibly a rock, hit the side of the truck Brian was travelling in and made a loud noise – and several passengers threw themselves on the floor, possibly thinking they were under attack.



*Waiting area at the Sarajevo airport with shelters shown on the left
Photos provided by Brian Cobby*

*Military aircraft at the Sarajevo airport
Photos provided by Brian Cobby*

The group arrived at the Canadian camp at Visoko and its members were assigned living quarters. At the camp, there were two large buildings – referred to as the Megaplex and the Crystal Palace. Brian was assigned a place inside the Crystal Palace along with the other headquarters staff who worked in the command post, the service company and the medical unit. Over the first two weeks there was a period of transition and orientation which included a handover from the previous team. During this period, Brian's vehicle was grounded so that gun shields could be mounted on it.

Brian met some other members of the RCH from the previous rotation who were preparing to leave. They and many other soldiers from the previous rotation wanted to talk about the death of Corporal Dan Gunther. The press releases issued at the time by the Department of National Defense in Ottawa, which were published widely by numerous news outlets, indicated that Gunther had died as a result of a mortar round exploding close to his vehicle, while he was getting out. This version of the incident seemed to infer that Gunther's death was not a deliberate attempt by any one of the belligerent parties to target the Canadians, but an indirect result of a possibly misguided round. The press release also seemed to infer that Corporal Gunther was partially responsible for his own death because he had exposed himself while mortars were landing in the area. However, the information that was being passed from soldier to soldier at the camp was that Gunther had been hit by a rocket-propelled grenade that had been aimed directly at his vehicle by members of the Bosniak Forces with seemingly hostile intent. The round had hit Gunther in the chest and had exploded behind him, destroying his body and blowing everything off the top of the vehicle. This information originated with the soldiers who were present at the event and others who had been sent afterwards to recover the remains and the vehicle.

Brian listened to his comrades and other soldiers at the camp who seemed to be very upset by the way the real story was not being told in Canada. The frustration of the troops was confirmed to Brian when he visited the junior ranks mess and saw some of the artwork that was left hanging after an art competition amongst the soldiers from the previous rotation. Several very dark pictures seemed to make direct reference to the event. Years later, with the help of the editor of *Esprit de corps* magazine, the true story was told and the government issued an apology for having misstated the truth.

Brian heard that many people from the previous rotation thought that the Bosniaks had targeted the Canadians as a means of sending them a message. Apparently, the Bosniaks objected to the presence of the anti-tank platoon and its powerful TOW missiles. In meetings prior to the event, the Bosniaks had apparently unsuccessfully asked the Canadians not to deploy them in the field. After the incident, a liaison officer had apparently been told, as he crossed a Bosniak checkpoint, that the incident had occurred because the Canadians had ignored the warnings and deployed the TOW's. Whether this was the reason or not, Brian got the impression that the TOW missiles never left the camp at Visoko during his entire deployment.



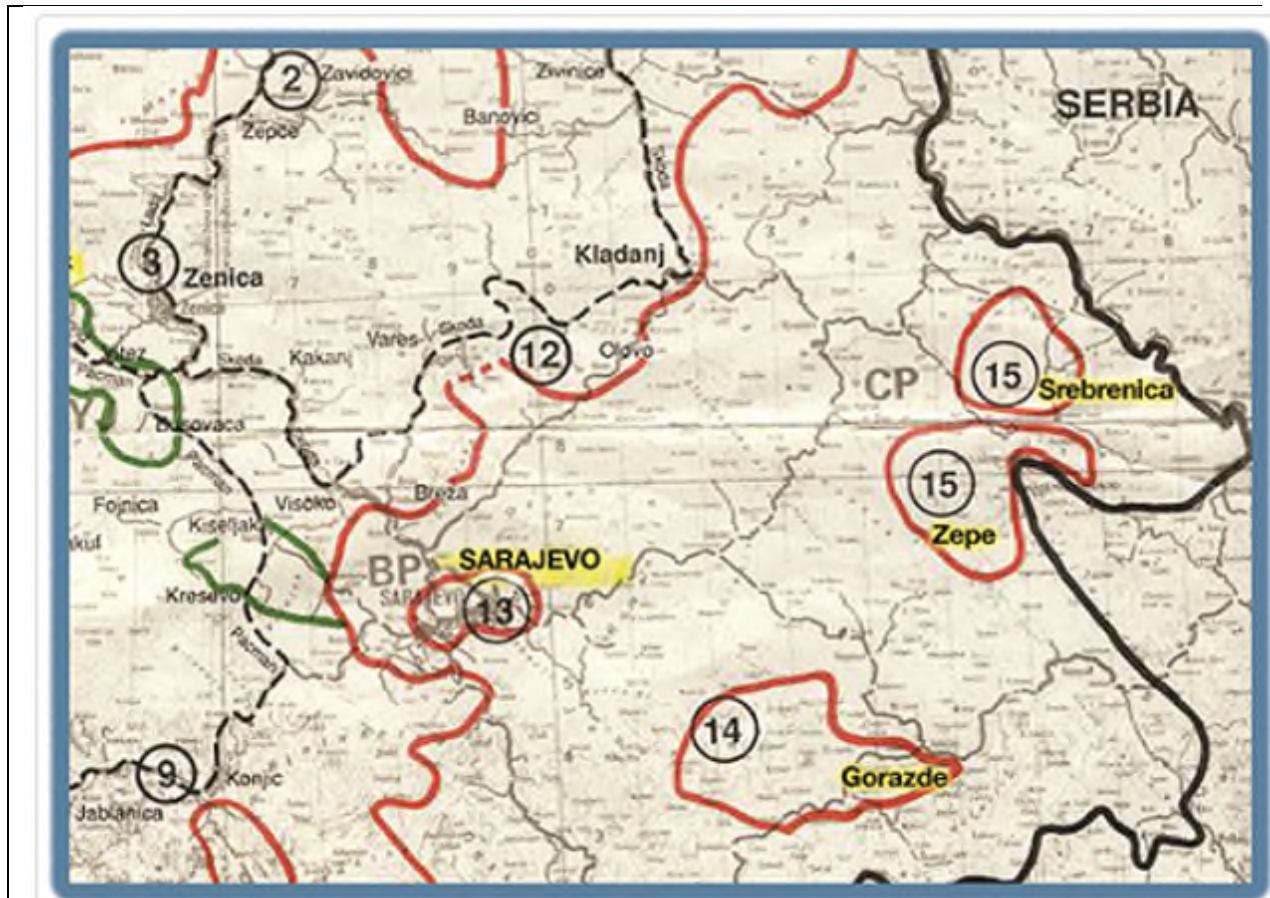
*Picture of the unused Anti-tank platoon vehicles neatly parked at the vehicle compound at the Visoko camp
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*

*On duty in the command post
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*

UN Mission and tactical situation

The Canadians were in Bosnia under the authority of the United Nations Protection Force Two (UNPROFOR II). UNPROFOR II was operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina whereas UNPROFOR I had been focused on a similar conflict in Croatia. UNPROFOR II was not a peacekeeping force because the three groups of belligerents in the country were still very much at war. UNPROFOR II initially focused on the protection of the Sarajevo airport for humanitarian purposes. Then it was tasked with the protection of humanitarian relief convoys organised by the UN. Eventually, it was asked to observe the peace in a number of safe areas that had been declared by the UN. The Battle Group's infantry company was stationed in one of those safe areas in eastern Bosnia - that of Srebrenica. The rest of the Canadian Battle Group at Visoko (CANBAT 2) focused on protecting the United Nations' humanitarian relief convoys in its area of operations. It also provided logistical support to the infantry company in Srebrenica.

Two months before the end of the rotation, the infantry company was called back to Visoko and was replaced in Srebrenica by Dutch troops. It was called back because it was needed at Visoko, notably to help with camp security. Without any infantry for camp security, the cougar squadrons alternated between providing camp security and escorting UN convoys carrying supplies for humanitarian aid. Being able to field only one squadron at a time significantly reduced the level of support that the Battle Group could provide for the UN convoys.



*The Map above outlines the disposition of the belligerent forces in 1994. The red lines show the limits of the Serbian advance from the east. The UN-declared safe areas in the east of the country, populated almost exclusively by Bosniaks, bear the numbers of 14 and 15. The two safe areas with the number 15 were eventually captured by the Serbs when the Bosniaks stopped actively defending them. The city of Sarajevo (number 13) was almost completely surrounded by Serb Forces. The Green lines to the northwest of Sarajevo show two Croatian enclaves. The more powerful Croatian groups were found further west. The Bosniak Forces controlled most of the area in between, including the area around Visoko which is northwest of Sarajevo.
Map provided by UNPROFOR*

The area around Visoko was dangerous because all three belligerent forces had positions that converged nearby. Both Visoko and Sarajevo were controlled by the Bosniak Forces. The Serbs, however, had encircled Sarajevo and were laying siege to it and thus controlled much of the area between the two locations. The Croats controlled two enclaves to the west and north of Visoko – one around the town of Kiseljak and the other around the town of Vitez. Before the Croats and the Bosniaks joined forces at the end of February 1994, the Bosniaks were pressing hard to capture both of these Croatian enclaves.

UNPROFOR's contingent from Britain (BRITBAT) had a camp in Vitez, a town further north. Since the Bosniaks often bombarded the Croats in this town, artillery fire often landed near the British camp. On at least one occasion, the Canadian camp at Visoko was put on alert when the Croatian forces threatened to attack the British camp.

UNIPROFOR had two headquarters from which it commanded all the UN forces in the country. The main UN Divisional headquarters was located at the airport at Sarajevo, where it was protected by French soldiers, and the alternate headquarters was located in Kiseljak, where it was protected by Danish soldiers.

UN humanitarian-aid convoys moving between the UN-controlled airport at Sarajevo and Visoko and beyond could not take a direct route. They travelled along a supply route that went through Kiseljak. They carried supplies to refugee camps, UN-declared safe areas and other locations to the north and east of Visoko. Sometimes, convoys came overland in the opposite direction from the Port of Split. All these convoys were organised by the UNHCR, who had their own vehicles and their own drivers. CANBAT 2 provided escorts for these convoys, meeting them when they entered its area of operations, helping them through the checkpoints and escorting them until they either departed from its area of operations, arrived at their destination or until the escorts were barred from continuing. The Canadian Cougars were generally not allowed to escort the convoys that went to Tuzla through Serb-dominated territory.

CANBAT2's Command and Services Squadron also organised convoys to transport supplies for its own purposes and personnel to and from the airport. For the most part, these convoys also needed to be escorted.

Along these roads the convoys needed to pass through numerous checkpoints belonging to the different belligerent groups. Also, between Visoko and Kiseljak, the convoys were exposed to harassing fire from one or more of the belligerent groups positioned in the hills overlooking the road. Brian especially remembers receiving harassing fire from the surrounding hills when he drove through Buci, a small town just southwest of Visoko.

Commencement of Tactical Air Control operations

The Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) was a divisional asset. While the TACP fell under the administrative authority of the Canadian Battle Group, it was commanded by the Air Operations Command Centre (AOCC) that was located at the alternate UN Divisional command headquarters in Kiseljak. Brian had to drive the TACP team leader to the AOCC numerous times for meetings, generally twice a week.

All requests for air support were to be sent by the FAC's to the AOCC, who would in turn forward the requests that it authorised to an Airborne Command Centre, which operated over or around the Adriatic Sea.

The air support was provided by jet fighters from American, French and British air forces stationed at NATO air bases located in Italy. Air support missions using live munitions could only be conducted after a 24-hour delay, the time required to get permission from UN headquarters in New York City. It was possible, however, at any time, to organise a show of force – i.e. to get a jet fighter to buzz the target and drop flares.



Map showing the relative positions of Sarajevo, Kiseljak, Visoko and Vitez and some of the events described in this story. Map reproduced using Google in conformity with Google's usage policy
 The two parts of the map are not necessarily to scale

Commencement of operations

After the initial handover, Brian was loaned to the Battle Group signals section for a period of two weeks where he worked with another member of the RCH, Miles Stringer. Mostly he worked as a duty operator on a radio and telephone exchange. He generally found this work to be long and tedious, but he was the operator who took two unusual calls. The first call came from the infantry company that was stationed in Srebrenica, a Bosniak enclave located deep in Serbian territory. The company had been stationed there to observe the peace because the enclave had been declared a safe area by the UN. The company reported that one of their soldiers had been shot in the arm by a Serbian sniper. The casualty had

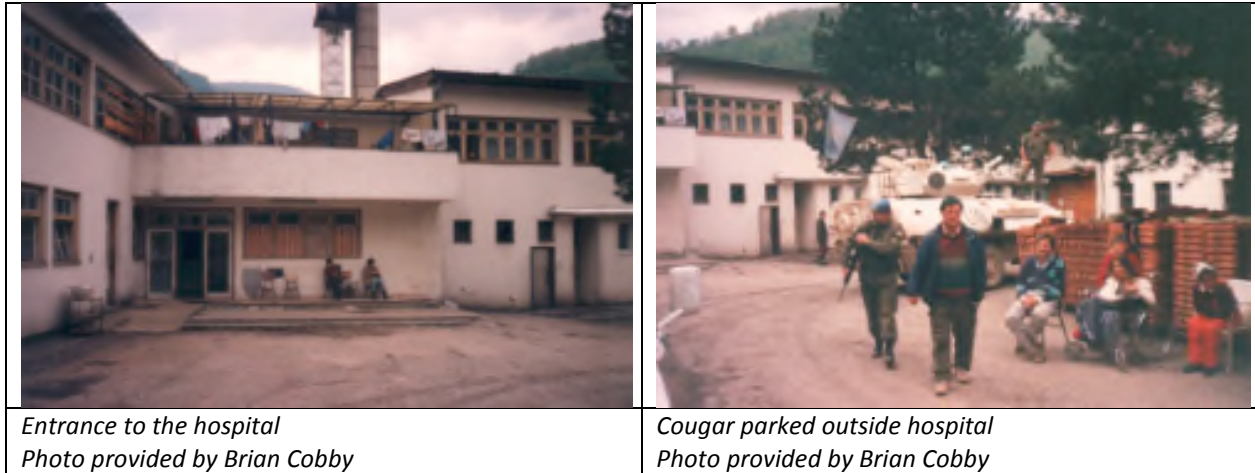
apparently been using his binoculars to observe the Serbian positions in the hills surrounding the town. It was felt that the attack was a warning that that type of observation would not be tolerated by the Serbs. The second call came in from the camp guards who reported that the ammunition container was on fire. Brian promptly informed the duty officer, who rushed out of the headquarters, only to return half an hour later to inform him that a trip flare near the container had gone off and given the impression that there was a fire.

On other occasions, Brian was assigned to other headquarters duties. For example, at Christmas time, he was a member of the party that escorted the chief of the defence staff (CDS) between the camp and the Sarajevo airport. On a different occasion, he acted as the driver for General Forand, the commander of the *5e Groupe-brigade mécanisé du Canada*, during his visit to the camp.

Shortly after arrival at Visoko, an accident occurred that resulted in the death of two soldiers – Corporals David Galvin of the Sherbrooke Hussars and Daniel Langevin of the 12 RBC. Brian was informed when he and the other members of Command and Services Squadron were called into the cafeteria for an announcement. Brian and the other reservists, who had lived on the same floor of the residences in Valcartier with David for the past two months, were quite shook up. Two days later, Brian attended an evening funeral service conducted by the camp padres. After the funeral, he and his comrades went to the mess and sat quietly. Later, when the vehicle was recovered and brought on to the base, it was placed in the vehicle compound under guard, with instructions that no one was to touch it. Late one night, Brian approached the sentry guarding the vehicle and asked if he could enter the vehicle to say goodbye to his friend. The sentry, understandingly stepped aside and allowed Brian to quietly sit and find his peace within the vehicle.

Shortly afterwards, Brian almost had an accident of his own. It occurred when he was acting as the driver of an M113 command post that was being sent to one of two hospitals that was being helped by the Battle Group. The local staff that operated these hospitals had abandoned their posts when a battle erupted nearby, leaving the patients to fend for themselves. The Battle Group had stationed some soldiers at the hospitals to provide essential services until the staff were able to return. The vehicle Brian was driving was needed at the Bakovici² hospital to set up a remote rebroadcast facility. He drove the M113 and another RCH member - Miles Stringer - acted as the crew commander. There were no other passengers. Along the road, the vehicle lost power and the intercom stopped working. Being diesel-powered, however, the motor kept running. Without stopping, Brian turned to signal to Miles that there was a problem. At that point, he saw a cloud of black smoke coming out of the cargo hatch and pointed it out to Miles. Miles quickly used the fire extinguisher to put out the fire. Miles then took the Jerry can full of diesel fuel, which had been stored in the cargo area, and threw it out of the moving vehicle. He also moved the 84mm rockets, M72 anti-tank weapons, and other ammunition stored in the cargo area away from the area of the fire. Some of the packaging on the munitions had started to melt but fortunately, nothing had exploded. Since the motor was still running, Brian's vehicle was able to continue with the convoy, until it was blocked at a checkpoint, at which time the group returned to camp.

Later, after Brian returned to his job as driver for the TACP, his FAC was sent to the Bakovici hospital, in case air support was required. The section stayed there several days. He remembers that, at night, soldiers not on sentry duty were locked into a separate wing, to separate them from the patients.



Tarčin recce for an alternate route to the hospital

The route to the hospital passed through several checkpoints manned by different belligerent groups, who were generally uncooperative. Consequently, the Canadian convoys moving to and from the hospitals experienced many delays and refusals. They also experienced harassing fire from the surrounding hills. To improve this situation, a reconnaissance (recce) patrol was formed in an attempt to open an alternate route to the hospital. The proposed alternate route passed through Sarajevo and circled around through Tarčin to approach the hospital from the south – i.e. through the back door. The recce patrol, which was led by a liaison officer, included two cougars, an engineer section and an ambulance. The FAC was present even though it could only to organise a show of force. All vehicles were painted white and were clearly marked as UN vehicles. The roads through the mountainous terrain were narrow and treacherous. When the patrol started moving north into the mountains, it passed through a Bosniak Forces checkpoint, and the person in charge apparently warned the patrol leader that there was an operation being conducted up the road, and that if they proceeded, they might get shot at. The patrol leader decided to proceed in spite of the warnings. Further up the road, the people in the lead vehicles heard sustained machine gun fire. The patrol leader decided not to proceed further and had the vehicles turn around. Turning around was fairly easy for the three M113s – they turned almost on a dime, by engaging the brake on one track and using the other track to move the vehicle. The cougars had more difficulty, but succeeded without getting bogged or having an accident. This was more difficult because there was not much room to turn around. Shortly afterwards, mortar rounds started falling around the UN vehicles. A mortar fell to the right of Brian’s vehicle and he thought that it must have been very close or powerful because he remembers feeling a shockwave move from his right to his left, even though the round had landed on the other side of the engine compartment and he was driving with his “hatches down”.

As the patrol moved back down the road, a machine gun started firing intermittently at the vehicles. All three M113s were hit with some fire. None of them were pierced but the Canadians were surprised that the white vehicles and even the ambulance were being shot at. A second mortar hit near the last vehicle and shrapnel hit the side of one of the cougars. When they reached the Bosniak checkpoint, the liaison officer went forward to negotiate passage. While the LO was negotiating passage, Brian looked around and was surprised to see that the cougars had adopted fire positions overlooking the checkpoint. He was surprised that such an aggressive stance would be taken by the Canadians because he had not detected any hostility from the people at the checkpoint when the patrol had passed through it on the way up the road. The patrol was called off, having reached the conclusion that the alternate route was not easier than the existing route. The Patrol returned to Sarajevo and stayed at the French camp overnight. Brian remembers that he and the other patrol participants were still high on adrenaline. He was impressed to hear that the Canadian camp had sent a jeep with some beer for them all the way to the French camp.



Working with MALBAT

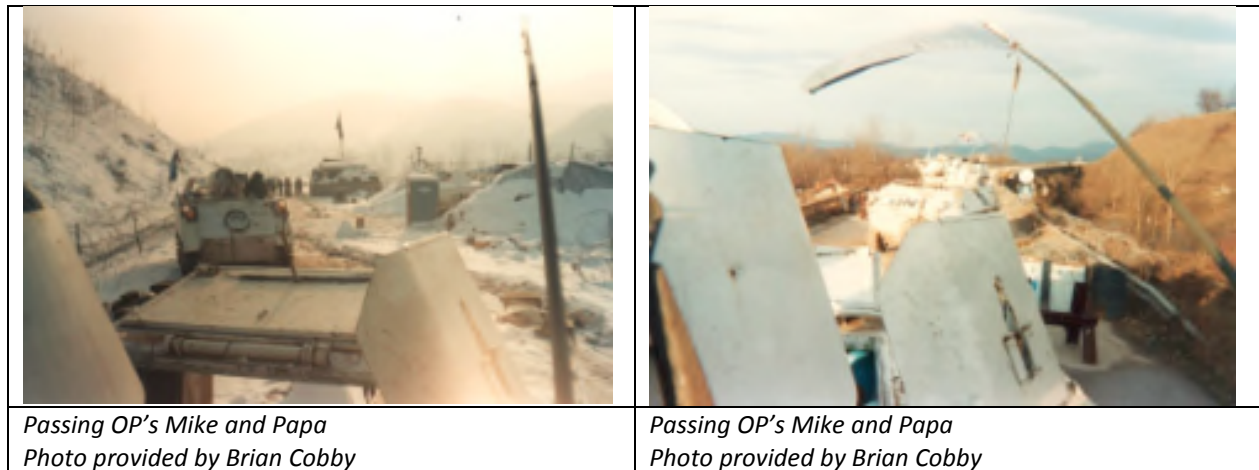
Shortly thereafter, a Malaysian Battalion (MALBAT) joined UNPROFOR at a location to the southwest of Visoko. Brian remembers that his FAC was sent to the MALBAT camp for a week to help integrate the Malaysians into UNPROFOR. Other Canadian soldiers had also been sent there notably to teach the Malaysian drivers how to drive on snow and ice. MALBAT had brand new equipment that had been purchased by the UN specifically for this mission. Brian remembers that the Canadian and Malaysian FAC's went up on a mountain to establish a joint observation post and practice the steps they would follow if they called in an air attack. Brian remembers that their OP was hit by a very bad storm and high winds. Consequently, the operation was discontinued and the units returned to the MALBAT camp. While working with the Malaysians, Brian remembers eating curries three times a day.

Leave and time off

During his eighteen-day leave period, Brian was able to visit Egypt with a soldier from the Sherbrooke Hussars. For his two Rest & relaxation weekends he visited Rome, where he had a great time.

First hostage-taking incident

In early December, twelve Canadian soldiers were taken hostage by Serbs near Ilijas. The Battle Group had established two observation posts (OP's) called Mike and Papa, one on either end of a bridge that spanned a river that separated the Bosniak and Serb Forces. Earlier that day, the Serbs had brought an injured soldier to the Canadian OP on their side of the river and asked that the UN evacuate the soldier to a hospital. Apparently, the evacuation could not be arranged before the soldier had died. Later, some frustrated members of the deceased soldier's unit returned to the OP and captured its Canadian occupants. Brian was not at all involved, but from the information that was communicated on the camp, he understood that the angered Serbs had threatened to kill the Canadians and even conducted mock executions by firing over their heads. The Canadian soldiers were eventually released upon the arrival of a Serbian officer.



Change in the tactical situation

In early February 1994, a mortar attack in a Sarajevo public market killed and wounded a large number of civilians. As a result, the UN requested and NATO authorised the use of retaliatory air strikes against any artillery or mortar units identified by UNPROFOR II as being responsible for attacks on civilians. NATO issued an ultimatum to the Serbs requesting that they move their heavy weapons away from Sarajevo by February 20th, 1994, or suffer air strikes. In return, the Serbs threatened to retaliate on UN camps. At this time the Battle Group fortified the Canadian Camp at Visoko by building walls of hessian cloth filled with sand.

Mission to direct an air strike against the Serb Artillery

Generally the Serbs did comply with the NATO ultimatum. There were, however, some exceptions where the guns had not been withdrawn. Brian remembers that one of the FAC's was asked to move into a position where he could direct a bombing mission on some of these guns. The FAC moved out of camp in an M113 that Brian was driving and an escort of two cougars. Because Brian's regular vehicle was undergoing maintenance, he was ordered to use a vehicle that was usually driven by another driver. The group proceeded to an existing Canadian observation post, but from that position the FAC was not able to see the guns in question.

Brian remembers hearing various discussions that led to a second move. The first discussion was between the TACP commander and the escort. The escort only had orders to bring the TACP to the OP, and did not want to proceed further, so it returned to camp. The second discussion was between the FAC and the personnel at the OP. The latter agreed to escort the FAC to a position that, at the time, was occupied by a French TACP that the Canadians were supposed to relieve. By the time they left the OP, night had fallen, but the group moved forward anyways because the FAC had to be in place in time for an early-morning attack.

The party eventually met the French FAC, who was already on the road returning to its base. The Canadian TACP leader met with his French counterpart to get the positions of the OP and of the guns. Because of what happened later, Brian suspected that there may have been a communication or language problem. The Canadian group continued to the location the TACP leader understood would be the best vantage point from which to observe the target. The group arrived in the darkness, and were surprised to see Serb soldiers in the area. The TACP leader suspected that they had incorrectly gone to the position of the guns rather than the observation post, but he decided not to move any further in the dark. Consequently, the party parked and set up local security, taking care not to antagonise the Serbs.

At first light, the members of the TACP were able to confirm that they were indeed at the position of the Serb guns. Strangely, the position seemed abandoned, except for the guns. The members of the TACP later found out that the Serb soldiers had returned to the village after they saw them the night before. While the gunners in the M113's provided security for the vehicles, Brian participated in a 3-man foot patrol to confirm the precise position of the guns. The patrol lasted about forty minutes and moved beyond the cover provided by the vehicles. Once the position of the Serbian guns was confirmed, the patrol returned and the drivers resumed providing local security.

Once the mix-up in locations was confirmed, the TACP leader called back to HQ to ask that the bombing runs be cancelled since the TACP was virtually sitting on the target. This message never reached the airport in Italy where the jets were stationed, so the jets approached and contacted the FAC as planned and were asked directly by the FAC to cancel the mission. The Serbs arrived in the morning and took up their positions while the Canadians maintained a non-adversarial stance. The Serbs were confident that with the Canadians present, they were not going to be bombed. After a meeting between the Serb local commander and the TACP leader, the Canadians were eventually allowed to leave. Unfortunately, however, at that point, the front left sprocket on Brian's M113 fell off.



*View of seemingly abandoned Serb Artillery position taken while on a 3-man foot patrol
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*



*View towards Sarajevo from Serbian Gun position
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*

Since the vehicle could not move, a decision was made to evacuate the TACP personnel. This caused another delay because all the sensitive equipment had to be stripped from the vehicle before they left. A cougar troop arrived to escort them back to the camp, and to secure the broken-down vehicle until it could be recovered. Brian remembers returning to the camp and meeting the original driver of the vehicle, who was not very happy to hear that his vehicle had broken down and needed to be recovered.





Supporting a ground operation against the Serb guns

One week later, the Serb guns had still not been moved, so the UN Divisional Commander, ordered a ground intervention. Brian knew something was about to happen when, on Sunday morning, he was told to go prepare his vehicle for a move, without being told what it was. He noted that many of the officers were being convened for orders and that the liaison officers were leaving the camp, presumably to inform other parties of the planned activities. The orders were issued on Sunday morning, a time when the men were normally allowed to sleep in. Unusually, Command and Services Company, rather than one of the Cougar squadrons, had been assigned to camp security. Later in the morning, Brian received a briefing and was asked to stand to at his vehicle in preparation for a move. It was very unusual to see the two armoured squadrons and the infantry company preparing to leave camp all at the same time.

Brian heard that according to the original plan, a Russian airborne battalion in the UN structure had been tasked to move up to the Serbian gun positions and ask them to pull back. The Russians were apparently chosen for this task because there was an affinity between the Serbs and Russia. The Canadian Battle Group was to circle around and provide fire support for the Russians in case of trouble. However, when the Russians received contradictory orders from their national chain of command, they withdrew from the operation. The Canadian Battle Group or the UNPROFOR headquarters or both decided to proceed with the operation using the Battle Group's own infantry company.

The TACP was tasked to move to a position of observation to provide air support if needed. Apparently, it had several jets and an AC130 aircraft on call. Brian remembers hearing the drone of the AC130 as it circled the area waiting for a call. The TACP left the camp with the main party heading south. As they

left the camp there was a bit of congestion. When the main party reached the Serbian lines, the Serbian soldiers at the checkpoints offered no resistance and let the Canadians pass. One of the squadrons stopped there and secured the bridge and its controlling checkpoint. A group of engineers diffused the explosives on the bridge. The TACP, with a cougar escort, left the main party and took up a position on the high ground near Ilijas. Although he observed at a distance and monitored the radio, it was only later that Brian fully understood what happened at the gun position. The other cougar squadron and the infantry company continued on from the bridge into Serb-controlled territory, arrived at the gun positions and asked the artillery unit commander to move his guns further from Sarajevo. On arrival of the Canadians, the Serbian soldiers melted into the woods, but later returned to take up positions around the Canadian vehicles and place antitank mines between the wheels of some of them. Brian also heard that the Serbian Sarajevo Reaction Force had approached the area with a number of M-84 main battle tanks. The operation stalled and a stalemate developed.

	
<p><i>Congestion as the troops leave the base on the way to the Serb gun position</i> <i>Photo provided by Brian Cobby</i></p>	<p><i>Cougar escort with TACP in over watch position</i> <i>Photo provided by Brian Cobby</i></p>
	
<p><i>View overlooking the Serbian gun positions on the other side of the valley</i> <i>Photo provided by Brian Cobby</i></p>	<p><i>TACP observing activity on the other side of the valley</i> <i>Photo provided by Brian Cobby</i></p>

The Canadian unit stayed on site overnight and withdrew on the second day. Although the Serbs did not move their guns, it was reported that they had promised to do so. Throughout this period, the FAC maintained observation and the other personnel stayed in or near their own vehicles. During the evening, several uninvited and unwanted Bosniak guests dropped by the TACP OP to act as cheerleaders.

Brian remembers thinking that the Canadians were not negotiating from a position of power. The UN-imposed rules of engagement prevented them from firing at belligerents unless they were actually being fired upon. The Serbs knew that by not taking an aggressive stance, they could approach and get very close to the Canadian soldiers, until it was too late for the Canadians to react. Because the Serbs were now in close proximity to the Canadian vehicles, they were well placed to cause significant damage had any fighting started. Their proximity also prevented the use of air support. Finally, if the Serb tanks joined a firefight, the Canadians would have probably suffered significant casualties.

Later, after all units had returned to base, the Battle group organised a huge party at the mess. Brian joined in the party but he noted that many of those present were critical of the plans and the tactics used during the operation. He was not convinced that the operation had achieved its objective, but he saw no reason to avoid a party.

Temporary lull in aggressions

Towards the end of February 1994, the Bosniak and Croat Forces struck an alliance and stopped fighting each other. They were then able to focus all their aggression on the Serbs. The combined forces were a better match for the Serbs so a stalemate seemed to develop. Brian and the other troops got the mistaken impression that peace had come to Visoko. Troops stopped wearing their helmets outside of camp and replaced them with baseball caps. Brian remembers sitting in the mess and proudly but incorrectly boasting to his comrades that they had come to the area when it was in a state of war and they would be able to leave it in a state of peace.

Reaction mission to the 2nd hostage taking

This quiet time only lasted three weeks. Then, the Serbs started attacking. In one day, the Serbs captured 128 UN hostages across the area of operations. They also shot up two resupply convoys coming from the Croatian coast and they resumed their shelling of Sarajevo. This was their strategy to neutralise the air attacks against them being threatened by the UN and NATO. The commander of the Serb forces correctly assumed that the UN would not engage in bombing missions, if even one of their troops was in danger of being killed.

In the Battle group's immediate area of operation, the Serbs captured OP Quebec, which was being manned by the mortar platoon, and took its occupants hostage. The OP was located on one side of the line of confrontation near Ilijas. Initially, the Serb forces kept the hostages at the OP, which they allowed to be resupplied but not evacuated. The Canadians started thinking of mounting a rescue effort. The TACP was sent out to find a location from which they could call in air support, in case a rescue attempt was initiated. On this recce, the TACP moved with two vehicles but no escort – one vehicle was to direct the covering fire and the other to support the first.

Brian got the impression that something big was going to happen, because the mission was commanded by Major Thorne, the second in command of all the Canadian FAC's, who usually worked only at the camp. He also noted the presence of someone he thought might have been a Bosniak. Apparently, this person knew the area very well and had been asked to come along to point out potential targets.

The FAC teams moved up onto a high hill with a view over Ilijas. Seeing vehicles on the front side of the hill, the Serbs sensed danger and started calling down artillery on the Canadian FAC party. The FAC party vehicles turned around so they could return to the rear side of the hill. As the second vehicle was turning around, it threw a track and was no longer able to move. Once Brian's vehicle had safely returned to the rear side of the hill, but while the artillery rounds were still falling on the front side of the hill, his vehicle commander, Captain Leblanc, asked Brian to give him the track kit and then headed back to help, with Brian following. Brian was surprised and impressed by the Captain's initiative. The Captain and Brian ran over the hill and helped the driver of the other vehicle, Corporal Gilles Carrier of the 12 RBC, reinstall the track. By the time they arrived at the vehicle, the shelling had stopped so they were able to reinstall the track without exposing themselves to any immediate danger. Only after the track was reinstalled, did Brian remember that they had left the major, the interpreter and the other person back at the M113 without any security. When they got back to their vehicle, the mission was discontinued so they returned to the camp at Visoko.



Later, all members of the TACP were brought up to the conference room to discuss the events of the day and possible solutions to the hostage situation. Brian remembers someone suggesting that the white vehicles be repainted green to make them less visible. Someone else immediately pointed out that as soon as they did this, one or more of the belligerents were likely to shoot at them as soon as they left the camp. After the situation was discussed at length, the commander took a wait and see attitude. That very night the HQ lost contact with the OP, increasing the pressure on the Canadians to do something. Later, the Serbs telephoned the HQ directly to warn against any rescue attempts, telling the duty officer that the Canadians had been distributed to various locations in Ilijas.

Eventually, the Serbs decided to release the hostages, allowing them to be brought back to camp. Brian remembers that this event affected the morale of the Canadian troops, who became more critical with the events and the decisions being taken.

Finally a show of force

The TACP to which Brian was assigned never got to guide a live attack onto a target while in Bosnia. Brian understood that there was only one live fire mission during this rotation, and that had occurred at a site where the Serbs were shelling a hospital in the town of Goražde. The attack, which was directed by a British TACP, resulted in the destruction of two Serbian tanks. Brian remembers that the officers in his TACP were disappointed that they had not been the ones to call in the mission.

They did however have the opportunity to call in a show of force. During a show of force, an aircraft buzzes the intended target and drops flares to show the people at the target that they could easily have been hit if the pilot had released his or her armament. Brian remembers that just such a mission was undertaken after a Belgian peacekeeper was killed by a Bosniak sniper. The peacekeeper was driving a truck on the road between Visoko and Kesiljak. The sniper was located on a hill overseeing the road. Brian remembers being told by the sergeant-gunner to get the vehicle ready. The sergeant-gunner briefed him in a very serious manner and then apologized in advance if any spent casings fell from the machine gun into the driver's compartment.

The FAC section then drove to Kesiljak and then moved slowly along the road. The section was able to identify the area where the sniper had been positioned, but there was no way of confirming that the perpetrator was still there. As they went by the position, the FAC called in the mission and a jet fighter flew in low and dropped flares. The FAC's gunner was prepared to defend the vehicle if they received fire from the position, but the people at the position held their fire. Having done what they could, the TACP moved back to camp.

Impact on morale

Brian remembers that towards the end of the tour, the morale among the soldiers was very low. They had come to the mission with high expectations. They had incurred several casualties and endured several humiliations, and they wanted something in return for their sacrifices, even just the feeling that they had helped improve the country. They felt that they were denied even this.

In reality, they probably helped much more than they ever realized. The security they provided to the UN personnel providing humanitarian aid was invaluable, to the benefit of many displaced civilians.

Departure

At the end of the rotation, the 12 RBC soldiers were replaced by soldiers from western Canada. During the handover, the incoming TACP noticed that there were several armoured Land Rovers at the camp. These vehicles were normally used by the liaison officers. The newcomers proposed that they, rather than the M113's be used by the FAC's. Brian was aware that his superiors objected to this idea believing that these vehicles would not be respected by the different belligerent groups. The newcomers chose to ignore this warning and departed from the camp in one of the vehicles only to have it seized and

stripped of its sensitive equipment including the GPS device, the laser target designator, the UHF radio, the crypto and other items. Although the vehicle was later recovered, the loss of the sensitive equipment and information therein resulted in a security breach.



*Travelling in the back of a truck to the Port city of Split
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*



*Ferry crossing on the way home
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*

After the handover was complete, Brian and the other soldiers in his section departed via a convoy of 2½-ton cargo trucks that travelled in a westerly direction to the port city of Split, Croatia. The security situation in Sarajevo was not good enough to allow their plane to land there.



*Coastal highway near the Port city of Split
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*



*Brian waiting to embark on an Air Transat flight home
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*

After the return

In May, 1994, the 12 RBC returned to Canada and Brian returned to Montreal and the RCH. During the next two summers, he was employed on several military call-outs and, during the fall and winter, he pursued his post-secondary education at Champlain College studying social sciences.

During that period, Brian felt a strong urge to return to Bosnia. He felt that he had left too soon before the situation had been resolved. He volunteered to return every time an opening was announced. Eventually he was accepted for a second tour that was scheduled to depart in July 1996.

Preparatory training for a second deployment

Brian deployed to Bosnia a second time from July 1996 to January 1997, this time with A Squadron of the *12^e Régiment blindé du Canada* (12 RBC) on Rotation 2 of Operation Alliance.

The preparatory training for the rotation started in January 1996. The reservists going on the rotation were first assembled in Long Point where they underwent several weeks of individual skills and refresher training. Once in Valcartier, Brian and the other three members of the RCH were assigned positions in A Squadron of the 12 RBC. Brian Cobby and Mark Fex became gunners in call signs 13C and 13D respectively. Marc Legault became a gunner in one of the other troops and Charles Arnsby became a Bison driver at the squadron headquarters. Once A Squadron was topped up with the reservists, it proceeded with collective training.

The collective training was conducted both in Valcartier and in Gagetown. Brian remembers that the training for this rotation was focussed more on battle skills than the training for the previous rotation. The soldiers would no longer just be providing protection for convoys providing humanitarian aid. They needed to be ready, if they were called upon, to enforce the Dayton Peace Accord. The Squadron conducted a lot of range exercises and battle runs. On the range, they fired at the usual intervals, but placed more emphasis on close engagements. This was done, because the squadron wanted to be able to defend itself in the mountains and forests that are prevalent in Bosnia. The crews were drilled to be able to react quickly and engage targets at short-range. On the battle runs these targets were often positioned on the reverse sides of the slopes, forcing the crews to react quickly as they crested the hill. For Brian and the other gunners it was a great opportunity to improve their gunnery skills.

For its final exercise, the Squadron moved to Gagetown for a period of six weeks, four of which were spent off base in the area around Sussex, New Brunswick. During this period, they practised patrolling and setting up checkpoints among the civilian population. The Squadron also spent two weeks on the ranges. During this whole period, Brian remembers being uncomfortable in the rainy, cold spring weather. The only good thing about the weather, was that it made the Squadron's subsequent arrival in warm and sunny Bosnia feel very uplifting.

Throughout the preparatory training, Brian noted that those soldiers who had been on a previous rotation were very dubious about their ability to help the Bosnians, based on the difficulties that they had encountered while working for UNPROFOR.



*Charles Arnsby, Marc Legault and Brian Cobby attend a smoker at the RCH before heading to Bosnia
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*

After taking leave, the Squadron deployed to Bosnia in July. The squadron members flew directly to Zagreb and were then transported by bus to Camp Black Bear in Velika Kladusa (VK). At VK, the Canadian logistical centre for the area, they performed their in-clearance and attended a number of briefings. Their bus then proceeded on to Camp Maple Leaf near Zgon.

Tactical situation

When Brian returned to Bosnia, he found that many changes had occurred. Most importantly, the Dayton Peace Accord had been signed in December 1995. This accord split Bosnia into two quasi-independent regions³, one populated almost exclusively by Serbs and the other populated mostly by Bosniaks and Croats. A demarcation line had been drawn between the two regions and a buffer zone was established on either side of the line. The armies on each side had vacated the buffer zones, withdrawn their forces and deposited their weapons and ammunition in cantonment sites established throughout the country. This withdrawal had occurred in the thirty days following January 19th, 1996. In many places, the buffer zone corresponded to an area that had been mined by one group or the other. Several controlled crossings had been established through these zones.

The United Nations had also disengaged from the conflict, and peace enforcement activities had been taken over by NATO. To help implement and oversee compliance with the Dayton Accord, NATO had established an Implementation Force, referred to as IFOR. This force had about 60,000 soldiers compared to UNPROFOR's 30,000, and it had armoured, artillery and air resources that would allow it to take on any belligerents, if needed.

For hierarchical control purposes, NATO had divided its forces and the area they covered into three sectors – The American sector (North), The French sector (South-east) and the British sector (South-west). The Canadian troops had been assigned to IFOR's south-west sector. The South-west sector was referred to as the British sector, but each of the participating nations took a turn commanding it. Parts of the Southwest sector fell into the Serbian part of the country while other parts of it fell into the Bosniak/Croat part of the country.

Brian deployed on the second and final rotation of Canadian soldiers in IFOR. On this rotation, Canada had been asked to lead a Multi-national Brigade. The Brigade was comprised of Canadian, British and Czech troops. The Brigade headquarters, formed mostly of personnel from the *5^e Groupe-brigade mécanisé du Canada* (5 GBMC) from Valcartier, established its headquarters at Coralici, about 27 kilometers to the south of Velika Kladusa, the site of the Canadian Forces national logistics base. The British unit in the Brigade was the *1st (King's) Dragoon Guards*, a unit that had served in the battle of Waterloo and, in Bosnia, was equipped with Challenger tanks. The Canadian infantry company and a company of Gurkhas provided infantry support to the Dragoon Guards. The Czech unit was the *6th mechanised infantry battalion*, which was equipped with Russian-built BMP's, armed with a 73 mm gun.

	
<p><i>British tank at the checkpoint that controlled the separation line between the two sections of Bosnia</i> Photo provided by Brian Cobby</p>	<p><i>Brian poses in front of a vehicle used by the Czech battalion</i> Photo provided by Brian Cobby</p>

In addition to Headquarters personnel, Canada also provided a recce squadron, an infantry company and a squadron of engineers. The Canadian units were based at Camp Maple Leaf near Zgon. By the time they arrived, a Canadian camp had already been established there by the previous rotation.



*British bridge-laying unit preparing for a practice
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*



*Practice exercise for British bridge-laying unit
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*

A Squadron 12 RBC (the reconnaissance squadron) was comprised of three 7-vehicle troops as well as command, administration and maintenance elements. It was staffed with approximately 127 members, 20 of which were reservists. It was tasked to be the reserve force for the Brigade and performed the following tasks:

- Day and night vehicle patrols to ensure freedom of movement within an assigned area of operation;
- Regular inspections of cantonment sites to ensure that weapons, ammunition and vehicles were still stored at these locations;
- Security escorts for convoys and visitors;
- Traffic control; and
- Weapons searches and collections.

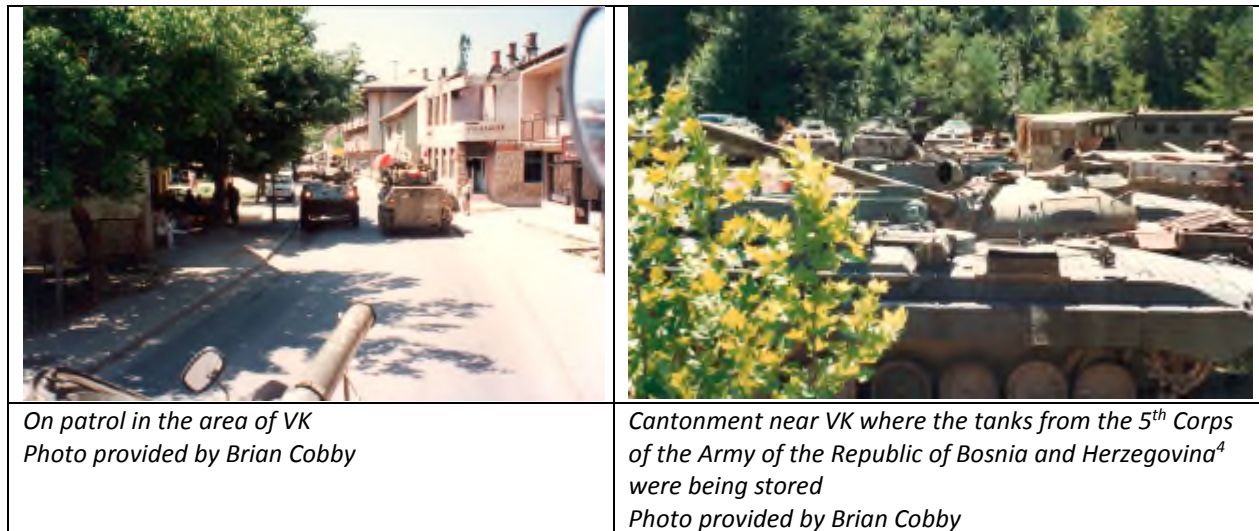
Within its area of operation, the Brigade controlled the three crossing points along the separation line between the two parts of the country. The Canadians controlled the crossing near Zgon (code named Minstrel Boy), the British control the crossing between Sanski Most and Prijedor (code named Grey Cat) and the Czech battalion controlled a crossing further north, near Bosanska Krupa.

Patrolling operations

Once the incoming squadron had taken over its duties at the camp, a patrolling schedule was set up. According to this schedule, one troop would perform local patrols returning to the camp each night, a second troop would perform long-range patrols sleeping over in a remote location, and the third troop would be assigned to maintenance, rest and camp defense. Every two weeks or so, the troops would rotate tasks. Being the reserve for the Brigade, the long range patrols covered areas throughout the Brigade's area of operation and often involved stops at the camps occupied by the other units in the Brigade. This routine was followed during much of the rotation.

At the time, IFOR was particularly concerned that a person by the name of Fikret Abdić might return to the northwestern corner of the country, and destabilise the region. Abdić had been the President of a

large food distribution company prior to the war, and had established his own forces during the war. Although he himself was a Bosniak, he had had a disagreement with the Bosniak government in Sarajevo, and had aligned himself locally with the Serbs, helping them in their siege of Bihac and VK. The Squadron was asked to patrol in the area and collect information with a view to discouraging the resurgence of his local supporters.



During one of the long-range patrols, Brian's troop was spending the night at the headquarters camp in Coralici, when it was called upon for a possible intervention. The troop moved out of camp, crossed the separation line at the Czech checkpoint and approached Prijedor. Near Prijedor, the troop parked by the side of the road and awaited orders. Eventually, they were told to stand down. Brian later heard that somebody had started destroying houses previously occupied by Bosniaks with a view to discouraging them from returning to the area. The perpetrators had apparently been using old land mines to blow up the houses. The activity stopped before the Canadian troop arrived, so its direct assistance was never needed.

On another occasion, the troop passed a site, where British and Hungarian troops building a bypass route beside the destroyed Hrustovo-Vrhpolje Bridge⁵ had found human remains and evidence that the area had been used as an execution site. The UN war crimes team was called in to investigate the situation in 1996 and as many as 150 bodies were found in three mass graves near the destroyed bridge. As the war crimes team's investigation proceeded, the victims' bodies were sampled for DNA, then moved to the nearby Hrustovo/Vrhpolje Cemetery. These killings were among the many serious atrocities that occurred in 1992 in the area around the town of Sanski Most.



Quite often, when out on patrol, the soldiers would park the vehicles, leave some soldiers to guard them and then conduct a three- or four-man foot patrol. Brian remembers one occasion when his patrol had stopped by the side of the road opposite a police station to record the license plate numbers of the vehicles passing by. Brian never received any explanation as to why this information was needed, so after a while, he complained about the futility of their work to the sergeant in charge of the patrol. Just at that moment a man wearing civilian clothes and carrying a rifle walked down the street towards their position. The sergeant, sensing Brian needed to be challenged, said to Brian, "OK, Mr. Wise Guy, let's see how you handle this, you take the lead." Brian stopped the man, who claimed to be a policeman. When Brian asked for his identification card, the man said that he forgot it at home in his other pants. Since Brian did not find this very convincing, he asked the man to come with him to the police station on the opposite side of the road to have someone vouch for him. They went in and met the local chief, who seemed to know the man and smiled at him, and then offered them both coffee. The chief was not able to provide Brian with any evidence that the person was a policeman, but he did not seem to be worried that the man was carrying a rifle. The chief explained to Brian and his sergeant that they were just getting things in order after the war and were still not very organised. After getting a sense that the man was indeed a policeman and not wanting to demand a level of proof that would have been excessive under the circumstances, Brian let the matter drop, but only after suggesting that the police chief maintain a file or list of the policemen at the station. After that, Brian was happy to return to the task of recording the license plate numbers of the vehicles passing on the road, even if he was not sure why.

Squadron-level operations

Brian remembers participating in only one squadron-level operation. For several days the entire Squadron moved out of Camp Maple Leaf and set up a camp at the Željava Air Base, an abandoned facility formerly used by the Yugoslavian Air Force. This base was situated on the border between Croatia and Bosnia near the city of Bihac. It had been built at the request of Tito, Yugoslavia's former president, who was forever concerned about the defense of the country. It was impressive in that the

hangars were constructed underground under Plješevica Mountain. The entrances to the hangars were shaped in a manner that allowed an airplane and its wings and tail to pass but not much else. Once at the airport, Brian noted that the Squadron seemed to be holding, possibly waiting for further orders. Occasionally, troops would be sent out to perform local patrols. While his troop had a rest period, Brian took the opportunity to explore around the airport and approach the protected hangars. After several days, the Squadron returned to its base at Zgon and resumed its normal patrolling pattern.



Elections

In addition to security, one of IFOR's principal tasks during this rotation was to support the national election of September 14, 1996. The organisation of this election, which was the responsibility of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), was apparently very complex.

A second set of elections – municipal level elections – was also scheduled but had to be postponed due to political problems.

During the week of the elections, the troops were parcelled out to reinforce the other units. Brian's troop was sent to the Czech camp, where they performed local patrols and were on standby in case of problems. Each night, they slept at the camp occupied by the Czech Battalion. While he was there, Brian remembers having a slight culture shock. He was surprised to see that the chubby Czech drivers often performed their vehicle maintenance dressed only in their speedo underwear. He also found the food to be very different from Canadian food. He had trouble eating it and preferred to eat the hard rations that he had been issued back at the Canadian base.

Leave and time off

During his eighteen-day leave period, Brian went to England, where he was able to visit his father's family and relatives. For his two R&R periods, he went to Budapest with another member of the RCH.

Training in Bosnia

On one occasion, the Brigade headquarters organised what was referred to as the Brigade Olympics. Each unit in the Brigade had to organise a team to compete in skills-and-team-building events such as shooting, patrolling, tugs of war, etc. Brian participated as a member of a team that had to assemble and load a trailer and push it a specified distance. Each unit also brought some of the vehicles it used, and established a static display in front of the Brigade Headquarters. The vehicles were lined up with the Czech vehicles to the far right extending past the headquarters building. While Brian was touring through the British vehicles, he heard an explosion. Apparently, a Czech in one of the vehicles on the right, had accidentally fired the missile on top of his BMP while explaining to his visitors how it worked. Fortunately, the vehicle was on the far right of the line, so the missile flew past the headquarters building and hit the mountainside behind it. Brian remembers hearing the boom and seeing the ensuing excitement.

On another occasion, Brian's troop participated in a live fire exercise on a range beside a Serbian base, near Banja Luka. To get there they had to cross the line of separation between Sanski Most and Prijedor. Brian remembers being in awe as they passed the Serbian base, because of the large numbers of main battle tanks in the parking lots. It made him feel very humble in his Cougar with its 76mm gun.

Threat level rises to FEARNOT

During Brian's first tour, UNPROFOR worked with three threat levels to govern the soldiers' state of readiness – red, green and yellow. When the threat level was red, it meant that a camp or a unit was under actual or imminent attack, that all soldiers were on alert and that vehicles and all defensive positions at the camp needed to be manned. If the level was set at green, there were no security concerns, and if it was yellow, the soldiers had to take precautions and be in close proximity to their vehicles. IFOR had a much more complex set of threat levels, even if the tactical situation around the camps was much calmer. Above red, two new levels were added, one was BLACK and the other was FEARNOT. BLACK was used to indicate a major battle was about to be fought and FEARNOT was used to indicate that even something more severe was about to happen. The troops were given instructions that

if ever the threat level was raised to FEARNOT, they were to abandon all activities and positions and return to their camps and prepare for a near-catastrophic event.

When Brian's patrol was out on a long-range patrol near Sanski Most, an incoming radio message was received stating that the threat level was being raised to FEARNOT. This was almost unbelievable given that it was a hot, balmy late-summer day. Local life seemed beautiful and many of the residents were out strolling on the streets. The patrol commander immediately requested a confirmation, which he received. He was then instructed to standby for a mission, and shortly afterwards received orders to proceed to a radio rebroadcast site at the top of a nearby mountain and evacuate the rebroadcast team situated there and escort them back to the camp. Everyone in the patrol was quite alarmed, given that they were not told the reason for the escalation. Brian remembered that Charles Arnsby, another member of the RCH, was working in the signals section at the top of that mountain. As they moved towards the mountain, Brian's imagination started to work. He started wondering if they were going to be intercepted by a large column of armoured vehicles. The patrol arrived at and moved through the British checkpoint at the line of separation. Eerily, it was abandoned. The three tanks that were normally stationed there had returned to their base. This made Brian and the members of his patrol think that indeed the threat level was very serious.

When the patrol arrived at the mountain, they had to climb a narrow gravel road to the top. Part-way up the road, the lead vehicle came to a spot where the road was partially blocked by an abandoned farmer's wagon. Since the threat level was extremely high, and the people at the top of the mountain needed to be evacuated as soon as possible, Brian's crew commander was in no mood to find the farmer and ask him to move it. High on adrenaline, he decided to blast it out of the way. He called upon Brian, his gunner in the vehicle, to traverse the turret and prepare to fire the main gun at the wagon. When Brian traversed the turret, it jammed in a position where he was unable to aim at the wagon. The stress level in the vehicle at that point rose quite high. Later they found out that the driver had cleaned up the vehicle and had stowed things in places where they would not get in the way. Unfortunately, he had stowed the portable radio in a place where it would interfere with the traversing mechanism of the turret. While Brian and his crew commander were trying to work out the problem, the junior vehicle in the patrol was able to find a way to bypass the wagon, to the good fortune of the farmer. The patrol continued up the mountain and arrived in time to see the signals section preparing to burn all their codes and sensitive documents. Brian noted that they were still in relaxed dress and had not had the time to don their protective clothing. The signals section did not normally concern itself with protection, because the security of the rebroadcast site was ensured by a platoon of Gurkha soldiers. At that point, the patrol was notified that the threat level had been downgraded and that the evacuation was called off. Later, Brian was informed that the threat level had been raised to FEARNOT by the Americans in the northern sector, who had identified a high-value target, possibly even General Mladic himself, the commander of the Bosnian Serb forces, and were attempting to capture him. The Americans feared that such a move would result in numerous reprisals against their own forces in the Northern area, so they had called a FEARNOT for their sector as a means of having all of their personnel return to their camps as soon as possible. They had intended the threat level to be applied only to their sector but for some reason it had been announced country-wide.

Tribute to fallen comrades

On or about Remembrance Day, the squadron organised a visit to the Zenica Flyover, the location where two Canadian soldiers, including Brian's friend David Galvin, had died in a vehicle accident three years prior, in 1993. The two soldiers had been members of the very same squadron and the very same troop in which Brian was now serving. To forever remember their demise, the troop had retired the call sign of the vehicle involved in the accident. Instead of 13-Foxtrot, the last and seventh vehicle of the troop now used 13-Golf as its call sign.

Under the escort of a patrol of cougars, two buses full of soldiers travelled south for three or more hours to arrive at the site, a bridge that crossed a river into which the vehicle had plunged. The aim of the visit was to attend the dedication ceremony for a plaque that had been erected there in the memory of the two soldiers who died. Brian remembers that the Padre addressed the attendees after a protective cover was removed from the plaque.

After the poignant service in the warm autumn air, Brian started thinking back to the previous rotation and making comparisons. He remembers thinking that the weather during the previous one had been constantly bleak and dreary. He remembers thinking that the towns were often deserted of people and that the people he did see were understandably only interested in finding food, not really caring about their personal appearance. He started comparing those observations to his present situation. Maybe it was the warm, sunny weather that got to his head, but he thought that he detected a change for the better. On his recent patrols and on the bus trip south, he had seen the local population out and about, working their gardens and taking care of business. He noticed that the interpreters and the other local employees who worked at the camp, seemed to be more relaxed and more confident and even a little more demanding. On his first tour, they had seemed unsure of themselves, were easily intimidated and were always concerned with basic needs such as food and safety. Brian remembers one interpreter getting fired because she had refused to go on the Tarčin recce, out of fear for her personal safety. During his second tour, Brian noticed that these employees were more outspoken and less concerned about their safety. Now that their more basic needs were being met, they were again concerned with their clothing and personal appearance. He remembers several interpreters asking to be provided with boots or other items of clothing that were made out of Gortex, like those worn by the troops. He saw this in a positive light and got the impression that, compared to the previous rotation, the country was changing for the better. At that moment, at that place of sorrow, he felt the disillusionment that had built up in the previous rotation slowly start to fade away. There, at the site of the memorial for the two fallen comrades, much as he regretted their deaths, he started to get a feeling of closure.



*Site of the 1993 accident
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*

*Brian poses beside a plaque that was erected at the site
in memorial to the two soldiers who died.
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*

Troop house in Bihac

Six weeks before the end of the rotation, the Implementation Force (IFOR) evolved into the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) and its strength was reduced from about 60,000 troops to 20,000.

For a period of six weeks near the end of the rotation, Brian's troop was sent to live in a troop house in Bihac to create a local presence and to perform local patrols. Some of the soldiers would perform mounted patrols, while others would perform dismounted patrols, in groups of three or four. Living in the house, there were 21 soldiers, 2 interpreters and one cook.

During their stay in Bihac, the soldiers were invited to attend a CANCON show at VK. A CANCON show was a group of Canadian artists – mostly singers and dancers - who were occasionally brought to the theatre of operations to entertain the troops. Laurence Gowan, a solo artist and the lead vocalist and keyboardist for the band Styx, was one of the artists in the show. After the show at VK, the CANCON group travelled around and made courtesy calls at the other Canadian camps in the region. As their bus travelled through Bihac, the threat level was raised to red, so the bus and their escort was diverted to the platoon house at Bihac, where the group was asked to hold indefinitely. Consequently, for a day, the troop house in Bihac was converted into a mini-concert hall while the artists practised and performed several impromptu concerts. It was a pleasant way to wind down Brian's second rotation to Bosnia.



*Brian relaxing in his room at the Bihac troop house
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*



*Cancom entertainers put on an impromptu concert in the dining area
of the Bihac troop house
Photo provided by Brian Cobby*

Return to Canada

When Brian returned to Canada in 1997, he continued with his studies after which he was employed for a number of years by a manufacturer of gunnery training simulators. During that time, he acted as a gunnery simulator instructor for numerous courses held in Canada and the United States.

At the time he was interviewed for this document, he was the Squadron Sergeant Major for B Squadron of the Royal Canadian Hussars. He had spent much of his time over the previous four years as an instructor in the advanced trade courses at the Armoured Corps Battle School in Gagetown.

Footnotes

1. To facilitate the reading of this document, the belligerent forces 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.
2. At the end of the tour, a board of inquiry investigated the misbehaviour of certain Canadian soldiers at the Bakovici Hospital including misuse of alcohol, abuse of patients, and sexual misconduct. It found that there had indeed been unprofessional conduct on the part of certain individuals and that appropriate disciplinary action had not been taken at the time. The board of inquiry also found that the majority of the soldiers at the location had acted appropriately and provided an invaluable service to the patients.
3. The country was divided into two semi-independent entities, the Republic of Srpska, which was dominated by Bosnian Serbs, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which grouped together the other two ethnic-religious communities

4. The Fifth Corps was one of seven corps in the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The formation was deployed around the Bihać pocket to protect it against the surrounding Serb forces. The Fifth Corps also fought a successional Muslim force loyal to Fikret "Babo" Abdić, who was cooperating with Serb and Croatian forces. In its last military action, Operation "Sana 95", the corps defeated Abdić's supporters and brought a number of regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina under government control.
5. The high number of ethnic killings in the area in 1992 led to a UN-sponsored war crimes investigation. The International Commission on Missing Persons oversaw the Krajina Identification Project which was focused on the excavation of different mass graves in the Sanski Most and Prijedor areas and the identification of victims found therein through DNA analysis. Subsequently, in the Hague trial of wartime Bosnian Serb army commander Ratko Mladic, the sole survivor of a 1992 massacre at the Hrustovo/Vrhopolje bridge gave an account of how he and 15 other men were beaten and forced to jump off the bridge. Their captors then shot at them as they tried to swim away. The investigation was never able to conclusively determine who performed the killings or how the other victims found at the site died.

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Edward (Ted) Duckworth's story

1999 – 2000 – Operation Palladium at Camp Maple Leaf



*Destroyed farm house situated along the road
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*

Authors' note

The principal authors of this text, aside from the individual recounting the story, are John Cochrane, a former member of the unit, and his niece Marina Tinkler, a Concordia University literature student. This record of events was prepared in 2015, many years after they occurred. The authors prepared this record principally using information obtained during interviews with the individuals involved. Where possible, this information was corroborated through interviews with others and a review of pictures and other publicly available information. The record presents the events as the individuals involved remember them several years after they occurred.

Edward (Ted) Duckworth's story

Edward (Ted) Duckworth deployed to Bosnia from August 1999 to February 2000 on Rotation 5 of Operation Palladium with D Squadron of the *12e Régiment blindé du Canada* (12e RBC).

D Squadron was a reconnaissance (recce) squadron attached to a battle group formed by the *1^{er} Battalion, Royal 22e Régiment du Canada* (the R22eR) who were fulfilling Canada's commitment to provide a battle group to the NATO Stabilisation Force in Bosnia (SFOR).

D Squadron was stationed at Camp Maple Leaf, where Ted worked as the driver for the Operations Warrant officer (Ops WO) in the Squadron Headquarters (HQ).

Personal Background

Ted was attracted to the military having come from a family that had served in the military in both Canada and Britain. When he originally applied to join the Canadian Armed Forces, he was initially selected for pilot training. He was then asked to take a lung test because he had previously suffered from asthma. Unfortunately, he failed the lung test because he had bronchitis on the day of the test. Still interested in the military, Ted joined the Royal Canadian Hussars in 1995. Prior to his deployment to Bosnia, his only call-out experience had been when he worked as part of a military task force providing assistance to civil authorities in the aftermath of the Quebec ice storm of 1998.



*Ted and some other soldiers pose for a picture in cavalry troop uniforms using RCMP horses
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*



*Ted helping out in the Eastern Townships after the ice storm of 1998.
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*

Preparation

With the other soldiers in the squadron being mobilised for the Bosnian mission, Ted attended preparatory training from February to July 1999. During this training, which was conducted principally in Valcartier and Gagetown, the soldiers were familiarized with different weapons, including those used by the belligerents. Ted enjoyed having the opportunity to see foreign weapons such as AK-47s and World War II era German MG 42 machine guns. The soldiers received refresher training on the equipment they were to use, some history, and some very basic language training. Ted remembers interpreters teaching the troops to say key phrases like "stop or I'll shoot you". The squadron also practiced tactical

manoeuvres and operating procedures, and worked on physical fitness and team building. They ran 5 km every day and 10 km on Fridays.

At that time, none of the reservists assigned to the squadron were qualified to drive the new Coyote reconnaissance vehicles that were going to be used in Bosnia, so none of them were assigned positions in the recce troops. Instead, they were assigned to other roles in the HQ or the rear echelons. Since Ted was qualified to drive a Bison Armoured vehicle, he was selected to be a driver within the squadron HQ. The squadron HQ was equipped with three Bisons, two of which were used as command posts.

Ted worked principally as the driver for the Ops WO, who was David Tofts, an RCH alumnus. The Ops WO was generally responsible for the operations of the squadron's command posts (CPs). The CPs were equipped with multiple radios and work areas in the back of the vehicle. As well, they had tents that could be erected to expand the work areas and masts that could be extended to increase the range of the radio antennas. During field operations, Ted worked in the CP, driving it when it moved, setting it up when it stopped and then working in it as a radio operator. Because French was not his first language, he at first had some difficulty recording long messages and kept asking people to repeat them. Some people in the recce troops complained about this and he was warned by the Ops WO to improve his performance, which he worked hard to do, because he really wanted to go on the mission.



*Riot control training in Valcartier
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*



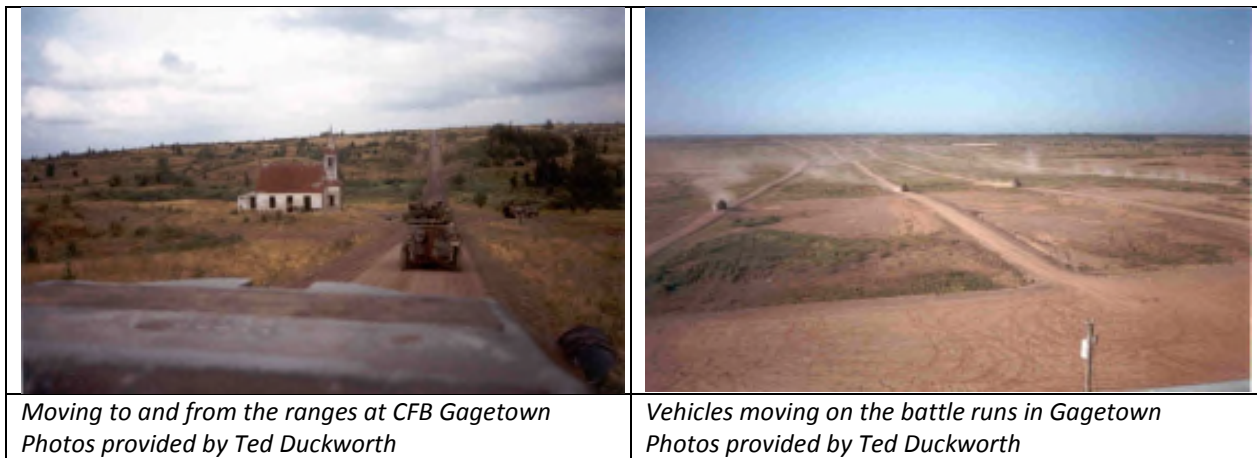
*Taking a rest on top of a vehicle in Valcartier
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*

Ted remembers different training sessions, like the one when the squadron was practicing riot control. During the ramp-up for the impending elections in Bosnia, it was thought that the squadron might be asked to help the local forces in controlling a hostile crowd. As part of this training each soldier was sprayed with pepper spray. They were also asked to experience tear gas and to practice donning and wearing gas masks. On one occasion, in an effort to make the training more realistic, the squadron decided to operate an old T72 Russian Tank that Canada had received as a gift from Germany and repatriated to Valcartier for training purposes. Conceivably, they might need to collaborate closely with local forces that used this type of equipment. The Canadian crew of this tank turned on the device designed to lay a smoke screen thinking it might be an effective means of dispersing a crowd. The tank generated the smoke by squirting fuel onto a hot surface which emitted a very foul smelling blackish-grey smoke. Unfortunately, once the crew got the smoke generator working they could not figure out

how to turn it off. Ted remembers feeling nauseous inhaling the awful smoke. He could see that it might have an effect on less determined belligerent forces. The tank moved out leaving a noxious trail of smoke as it drove around the base. Ted also remembers seeing how the steel track pads tore up parts of the asphalt roads. The Soviet-bloc tanks were not equipped with rubber track pads that would allow them to travel on roads without causing damage.

Ted also remembers learning NATO's rules of engagement. Since this rotation was being deployed several years after the Dayton peace agreement had been implemented and the hostilities had ended, the Canadian Forces were not expecting any significant confrontations. Nevertheless, the rules allowed them to intervene if necessary. The rules were less restrictive than those used under the UN. NATO forces were allowed to be more proactive and engage belligerents even before receiving fire. Nevertheless, they still needed to use proportional force.

To perform their live-fire range practices, the squadron moved to Gagetown in a road move. Ted was the driver for the operations warrant who was a key person in the organisation and supervision of the range exercise. In this capacity Ted was able to observe first-hand the range practices. Unfortunately, the squadron was there during a very dry period when the risk of forest fires was high. Due to lack of rain, the squadron would rise very early each morning and go to the range hoping that the dew would be sufficient to suppress the risk of grass fires and let them conduct their practice. This approach was not successful and after several days, a call was made to Ottawa to have the range procedures overridden. The squadron did not want to go into the theatre without ever having proven that they could use the weapons on the new vehicles. Permission was obtained, the range exercise commenced and resulted in a large grass fire, so the exercise had to be stopped. During that period, the squadron did not receive any cooperation from the weather.



The soldiers departing on Rotation 5 were originally told they would receive a 2 week long pre-embarkation leave but this was cut 4 days short for an early deployment.

Arrival in Bosnia

To get to Bosnia, the members of the squadron flew non-stop from Quebec City to Zagreb and disembarked from the plane directly on the tarmac near the airport perimeter fence. Ted was surprised to see that the ground immediately on the other side of the perimeter fence had markings that indicated that it was a minefield.

From there, they were transported by a large bus to Camp Maple Leaf, which was to be their home for the next six months. At Maple Leaf, they received introductory briefings including one about mines and booby traps, which was the most significant risk to the Canadian soldiers at the time. At the camp Quartermaster's stores, they were issued all their kit, weapons and vehicles.

Deployment structure and location

The R22eR battle group was comprised of three infantry companies, an armoured recce squadron, a combat engineer squadron, mortar and anti-tank platoons, and a HQ command element. The Battle Group HQ was situated near Coralici. The infantry companies were each given areas of responsibility within the Canadian sector. The Canadian sector was generally in the north-west part of the country. Because of its mobility and specialised skills, the recce squadron was assigned tasks throughout the entire Canadian sector rather than being given an area of responsibility.

The recce squadron, an infantry company and an engineer squadron and some other support units were located at Camp Maple Leaf, a permanent base in Zgon. While the recce squadron was based at the camp, the recce troops were often sent out to patrol, to set up roadblocks or to complete other tasks aimed at enforcing the Dayton accord and maintaining the peace. One of the tasks SFOR performed was to inspect the military bases of the two separate Bosnian armies to ensure that they only had the weapons they were authorised to hold. The recce squadron also supported the infantry companies and the local police in conducting weapons collection operations and in setting up roadblocks.



*Aerial view of Camp Maple Leaf at Zgon. The recce squadron was headquartered here
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*



*Entrance to living quarters at Camp Maple Leaf
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*



Poster showing Canadian area of responsibility and the different camps. A red leaf indicates the location of a camp or other type of installation. Camp Maple leaf is the camp furthest to the east. The border between the two parts of Bosnia is demarked by the yellow line. The Canadian area of responsibility is the green area.
 – photo provided by Ted. Duckworth

Within the camp, sleeping quarters were established inside tents erected in an abandoned carpet factory. Fire blankets were hung on steel cables within those tents to create small compartments for privacy.

When the troops left the secure area of the camp, they had to wear their protective clothing. This included a canvas load vest and helmet. It also included a U.S. Army flak jacket equipped with ceramic bullet-proof plates on the front and back. The load vest was worn over the flak jacket and was used principally to carry spare magazines full of ammunition. The Canadian soldiers still wore their normal green uniforms, but the helmet cover they received on arrival in Bosnia had a camouflage pattern. They were also issued a set of Gore-tex boots that were not normal Canadian issue.



*Large tents were erected inside the factory to organise living quarters for the troops
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*

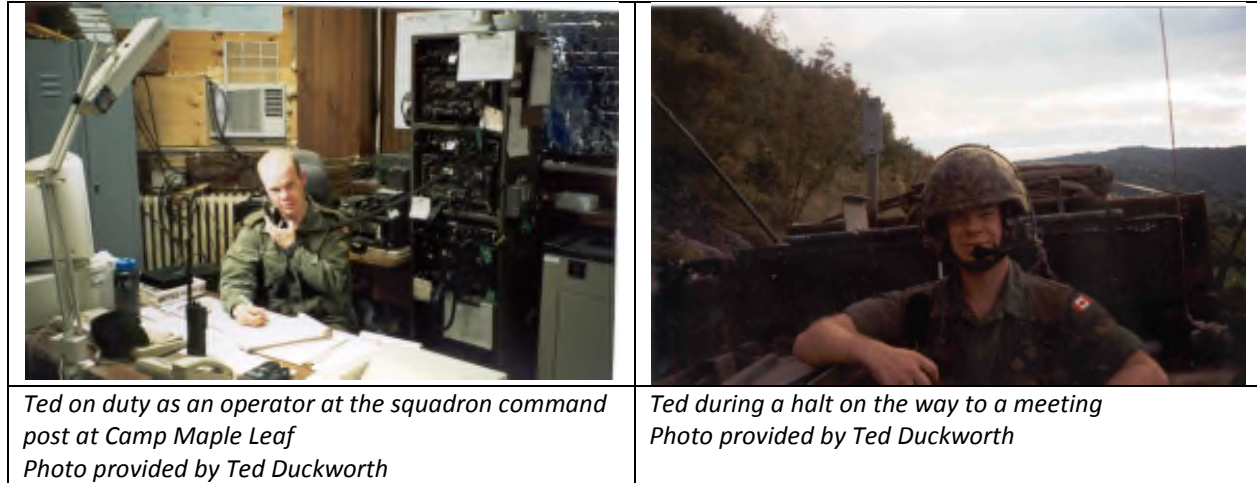


*Protective clothing and weapon laid out on Ted's cot. The carry vest on left is used to carry magazines of ammo. The Kevlar vest on right is worn underneath to protect vital organs
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*

Work at the command post

Ted had several responsibilities at the squadron HQ. His day job was principally to work as a driver and to maintain the three Bison Armoured Vehicles assigned to the HQ. His evening job was to man the radios as a duty operator in the CP.

The Squadron command post (CP) was set up permanently in the offices of the building at Camp Maple Leaf. The radios were removed from the vehicles and installed inside the offices of the building. The antennas were installed on towers on the roof. The operations room had desks for the staff, radios on one wall and a large map board on the other. The duty operator had to maintain a log of all messages sent or received. The map was equipped with movable arrows and pins that the operator used to indicate the last known location of each of the recce troops. If an important message was received the operator had to inform the Ops WO or the duty officer. A table was also maintained to show the status of the different routes used by the troops – i.e. to show if it was passable or not. Occasionally routes became impassable due to weather, landslides or other problems.



The CP was generally operated 24 hours a day seven days a week. Ted was generally on duty in the CP for an eight-hour shift starting at around six PM, after he ate supper. The bathroom facilities were nearby and someone could generally replace him if need be.

The CP had different radios – one to communicate with higher headquarters and the other companies in the battle group, and another to communicate within the squadron. There was also a third frequency which was the battle group administration frequency. The CP also had a CB radio which allowed it to communicate with the International Police Task Force. To communicate with the rear party and others in Canada, it has several telephones and a secure computerized messaging system.

Ted remembers that the volume of communications during his shift was generally light. The squadron net was kept open if any troops were away from the camp. Generally, these troops were on individual missions that did not require a lot of coordination with the squadron HQ. Occasionally they would submit situation or progress reports. Sometimes they would call in to report an accident and request assistance. Sometimes they would use a short phrase that was known by everyone in the squadron to be an internal joke. If they called in to say that they were going to “dismount and reconnoitre” it usually meant that they were stopping either to have lunch at a roadside restaurant or to shop at one of the local markets.

Most of the radios that the squadron used were very high frequency radios (VHS) which work well if you have line of site. This was rarely the case in the mountainous terrain in Bosnia. The squadron also had a limited number of high frequency (HF) radios that could be used. The radio waves emitted by these radios are more apt to bend with the circumference of the earth. At times, when troops were deployed at a distance or beyond a mountain range, arrangements were made to relay the communications through radio stations that the corps of signals had deployed permanently on two high points in the area - Gos Peak and Mount Gola.



At the headquarters, Ted's English language skills were helpful, notably when dealing with other countries who used English as the common language for communicating within SFOR. The camp received a lot of visitors from the military forces of other countries participating in the SFOR mission. Some of these visitors were particularly interested in examining the new Coyote vehicles and the sophisticated surveillance equipment they carried.

Ted remembers being on duty just before midnight on December 31st, 1999. He started wondering if any parts of his equipment would stop working as a result of the year-2000 bug. At one minute past midnight, he conducted a radio check with the other stations and all responded without incident. The big excitement was over.

Vehicle maintenance

Ted was also responsible to perform the driver's regular maintenance and make small repairs on the HQ squadron's three Bison vehicles. A Bison is an eight-wheeled armoured vehicle that can be used in different roles, notably as a command post, an ambulance, or as a troop transport vehicle. The Bisons that Ted maintained included the 2 CP vehicles and the battle captain's vehicle. The other driver in the squadron HQ was responsible to maintain the soft-skinned vehicles.



*Ted sitting on top of one of the Bisons that he was responsible to maintain
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*



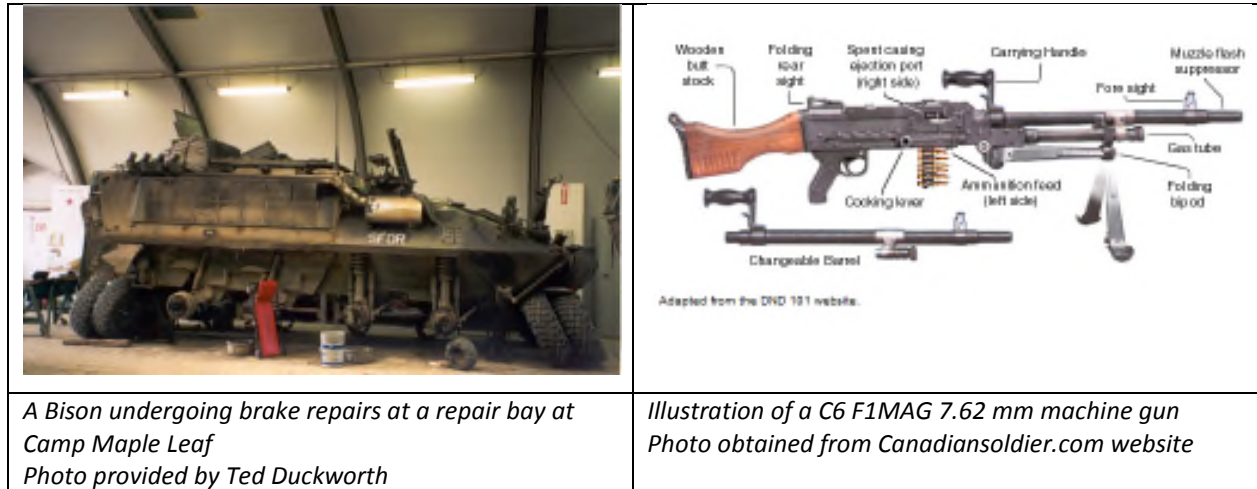
*Inside the back of a Bison showing the benches that could be used to transport personnel – note the machine gun being stored on the bench and the M72 anti-tanks weapons in their docks on the wall.
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*

Since the Bisons were not being used continuously as CPs, they were often used to transport troops between Camp Maple Leaf and remote troop locations. This additional transport was needed because each of the recce troops had been assigned sufficient personnel to operate seven vehicles even though they only had five. The presence of additional soldiers facilitated troop operations when troop members rotated out on leave and when additional staff were needed to provide local security in remote locations. The drivers and crews that borrowed these vehicles did not always take good care of them.

One recurring problem was the headsets for the vehicle intercom system. The temporary users of the vehicles would often break the headsets and throw them on the floor so Ted had to continuously check the state of the devices and repair or replace them. When the radios or vehicle intercoms did not work, he had to determine which piece was not working and get a replacement. This was done by trial and error, changing pieces one at a time until the broken piece could be isolated.

Ted was also responsible to maintain the machine guns that were mounted on the tops of the three vehicles. The machine guns were C6 machine guns that fired 7.62 mm rounds. He signed them out of the QM and placed them in the vehicles, along with several boxes of ammunition, two M72 rocket launchers and numerous smoke grenades. When the vehicles were parked at the camp, the machine guns were stored in the rear compartment of the vehicle. When the vehicles left the camp, the crews mounted the machine guns as well as a box of ammunition in their support brackets on top of the vehicle. The ammunition belt was fed into the weapon to be ready for use, but the machine gun was generally not cocked. When the vehicles returned to camp, Ted would check the weapons and clean them. Ted often cleaned these weapons during the evening when he was on duty at the command post. He would take the barrel and butt off the weapon, disassemble the other parts and lay them on a clean surface. He would then clean and oil each of the individual parts and then reassemble them and return the weapon to the vehicle. This work needed to be done after each use or at least once a week to prevent rust from forming, which it was apt to do given the humid climate. To avoid potential problems

with the ammunition, Ted ensured that the open boxes were used during one of the many range practices and replaced with unused boxes.



When the vehicles developed problems that he could not resolve himself, Ted was responsible to take them to the mechanics to get them repaired. One of the recurring problems for the vehicles was the brakes. Extra armour had been installed on the vehicles with a view to providing more protection to the crews. This extra weight combined with the mountainous terrain shortened the useful lives of the brake pads. Because of the risks involved, Ted was asked to take each vehicle to the garage for full brake inspections at intervals of approximately 2 months. At the garage, to make best use of the mechanics' time, Ted was instructed to drive the vehicle into a repair bay, jack it up and take off all the tires. Once the tires were off, the mechanic would come and inspect the brakes. Occasionally the mechanics would ask Ted to remove the brake drums for a more detailed inspection. If parts needed to be replaced, this work would be done by the mechanics and then Ted would put the wheels back on and return the vehicle to the parking lot. Ted was also asked to test the Jacobs Exhaust Brake which he would do by revving the engine and taking his foot off the gas to see if the engine immediately slowed down. This brake restricts the flow of exhaust gases and increases back pressure inside the engine thus slowing it down. In the hilly Bosnian countryside, its effectiveness was essential in reducing the wear and tear on the wheel brakes.

While at the mechanics' garage at the camp, Ted saw many out-of-service vehicles waiting for parts. During this period, most spares had been reserved for a separate military operation in Kosovo. Kosovo, another republic, was fighting to secede from the Yugoslav federation, and Canada had been tasked to send a separate squadron there. Compared to the troops in Bosnia, those in Kosovo were in a riskier situation so they were given priority for parts.

Driver duties

As one of two drivers at the Squadron HQ, Ted would drive one or more of the squadron officers to the higher headquarters at least one a week. He also drove on other trips and remembers several incidents.

Once, on an Election Day, he was driving the Battle Captain back to the camp in a Bison. The Bison's cooling system stopped working and the motor overheated. They stopped in front of a house and tried to call for recovery but radio communications were not good because they were in a low-lying area. The occupant of the house seemed very suspicious and nervous and went and got some friends who accumulated in front of the house. Ted thought something was brewing so he put some more water in the radiator and suggested that they move on to avoid potential trouble. He had to stop several times along the road to refill the water and let the motor cool, but they eventually made it to higher ground and were able to call in a request for recovery. The recovery did not come till after dark. Ted found it to be a little intimidating for them to be out in the dark by themselves not knowing when the recovery vehicle would arrive.

On another occasion, Ted was sent out in the winter to drive the Battle Captain who wanted to visit one of the troops. In their Bison, they climbed some steep hills and entered a small high foggy valley where they encountered very icy conditions. As the vehicle climbed the road on the far side of valley its wheels started to spin and it started to slide towards the side of the road, which was a steep embankment with no guardrail. Ted realized that the vehicle was not going to make it up the hill without its winter chains. He slowly backed the vehicle down to a flat spot at the midpoint of the valley, but could not pull off the road due to the risk of mines. This was the first time that Ted had ever put on chains. The week before, he had asked someone to show him how, but they had not been able to find the time to do so. The chains needed to be put on all of the vehicle's eight wheels. Ted got them out and started to work. For the left side wheels, he had to lie on his back with his head under the vehicle and the lower part of his body extended out into the road. Large logging trucks kept passing on the foggy road, so the signaller acted as lookout calling out to warn Ted to pull his legs in whenever one approached. One of the chains was broken and it took a very long time to install it in a way that it would not risk damaging the brake-fluid line. Given it was his first installation, and given the passing trucks, the reduced visibility due to fog, and the difficulties encountered, Ted found this to be a stressful afternoon.

On separate occasions, Ted was able to observe some interesting live fire exercises when the squadron went to the ranges. The squadron deployed to large ranges on military bases in Glamoc and Sanica. At the range, Ted drove the Ops WO behind the squadron as it went through a battle run with some of the other NATO forces. He remembers that, on one exercise, the squadron advanced through a live-fire training area in a combined exercise with British Tanks, Spanish Infantry and Polish helicopter-borne troops. The squadron advanced until enemy was detected and the troops from the other countries proceeded with a quick attack.



*D Squadron at ranges in Bosnia
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*



*British troops at the range as well
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*

Camp life

Generally, because he had to work the evening shift in the CP, and perform maintenance and driver duties during the day, Ted had little opportunity to partake in camp life and visit the mess. In theory, he was allowed two beers per day at the mess, but was not able to visit it very often. He remembers attending a Thanksgiving dinner as well as a Christmas dinner. He also remembers attending a small Remembrance Day parade within the camp. The Remembrance Day ceremony was particularly memorable because it occurred while the troops were deployed overseas in an area where there was a recent conflict.

He regularly received care packages from his friends and family. The gesture was always appreciated but sometimes the gifts only arrived after a long delay and they had spoiled. Sometimes he would receive the packages 3 months later, other times within the week. His grandmother once mailed him a care package that was waiting for him when he came back to his quarters from his work shift at 3 AM. He found the box of baked goods on his bed and enjoyed a bedtime snack that he noted tasted vaguely like coconut. The next morning he made the unpleasant discovery that in the course of the long voyage the confections had become covered with mold.



*Ted and a fellow soldier relaxing on the walls of the castle ruins looking down over the town of Kljuc
Photo provided by Ted Duckworth*

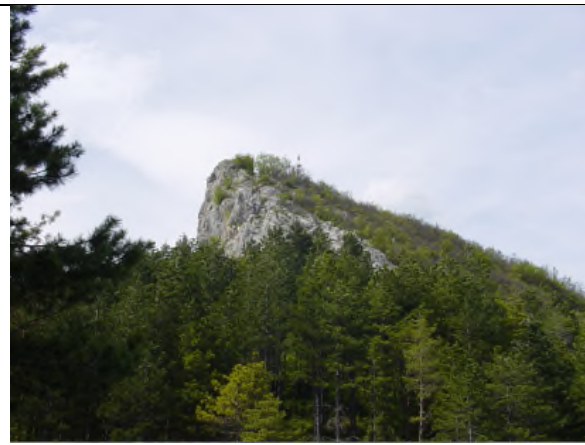


*View of the road below through one of the doors at the Kljuc castle
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*

Shortly after arriving in Bosnia, he remembers leaving the camp with one of the other soldiers and hiking up one of the nearby hills to visit the ruins of the Kljuc castle. The castle was constructed in medieval times to protect the community from attack. The engineers had checked the road between the camp and the castle for mines and declared it safe for recreational use by the Canadian soldiers.



*Additional pictures of the Kljuc castle
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*



*Additional pictures near the Kljuc castle
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*

On another occasion, Ted and the other driver for the squadron headquarters were jogging close to the camp when a young woman ran out of the woods in obvious distress. Her clothes were torn and it looked like she had been beaten. The two young soldiers took her to the camp where the interpreters determined that she had apparently been kidnapped and sexually assaulted by the local police. She was visiting from Slovenia and her presence in this part of the country seemed to be resented by some of the locals. An hour or so later, a local policeman arrived and parked his car outside the front gate and raised his hand to show her that he had her passport. She decided to leave the camp of her own free will and walked over and got into the police car. Ted was told that there was nothing that the squadron could do

for the woman. He of course was very concerned for her safety and frustrated by the futility of his actions and the situation.

Vacation and leave

Each of the soldiers in Bosnia was entitled to a home leave travel allowance, which was an amount of funds equivalent to the cost of a return trip home to visit his or her family. Rather than go home to Canada, Ted invited his mother to come and meet him in London to celebrate her 50th birthday. After they met and celebrated in London, they toured England, Scotland and Wales and visited some family friends.

On his first 96-hour leave, Ted visited Budapest, Hungary, on a tour pre-arranged with other soldiers. On his second 96-hour leave, he visited Vienna on his own.

Injury

Near the end of his tour, Ted seriously injured his back. This injury was the result of lifting heavy objects such as the large vehicle tires which he changed on his own as well the constant bumping and jarring in the vehicle as a driver. As time progressed, his injury became so painful that he started driving the Bison standing up rather than sitting down.

He underwent an X-ray that confirmed that he had an injury but because the squadron HQ was very shorthanded and had no reinforcements, he was not sent home. He had difficulty sleeping, was very uncomfortable and was assigned light duties but continued to work in the CP and as a driver.

Departure

At the end of the rotation, the squadron was transported by bus to Zagreb and then flew to Quebec City. He remembers the send-off because the mechanics at the camp had a life-size cardboard picture of Shania Twain which they had modified to allow them to move the arm. For the departure, they brought this out to send-off the departing troops. He remembers seeing Shania and a group of mechanics waving goodbye to him outside the bus.

After the return

Despite his injury, he was released from his call-out and sent back to the unit. Back at the unit, even though he reported the injury, nothing seemed to happen to address his medical situation. Eventually, he called the Veterans' Ombudsman, who intervened and unblocked matters. He was then put on disability and paid throughout his physical recuperation and vocational rehabilitation. He was also given a veteran's pension. He underwent back surgery in July 2000 and then attended physiotherapy sessions for over two years.

Since his injury also prevented him from pursuing a military career, he was enrolled in a vocational rehabilitation program. Under this program, he attended university, first at Concordia, where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts in History and Geography within two years, and then at McGill, where he obtained a teaching degree. When he finished these programs in 2003, and his vocational rehabilitation was considered a success, he was released from the military.

In 2003, he started working at MacDonald High School in Saint-Anne-de-Bellevue, teaching History and Geography. At the school, he also ran an extra-curricular robotics program for his students along with another former Hussar, Master Corporal (Retired) Alan Dornan.

Subsequently, Ted participated in a successful class action law suit which brought to light the fact that the group insurance company used by the military had underpaid convalescing veterans over many years by paying them invalidity benefits only on a net basis, after incorrectly deducting the amounts of their veterans' pensions.

Throughout the years Ted maintained his interest in military matters. He was active every year organising the Remembrance ceremony for the school that was conducted jointly with the nearby Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Veterans' Hospital. Also, as a collector, he refurbished a military Iltis jeep. From 2004 to 2009, he served as an officer in Cadet Instructor Cadre at an air cadet squadron on the West Island.

L'histoire de Guy Bériau

2002 - Opération Palladium à camp Maple Leaf en Bosnie



*Véhicule Coyote qui avance sur un sentier en Bosnie
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*

Commentaires des Auteurs

Les auteurs principaux de ce texte, autre que l'individu qui a raconté ses expériences, étaient John Cochrane, ancien membre de l'unité, et Marina Tinkler, sa nièce et étudiante à l'université Concordia. Cette version historique des événements a été préparée en 2015, plusieurs années après leur déroulement. Les auteurs ont préparé le texte en utilisant principalement les informations qui leur ont été fournies lors des entrevues avec les personnes concernées. Lorsqu'il était possible, cette information a été validée via des entrevues avec d'autres participants, et par un examen des photos, textes, et vidéos qui étaient disponibles. Les présentes textes sont des récapitulatifs, comme les individus concernés rappellent les événements quelques années après leur déroulement.

L'histoire de Guy Bériau

Guy a été déployé en Bosnie entre le 2 avril et le 4 octobre 2002. Il a agi en tant que canonnier dans le véhicule du commandant de la troupe 43 au sein de l'escadron D, escadron de reconnaissance du *12^e Régiment blindé du Canada* (12 RBC).

Historique

Guy s'est joint au Royal Canadian Hussars en décembre 1993. En 1994, il a suivi son cours de recrues et son cours de qualification de métier (NQ3 Blindé). Au cours des étés subséquents, il a obtenu plusieurs qualifications de grade et de métier. À l'été 1998, il a complété le cours de sous-officier subalterne (CSOS) et a été promu caporal-chef en septembre 1998. Durant ses hivers, il a étudié au CÉGEP Rosemont, où il a obtenu un DEC en sciences pures, et à l'université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), où il a obtenu un baccalauréat en histoire. À l'unité, Guy était membre de l'escadron A, où il participait régulièrement à l'entraînement blindé sur les véhicules Cougar.

Au cours de l'été 2001, Guy avait obtenu sa qualification de sergent, et par la suite, il a agi en tant qu'instructeur sur le cours de NQ3 blindé à l'école de combat de la milice à Valcartier. Au cours de l'été, il a appris qu'il y avait des ouvertures pour des réservistes sur la rotation 10 en Bosnie. Guy a posé sa candidature et a été accepté pour une position de caporal-chef. À ce moment, il poursuivait ses études à l'UQAM et n'avait que quelques cours à compléter avant d'obtenir son baccalauréat en histoire. Comme la mission en Bosnie lui intéressait beaucoup, il a demandé un congé d'un an auprès de l'université.

La préparation

Guy a été accepté provisoirement pour la mission et a été affecté à l'escadron D du 12 RBC. Pour la mission, l'escadron D a été attaché au Groupe-bataillon (GB) du *2^e Bataillon du Royal 22^e Régiment* (2 R22^eR). À l'intérieur de l'escadron, Guy a été affecté à la troupe 43 – une troupe dotée de 5 véhicules Coyotes et de 19 soldats. Il y avait 4 personnes par équipage de Coyote, sauf pour le véhicule du commandant de la troupe, indicatif d'appel 43. Ce véhicule n'avait pas de suite de surveillance et donc pas de surveillant. Les véhicules des commandants de patrouille, les indicatifs d'appel 43A et 43C étaient des Coyotes équipés de mâts pour recevoir le système de surveillance. Les véhicules juniors 43B et 43D étaient équipés de trépieds pour placer la suite de surveillance à 200 mètres du véhicule.

De septembre 2001 à avril 2002, l'escadron a suivi un programme de préparation, appelé « Montée en puissance ». Le programme de préparation a débuté par des cours individuels sur les nouveaux véhicules (les Coyotes), les armes et le système de surveillance. Lors de cette phase de la préparation, Guy a suivi le cours de tireur et le cours de surveillant. Antérieurement, il avait déjà suivi le cours de chauffeur de Coyote et le cours de chef de char : Guy était donc un des seuls membres de la troupe qualifiés pour les quatre positions du véhicule.

Durant cette phase de la préparation, l'uniforme de combat a été changé. Les soldats ont reçu le nouveau modèle d'uniforme de combat. Auparavant, ils portaient des vêtements de combats d'une seule couleur – le vert olive. Le nouvel uniforme (CADPAT, Canadian Disruptive Pattern) était un uniforme avec du camouflage qui mélangeait trois couleurs. Ces uniformes ont été appelés « des

uniformes relish» par les troupes. Les tout premiers uniformes avaient été distribués au personnel de l'OPÉRATION PALLADIUM Roto 9. La rotation 10 était le second groupe à en être équipé. Comme c'était le premier changement d'uniforme depuis plus de quarante ans, les spécifications n'étaient pas tout à fait au point. Les uniformes déchiraient trop facilement, surtout lorsqu'ils s'accrochaient sur les objets pointus à l'intérieure des véhicules, les couleurs s'effaçaient trop rapidement, et les boutons étaient facilement visibles dans des lunettes de vision de nuit. Il avait été demandé aux troupes de placer leur linge à l'envers au lavage pour limiter la décoloration des combats. Quelques années plus tard, il fallait remplacer les uniformes par des uniformes plus robustes avec des boutons cachés. Guy se souvient que les indicateurs de grade ont été livrés en morceaux. Les grades étaient brodés à même le tissu de l'épaulette. Cependant, il devait lui-même coudre les épaulettes et les badges d'affiliation régimentaire. Les badges de drapeau canadien et les noms étaient maintenus par du velcro.

Après la formation individuelle, l'escadron a suivi un programme d'entraînement collectif selon un scénario de guerre conventionnel. En novembre, l'escadron s'est déplacé au camp militaire de Gagetown, au Nouveau-Brunswick pour une période d'environ un mois. L'escadron a pratiqué les tactiques dans le secteur d'entraînement et a utilisé le champ de tir et les parcours de bataille. Pour la première fois, Guy a eu la chance de voir en profondeur l'efficacité du système de stabilisation pour le canon.

Pour une grande partie de l'exercice, Guy a travaillé comme chef d'équipage pour le véhicule 43D, le véhicule junior de la patrouille C. En tant que junior, il a souvent agi comme premier véhicule dans l'ordre de marche de troupe et a guidé la troupe lors des mouvements. Il était particulièrement fier de deux déplacements où il a guidé la troupe en pleine nuit en conduit avec feux masqués. Pour assurer le succès, Guy mémorisait les routes avant de partir. Il faisait cela puisque les lampes de nuit militaires étaient dotées d'un filtre rouge qui rendait invisibles les routes qui étaient tracées en rouge sur les cartes. Son véhicule était équipé d'un système GPS, mais ce dernier avait tendance à geler et n'était pas fiable.

Lors du premier déplacement, Guy a noté que les véhicules derrière lui se sont arrêtés sur le côté de la route. Il s'est arrêté également et il est descendu de son véhicule pour prendre connaissance du problème. L'adjudant de troupe lui a mentionné que ce dernier ne savait plus où il était rendu sur le trajet. Guy a aidé l'adjudant à trouver ses repères et la troupe a repris la route. Lors du deuxième convoi, il fallait sortir d'une cache vers 5 heures du matin et guider la troupe à une ligne de départ pour une avance. Lorsque Guy est arrivé à la ligne de départ, l'officier de troupe l'a avisé que la troupe était au mauvais endroit et a demandé à Guy de le suivre. Les véhicules ont avancé pendant une demi-heure et ont complété un grand cercle pour arriver au même endroit. À ce moment, l'officier est venu s'excuser et dire à Guy que la troupe était originalement au bon endroit. Ces expériences ont aidé Guy à augmenter sa crédibilité auprès de ses supérieurs. Étant caporal-chef à seulement 26 ans, et réserviste en plus, il fallait travailler très fort pour gagner le respect des autres membres de la troupe.

Lors de l'exercice à Gagetown, Guy avait noté que son chauffeur était beaucoup trop confiant et prenait trop de risques. À quelques reprises, Guy lui avait demandé d'avancer tranquillement, mais pendant que Guy surveillait le terrain devant lui, le chauffeur augmentait dangereusement la vitesse. À un autre

moment, ce chauffeur a reculé son véhicule sans guide dans un sous-bois et a par conséquent endommagé le véhicule et un des rétroviseurs. À quelques reprises, Guy lui a demandé d'être plus prudent et moins agressif. Plus tard, à Valcartier ce même chauffeur a fait une omission qui a failli causer des blessures graves. L'accident s'est produit lors d'un arrêt de convois de la troupe dans le secteur d'entraînement à Valcartier. Le convoi était arrêté au lieu d'un accident simulé aux fins d'entraînement. Le véhicule de Guy était arrêté en bas d'une côte et Guy est allé à l'arrière de son véhicule pour ouvrir les portes et décharger un brancard. Le chauffeur en question a arrêté son véhicule en haut de la côte et les membres de son équipage sont sortis pour se mettre debout sur la coque du Coyote. Le chauffeur avait oublié de mettre le frein de stationnement donc son véhicule a roulé en bas de la côte et est entré en collision avec le véhicule de Guy. Plusieurs témoins des événements ont crié pour avertir Guy de s'écarter de la route du véhicule hors de contrôle. Guy a entendu les cris de ses collègues, mais puisqu'il avait la tête dans le véhicule, il n'a pas réalisé le danger, croyant que c'était lié à la simulation d'accident. Il s'est déplacé au dernier moment et s'est frappé le bras contre la porte de son propre véhicule, qui venait d'être heurté par un Coyote de 15 tonnes. Après l'incident, Guy et les autres sous-officiers de la troupe ont discuté de la situation et ont conclu que le chauffeur en question ne devrait pas participer à la mission, puisqu'il mettait à risque la sécurité des autres.

Les déplacements entre Valcartier et Gagetown ont été effectués par convois. Lors du voyage envers Gagetown, plusieurs véhicules ont eu des problèmes d'arbre de transmission. Un des véhicules de la troupe avait cinq arbres de transmission à remplacer à son arrivée à Gagetown. Pour être en mesure de commencer l'exercice avec les cinq Coyotes de la troupe 43, les chauffeurs se sont relayés toute une nuit afin de remplacer les arbres de transmission. Guy se souvient particulièrement du voyage de retour au mois de décembre parce que la température était très froide et qu'il neigeait. Plusieurs véhicules sont tombés en panne. Après l'exercice à Gagetown, les membres de l'escadron ont assisté pendant quelques semaines à une série de présentations sur la Bosnie dans un auditorium à l'Académie de Valcartier. Les sujets couverts étaient la situation sur le terrain et la culture locale. De plus, ils ont repassé les règles d'engagement, plusieurs éléments de la doctrine et plusieurs autres sujets.

En fin février, l'escadron a passé une période de validation où il fallait démontrer que le Groupe Bataillon du 2 R22^eR et ses membres étaient prêts à assumer leurs rôles sur le terrain. L'exercice de validation a été effectué sur la base et dans la région de Québec, incluant la Beauce. Les troupes ont toutes reçu des tâches individuelles et ont opéré dans différents lieux à l'extérieur de la base pour les compléter. Les tâches étaient similaires à celles que les troupes canadiennes pouvaient recevoir en Bosnie et la superficie du secteur d'opération était similaire à leur secteur d'opération en Bosnie. Ils recevaient en moyenne trois tâches par jour et l'on se retrouvait à avoir environ trois incidents simulés par jour. Le but était de s'assurer que les troupes seraient préparées pour le pire. Guy se souvient que sa troupe a été envoyée à St-Marie-de-Beauce, sur la rive sud, pour apporter du support aux autorités de la place. Il faisait très froid quand la troupe a passé sur le pont Pierre-Laporte. Durant cette journée, il faisait environ -25 degrés Celsius. Sa tête était à l'extérieure de la tourelle et le vent arctique descendait le fleuve et le frappait en plein visage. De plus, le système de chauffage du véhicule ne fonctionnait pas. Malgré le froid, l'escadron a performé au niveau attendu et a reçu la confirmation qu'il était prêt à partir en mission.

En mars, les troupes ont complété les préparations finales et ont eu droit à des congés avant d'être déployées en Bosnie.

À la fin de la période de préparation, cinq réservistes ont été choisis pour participer à la mission au sein de l'escadron D, dont trois étaient de la troupe 43. Guy a été affecté à la position de canonier du commandant de la troupe et un autre hussard, le caporal Kareem Ishmael, a été affecté à la position de surveillant et chauffeur suppléant dans un autre véhicule (indicatif d'appel 43B) de la même troupe. Juste après l'entraînement de validation pour la Bosnie, Kareem a failli ne pas aller en mission, puisque son dossier médical a été perdu à la suite d'une erreur administrative. Sans ce dossier, Kareem ne pouvait pas partir en mission. Suite aux vérifications administratives avant le départ pour la Bosnie, le dossier médical avait été envoyé par erreur au 5^e Régiment de Génie de Combat. Guy a fait des recherches et a retrouvé le dossier perdu. Il est allé personnellement récupérer le dossier pour le retourner au 12 RBC.

Le déploiement vers la Bosnie

Finalement, l'escadron est parti en Airbus A310 militaire (CC-150 Polaris) depuis l'aéroport de Québec pour atterrir à un petit aéroport de Rijeka, à proximité de la ville portuaire de Bakar, en Croatie. C'est à cet endroit que les nouveaux véhicules de l'escadron devaient être livrés par navire. Ils s'agissaient de véhicules Coyote et Véhicule Blindé Légers III (VBL-III) expédiés depuis le centre logistique de Longue-Pointe après avoir été pourvus des nouveaux équipements de communication radio TCCCS/IRIS (Tactical Command Control and Communications System/Integrated Radio Intercommunication System). L'opération de remplacement des véhicules en théâtre était nommée opération Monarque.

Opération Monarque avait pour but de remplacer l'ensemble de la flotte de véhicules militaires canadiens dotés des anciens systèmes de communication à lampes analogiques tels que les radios PRC-524 et PRC-77. Toutes les anciennes radios, même portables, allaient être remplacées par des radios PRC-522 numériques. Opération Palladium Rotation 10 allait être le premier emploi opérationnel de la suite de communication TCCCS/IRIS. Les véhicules militaires avec les anciennes suites de communication analogiques étaient retournés au Canada. Les véhicules nouvellement équipés de la suite TCCCS/IRIS étaient déployés en Bosnie. De plus, l'opération permettait le déploiement officiel des VBL-III en Bosnie. Lors de la rotation 9, il y avait eu quelques essais sur le terrain afin de confirmer que le véhicule serait en mesure de se déplacer sur les routes étroites de Bosnie. À l'époque, plusieurs sceptiques pensaient que le VBL-III serait trop gros et trop lourd pour être en mesure de se déplacer efficacement en Bosnie. Très rapidement, une fois déployés, les opérateurs ont pu confirmer que les inquiétudes sur la mobilité du véhicule étaient non fondées. Le VBL-III a une classe de pont de 19 tonnes, 4 tonnes de plus que le Coyote. Le VBL-III venait remplacer les Grizzly utilisés par les bataillons d'infanterie. Les Grizzly avaient été repris par les artilleurs pour tirer leur canon C-3 de 105 mm et par le génie pour le déplacement de leur personnel.

Quand l'escadron est arrivé au port de Bakar, les véhicules étaient déjà stationnés sur le quai. Il fallait quand même signer pour les véhicules, les armes, les radios et une boîte de munitions et installer le tout dans les véhicules. Chaque équipage a pris possession de son véhicule et l'a chargé de l'équipement et des bagages personnels (boîtes à fourbi, sacs alpins, etc.). L'espace de rangement limité dans les

véhicules représentait un défi surtout pour les équipages de quatre membres. Certains véhicules étaient tellement bourrés de stock que les tourelles ne pouvaient plus tourner.

Ce processus a pris quelques jours. Lors d'une de ces journées, une grue est venue sur place pour récupérer un véhicule Coyote qui a coulé dans l'océan lors de l'opération de déchargement du navire. Selon l'information reçue par Guy, le véhicule devait être débarqué du navire en passant par une passerelle pour aller sur le quai. Lorsque le chauffeur se déplaçait sur le pont du bateau vers la rampe, l'accélérateur s'est coincé et le moteur s'est emballé. Le chauffeur a eu de la difficulté à contrôler le véhicule, et par conséquent, a manqué la rampe entre le bateau et le quai. Le véhicule a basculé dans l'eau, mais par chance le chauffeur a été éjecté du véhicule par son écoutille avant que le véhicule ne coule.

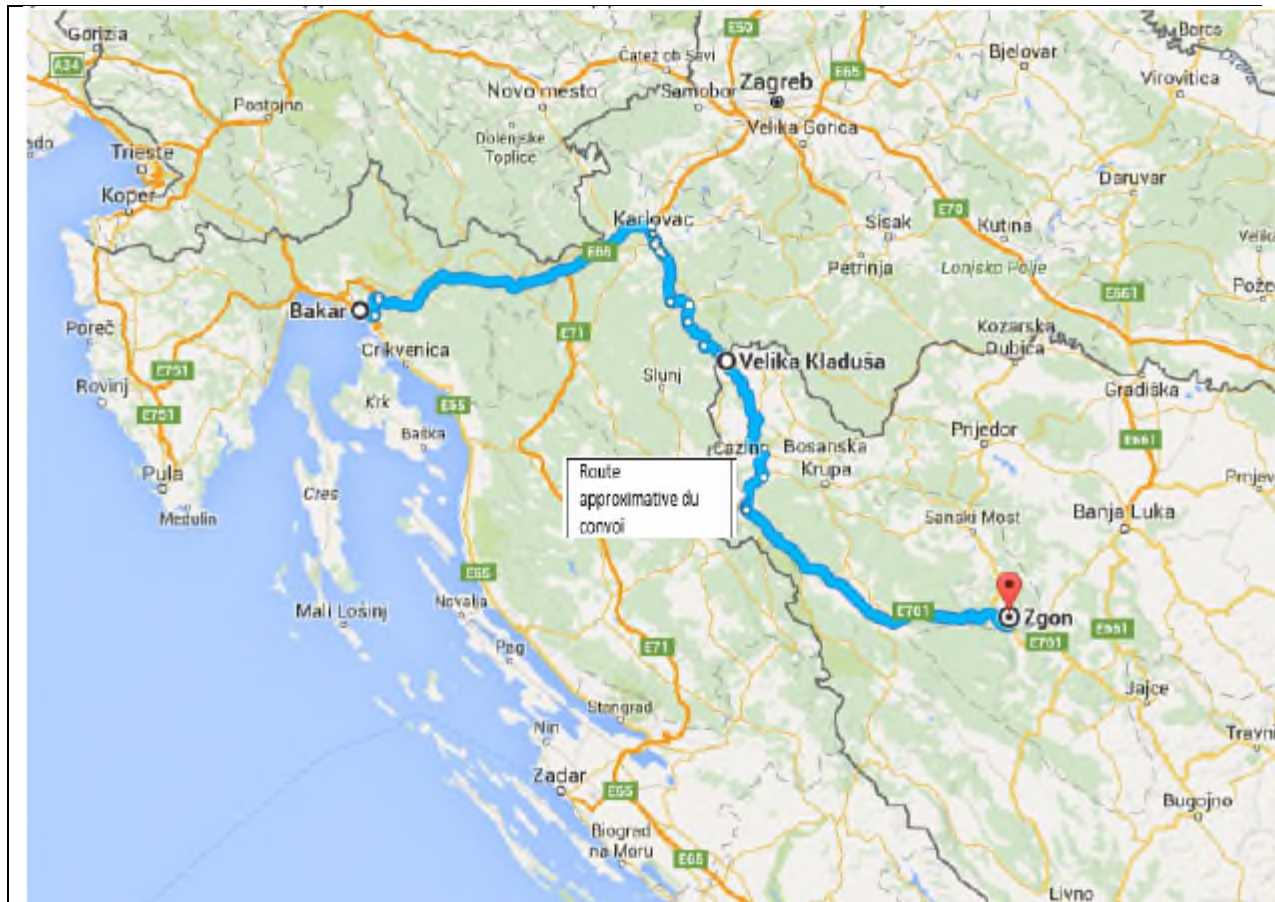
Lorsque ce travail fut accompli, l'escadron s'est déplacé vers le camp Black Bear à Velika Kladusa (VK), le camp logistique du contingent canadien. Ce déplacement a pris environ une demi-journée. Le commandant de la troupe 43 n'était pas présent puisqu'il était parti vers Zgon avec l'avant-garde de l'escadron D pour faire le changement de responsabilité avec l'escadron du 12 RBC d'OP PALLADIUM Roto 9. Alors, Guy a agi en tant que chef d'équipage de son véhicule et chef de convoi pour un groupe de dix véhicules qui voyageaient ensemble, principalement des véhicules logistiques, des VSLR (Véhicule de soutien léger à roue). Un autre caporal-chef du Poste de Commandement (PC) de l'Escadron D fermait la marche dans le dernier véhicule, un Bison PC de l'escadron. Comme carte, Guy a reçu une photocopie d'une carte routière avec la route surlignée en jaune. Il était le seul dans le convoi à recevoir une carte. Alors, Guy s'est assuré que son chauffeur conduisait lentement afin de ne pas perdre aucun véhicule. À VK, ils ont reçu le reste de leurs munitions, et ils ont monté leurs mitrailleuses polyvalentes C-6 sur les véhicules. Après une pause de 24 heures, ils ont poursuivi leur trajet vers le Camp Maple Leaf, leur base permanente à Zgon pour le restant de la rotation.



*Opération de récupération d'un véhicule Coyote qui a coulé dans l'océan lors du déchargement du navire
Photos fournies par Guy Bériau*



Projet de documentation historique des Royal Canadian Hussars
Expériences des membres ou groupes de membres lors de leur participation à une mission
militaire en Bosnie durant la période allant de 1993 à 2004



Rendus au camp Maple Leaf, les membres de l'escadron ont déchargé leurs véhicules et ont pris possession des quartiers. Les dortoirs étaient des tentes montées à l'intérieur d'une ancienne usine de textile. En utilisant des rideaux, chaque tente a été sous-divisée en petites chambres de 4 à 6 mètres carrés. Guy a été assigné à la tente des caporaux-chefs de l'escadron D. Les soldats et caporaux avaient plusieurs tentes semblables et étaient regroupés par troupes. Dans sa chambre, Guy avait installé une bibliothèque pour ses livres, un bureau, son ordinateur, sa télévision et un transformateur d'électricité. Guy a pris possession d'une télévision qui lui a été laissée par son frère, le bombardier Marc Bériau, un artilleur qui avait quitté le camp le 1^{er} avril alors que Guy quittait le Canada, le 2 avril. En retour, Guy a payé la télévision et lui a laissé son auto au Canada pour la durée de la mission.



*Chambre assignée à Guy dans les dortoirs, avec son ordinateur, sa télévision, et ses livres
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*



*Le lit dans la chambre assignée à Guy
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*

Lorsqu'il avait des tâches administratives à compléter, Guy utilisait l'espace de travail dans sa chambre. Sa tente était juste à côté du bureau de l'aumônier, donc il se réveillait les dimanches matins en entendant les prières et des chants de la messe.

L'escadron a mis environ une semaine à vérifier les véhicules et à les mettre en ordre.



*Photo aérienne du camp Maple Leaf à Zgon
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*



*Photo de la barrière principale à l'entrée du camp
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*

Opérations de troupe dans le secteur d'opérations canadiennes

À cette époque, la force de Stabilisation de l'OTAN en Bosnie-Herzégovine (SFOR) avait établi trois secteurs de responsabilité qui couvraient le pays. La zone canadienne était située à l'intérieur d'un de ces trois secteurs : le secteur sud-ouest ou MND(SW) pour Multi-National Division (South-West). Le secteur MND(SW) regroupait également les forces fournies par le Royaume-Uni et les Pays-Bas. Le quartier général de ce secteur était à Banja Luka, dans le secteur d'opération du Royaume-Uni.

À l'intérieur du secteur MND(SW), le Groupe-bataillon 2 R22^eR (GB) a pris la responsabilité de la zone canadienne. Le GB était constitué d'environ 17% de personnel de la Force de réserve et était composé des sous-unités suivantes :

- Une batterie d'artillerie qui devait maintenir la sécurité dans la zone de Glamoc et qui demeurait prête à être déployée en tant qu'artillerie dans tout le secteur;
- Un escadron de reconnaissance qui était la réserve du GB;
- Une unité de génie qui effectuait des activités de déminage, d'entretien des routes ainsi que la réfection des défenses des différents camps;
- Trois compagnies d'infanterie motorisées qui étaient respectivement responsables des zones Sud (Tomislavgrad, Kupres et Livno), Centre (Drvar et Bosansko Grahovo) et Nord (Velika Kladusa, Buzim, Cazin, Bihac, Sanski Most et Bosanska Krupa);
- Une compagnie de commandement qui fournissait les communications et l'état-major;
- Une compagnie de services qui fournissait le soutien de première ligne en matière de maintenance, approvisionnement, transport, pétrole et administration; et
- Un peloton composé exclusivement de réservistes qui assurait notamment la sécurité du général du QG du secteur à Banja Luka.

Rendu au Camp Maple Leaf à Zgon, l'escadron D travaillait sous les ordres du GB. Le quartier général de l'escadron D et celle du 2 R22^eR était dans les bureaux de l'usine au Camp Maple Leaf. Les sous-unités du 2 R22^eR étaient situées à d'autres camps ailleurs dans la zone de responsabilité du Groupe-bataillon. Le support logistique pour l'ensemble des unités a été assuré par la compagnie de service.



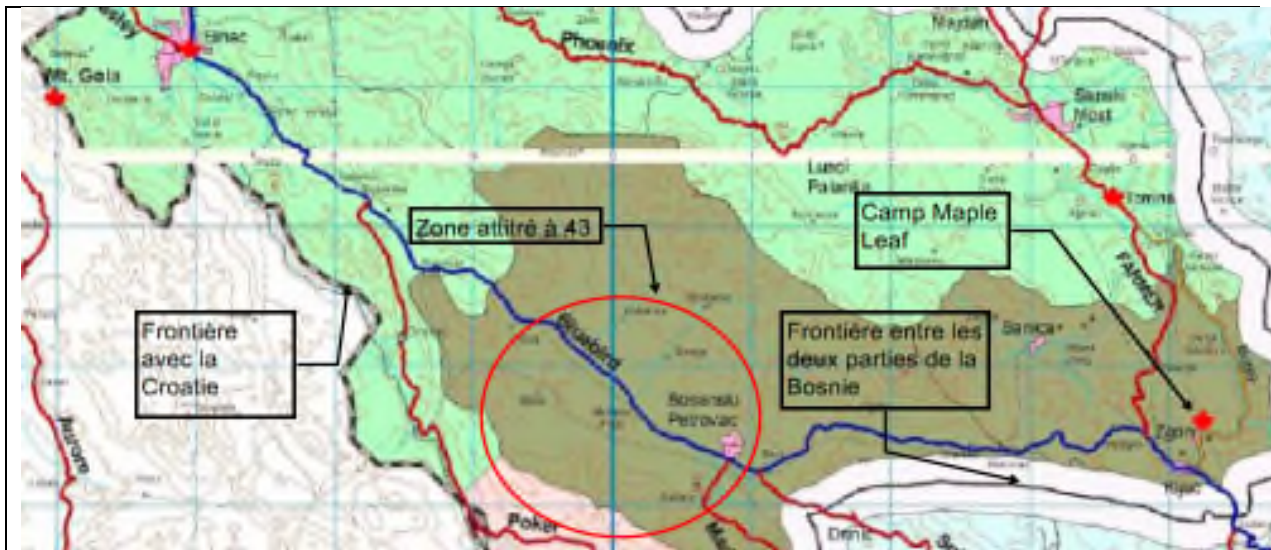
La zone d'opération canadienne est présentée en bleu. La zone d'opération britannique est en vert tandis la zone des Pays-Bas est en blanc. La zone espagnole-française est plus au sud.
Photo copiée du livre souvenir de la rotation 10

Même si elles avaient chacune un pied-à-terre au Camp Maple Leaf, chaque troupe de l'escadron D avait une zone d'opération assignée, où elles devaient patrouiller et récupérer des armes (OP HARVEST). La troupe 41 avait une zone, pas très loin du camp, au village de Klujc. Cette troupe avait aussi la

responsabilité de supporter l'équipe CIMIC, qui organisait des projets pour aider les gouvernements de la place.

Le secteur d'opération de la troupe 43 était autour du village de Bosanski Petrovac, 40 km à l'ouest du Camp Maple Leaf. Ce secteur était le plus éloigné, situé à l'extrême ouest du territoire canadien, près de la frontière avec la Croatie. Pour s'y rendre, la troupe faisait une heure de route, et une autre demi-heure pour la traverser. Durant le temps des patrouilles routinières, la troupe partait vers 9h le matin et revenait au camp vers 16h. Cependant, la troupe 43 était souvent assignée à des missions spéciales et dans ce cas, la troupe 42 patrouillait dans le secteur de 43 ainsi que dans le sien.

En 2002, la région de Bosanski Petrovac était principalement habitée par des Bosniaques et il y avait une minorité serbe dans la région. Les Bosniaques habitaient surtout le village et occupaient les fonctions principales. La minorité serbe était surtout rurale et âgée. La plupart des jeunes Serbes de la région avaient quitté la Bosnie pour aller se refaire une vie en Allemagne ou en Europe centrale. Avant la guerre, les serbes étaient le groupe local majoritaire. Il y avait peu de conflits entre les groupes. Au début de la guerre, les Bosniaques ont été chassés de la région par les milices serbes. Lors des offensives bosniaques en 1995, ce fut les Serbes qui furent chassés de la région. Ainsi, avant la guerre il y avait plus de 15 000 personnes qui vivaient dans la région. En 2002, il y avait moins de 4 000 personnes. Malgré le retour à la paix depuis sept ans, en 2002 il y avait encore beaucoup de maisons non occupées. Selon le recensement de 2013, la population était à près de 8 000 personnes et les Serbes étaient redevenues majoritaires dans la région.



Carte démontrant la zone d'opération approximative de la troupe 43

Très peu de temps après leur arrivée au Camp Maple Leaf, les membres de la troupe 43 ont été réveillés vers minuit. Le commandant les a informés qu'ils partaient pour une mission secrète à Drvar et qu'ils ne devaient informer personne à l'extérieur de la troupe. La situation était que le quartier général de SFOR avait reçu une lettre exprimant de la colère à la suite de certaines actions prises par la SFOR, lors de la

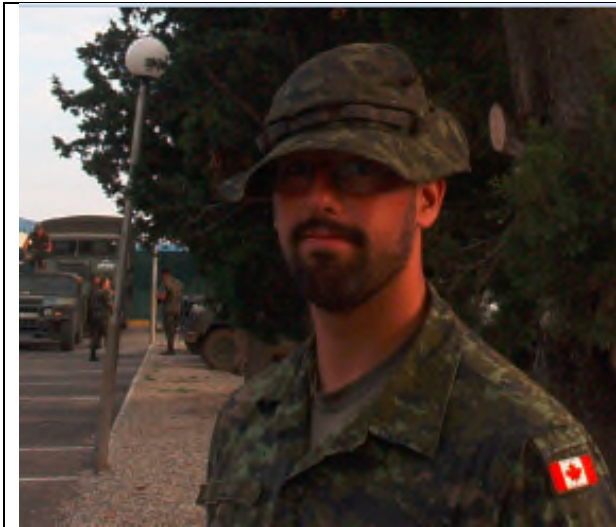
rotation précédente. À cette époque, SFOR essayait de créer un environnement stable en prévision des élections nationales planifiées pour le 5 octobre 2002. Une des menaces à la stabilité était l'agitation par un groupe politique nationaliste de Croates dans la région ouest du pays. Les membres de ce parti politique se sentaient écartés par l'entente de paix qui a divisé la Bosnie en deux parties. Les secteurs du pays où la majorité de la population croate vivait ont été consolidés dans le secteur musulmano-croate, et les membres du Parti croate s'opposaient au fait qu'ils n'avaient pas obtenu de territoire autonome exclusivement croate. Pour réduire les moyens de ce groupe, la rotation précédente de la SFOR avait saisi et fermé le compte en banque du parti politique en question à Drvar. La lettre reçue par la SFOR semblait présager une attaque contre les troupes de SFOR présentes dans la région de Drvar. La mission de la troupe 43 était alors de se déplacer au camp militaire de Drvar, de rejoindre la compagnie B du 2 R22^eR située en permanence à cet endroit, et d'aider ce dernier à sécuriser le camp et la région autour en effectuant des patrouilles de présences musclées, des postes d'observation et des points de contrôles routiers.

Donc, la troupe a quitté le camp de Zgon tôt le matin. Chose exceptionnelle pour un mois d'avril en Bosnie, durant la nuit précédente, il y avait eu une tempête de neige et les conditions routières ont été classées comme étant rouges (à très haut risque d'accident) alors les chauffeurs ont installé les chaînes sur les roues des véhicules avant de partir. De plus, comme le niveau de menace était aussi passé au rouge (haut risque d'attaque), les équipages ont chargé leurs armes, incluant les canons 25 mm. La troupe a avancé lentement sur les routes sinueuses et montagneuses et s'est arrêtée plusieurs fois pour vérifier et resserrer les chaînes. Le trajet a pris trois heures plutôt que deux, ce qui était le temps du trajet quand les conditions routières étaient bonnes. Sur la route à voies opposées, il était seulement possible de rouler sur la ligne blanche au centre, car il y avait trop de neige sur les côtés.



Rendu à Drvar, Guy a noté que le camp n'était pas dans un lieu facilement défendable, il a alors compris pourquoi il fallait patrouiller et placer des postes d'observation dans les environs. La troupe est restée à Drvar une semaine et a travaillé étroitement avec la compagnie B. Pendant cette semaine, quelques membres de la troupe ont souffert de gastro, car leurs corps ne s'adaptent pas à l'eau de la région. Lors d'une des patrouilles, le véhicule dans laquelle Kareem Ishmael était, le 43B, a été ciblé par un rayon

laser. Son véhicule était équipé d'un détecteur qui a sonné une alarme lorsque touché par ce dernier. Ces rayons sont utilisés notamment par les armes antichars et les chars d'assaut pour mesurer la distance de leur cible avant d'effectuer un tir. L'alarme était conçue pour donner à l'équipage un avertissement de quelques secondes avant que le véhicule soit frappé par une munition explosive. Dans ce cas, l'alarme a sonné, mais le véhicule n'a pas été attaqué. Les membres de l'équipage n'étaient pas capables de détecter la source du rayon laser, alors, après un court délai, le chef d'équipage a fait une blague à l'effet que l'observateur pouvait retourner dormir, et la patrouille a continué son parcours. Après une semaine, le quartier général avait réévalué le niveau de risque à la baisse et la troupe est retournée au Camp Maple Leaf pour reprendre ses opérations régulières.



*Le Caporal-chef Guy Bériau. Pendant une portion du déploiement, Guy avait reçu une dispense médicale lui permettant de ne pas se raser.
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*



*Le Caporal Kareem Ishmael
Photo copiée du livre souvenir de la rotation 10*

À la fin du mois d'avril 2002, la population de Bosanski Petrovac s'était plainte au sujet du site de cantonnement. Les sites de cantonnement sont les lieux où le matériel militaire était regroupé à la fin de la guerre en 1995. Le matériel militaire était sous le contrôle de l'armée de Bosnie, mais la SFOR s'assurait de surveiller l'utilisation des équipements. Il fallait garder le contrôle sur l'équipement militaire pour que des milices locales n'en prennent pas le contrôle comme lors de la guerre. Certains de ces sites sont devenus des bases militaires de l'armée de Bosnie. À Bosanski Petrovac le site de cantonnement était à l'image du village, il était petit et vide. C'était un bâtiment de quelques étages, comme un manège militaire de la réserve au Canada, mais en plus petit, avec une dépendance et un garage à proximité. Sur place il n'y avait pas d'armes ni de munition. Le tout était entouré par une clôture de six pieds surmontée de barbelés. Le site avait été laissé à l'abandon depuis plusieurs années. Les rumeurs locales laissaient entendre que le site de cantonnement servait de site d'entreposage pour des déchets radioactifs d'origines médicales. Afin de déterminer si la rumeur était fondée, le commandant de troupe a donné la tâche à la patrouille 43C d'aller sur place pour confirmer

l'information. Comme Guy était le spécialiste du matériel de surveillance de la troupe et qu'il avait quelques notions de sciences (il est diplômé en sciences pures) il a été affecté à la patrouille.

Avant de partir en patrouille, Guy a alors déployé l'ANVRD-2, une suite de surveillance sur le Coyote. Cet appareil est un détecteur de radiation qui ressemble à une enregistreuse avec un micro. En fait, c'est une boîte métallique verte avec un détecteur pour approcher des sources de radiations. L'appareil fonctionne grâce à trois piles électriques de 9 volts. Dans la troupe et même au QM de l'escadron, il n'y avait aucune batterie de ce type. Par chance, Guy avait ce type de piles dans ses bagages personnels. Avant le départ en Bosnie, on avait recommandé de se faire des réserves de piles électriques pour des usages personnels parce que, en théâtre, il était difficile d'en avoir. Après avoir confirmé le bon fonctionnement de l'appareil, la patrouille 43C s'est déplacée directement vers le site de cantonnement. Sur place, Guy équipé du ANVRD-2, a pris la tête de la patrouille pour se déplacer sur le site. L'inspection des lieux a commencé par le bâtiment. À l'intérieur, tout était vide, même pas de meubles. Le détecteur de radiation a capté une très légère hausse de la radiation qui était fort probablement due à une certaine accumulation de radon dans le bâtiment qui était complètement fermé depuis des mois si ce n'était pas des années. L'on a fait le tour du terrain sur le site de cantonnement, puis l'on est allé voir la dépendance près du bâtiment. Il s'agissait d'un espace qui devait avoir été utilisé comme salle de classe ou quartier-maître. La patrouille a trouvé sur place du matériel de défense nucléaire, biologique et chimique (DNBC) : il s'agissait de quelques seringues d'atropine périmées, des cartouches de masque à gaz, des gants, des lingettes de décontaminations, etc. Dans la dépendance, le détecteur de radiation n'a rien détecté. Puis, la patrouille s'est déplacée au garage qui jouxtait la dépendance. Dans le garage, il y avait des contenants de 45 gallons métalliques. Le détecteur de radiation n'a rien trouvé. Par contre, les contenants de 45 gallons étaient ouverts et contenaient des pilules en vrac en très grande quantité. Finalement, ce que la population locale avait cru être des déchets radioactifs médicaux étaient en fait des médicaments périmés.



*Site de cantonnement à Bosanski Petrovac
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*



*Village typique en Bosnie
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*

Quelques semaines plus tard, la troupe a été assignée à l'opération ALEXANDRA. Cette opération avait pour but d'empêcher l'entrée d'armes en Bosnie par des groupes de nationalistes croates qui auraient pu

menacer la bonne tenue de l'élection générale qui allait avoir lieu le 5 octobre 2002. Les troupes 42 et 43 ainsi que le PC d'escadron avaient été impliqués dans l'opération. Lors de cette opération, les troupes ont passé plusieurs semaines à faire des patrouilles et des postes d'observation sur la frontière entre la Croatie et la Bosnie en opérant à partir de Drvar, au sud, et Velika Kladusa, au nord. Les troupes ont établi des postes d'observation sur les routes qui franchissaient la frontière et rapportaient le mouvement des véhicules aux policiers locaux qui interceptaient et fouillaient les véhicules en question.

À quelques reprises lors de cette opération, la troupe 43 surpassait la portée de ses radios et par conséquent, ne pouvait plus communiquer directement avec le quartier général de l'escadron. Il fallait utiliser les PRA (postes de retransmissions automatiques) situés sur les points les plus élevés dans la zone d'opération canadienne. Dans ces cas, Guy devait changer les fréquences des radios dans le véhicule du commandant de la troupe pour communiquer avec la PRA situé en permanence sur le mont Gola.

Vers la fin du mois de juillet, à quelques reprises et sur des périodes de 12 heures de jour, Guy a été mis responsable d'un poste d'observation sur une intersection en forme Y près de Velika Kladusa et de la frontière avec la Croatie. Il fallait inscrire les numéros des plaques d'immatriculation et les descriptions des véhicules qui passaient par cette intersection. Pour faire sa tâche, il s'installait sur le bord de l'intersection dans un stationnement avec un Iltis (jeep), puisque le terrain n'aurait pas été assez grand pour placer un Coyote et qu'on avait demandé la discrétion. Guy allait s'asseoir sur le siège arrière du véhicule durant la tâche. Les deux autres soldats qui l'accompagnaient, dont le caporal Ismaël, prenaient place à l'avant du Iltis. Celui qui était assis du côté gauche du véhicule donnait les informations sur les véhicules qui arrivaient sur la gauche et la personne assise à droite du véhicule s'occupait des véhicules qui arrivaient de la droite. Guy assis à l'arrière prenait en note l'heure, le numéro de plaque, type de véhicule, nom de compagnie et direction de déplacement de chaque véhicule lourd. Durant la période de 12 heures la plus occupée, environ 320 véhicules lourds ont passés par cette intersection. C'était le poste d'observation de l'escadron où il y avait le plus de circulation. À la fin de la journée, on retournait les feuilles de données au poste de commandement (PC) de l'escadron D. Les commis d'escadron se chargeaient d'entrer les données dans un document *Accès*. Avec *Accès* au PC, ils étaient en mesure de produire une matrice de suivi des véhicules, parce que l'information de tous les postes d'observation y était versée. Lorsque Guy retournait ses nombreuses feuilles au PC, les commis étaient découragés. Durant cette tâche d'observation, les soldats devaient surveiller plus particulièrement les véhicules de certaines compagnies de commerce. Ainsi, lorsqu'ils en voyaient, ils devaient communiquer par radio au PC. Selon la gestion des priorités, un hélicoptère Griffon (CH-146) avec une caméra MX-15 pouvait se déplacer et suivre à distance, discrètement, les camions d'intérêt pour confirmer les trajets et les actions des camions entre les postes d'observation. Les efforts entrepris par l'escadron n'ont détecté aucune opération significative d'importation d'armes et la menace aux élections ne s'est heureusement jamais concrétisée. Les élections ont été tenues le 5 octobre dans la tranquillité et la paix.

L'escadron de reconnaissance, en plus de ses responsabilités habituelles, était désigné en tant que réserve du Groupe-bataillon. Par conséquent, il recevait plusieurs demandes de supports spéciales. C'est pourquoi la troupe a voyagé à travers toute la zone de responsabilité canadienne dès les premières semaines de la mission. Après cinq semaines en théâtre la troupe 43 avait déjà visité tous les camps canadiens.

Quand la troupe était au Camp Maple Leaf et n'était assignée à aucune tâche spéciale, elle effectuait des patrouilles quotidiennes dans sa région d'opération autour de Bosanski Petrovac. Les patrouilles de routines quittaient le matin et retournaient le soir. Tôt le matin, les participants aux patrouilles se rassemblaient au stationnement des véhicules où ils vérifiaient le matériel, les stocks et les radios, et chargeaient leurs armes. Ensuite, ils recevaient leurs ordres et partaient vers le secteur d'opération.

Comme canonnier du commandant de troupe, Guy avait plusieurs tâches secondaires dans le véhicule. Lorsque le commandant de troupe était occupé, notamment quand ce dernier préparait des plans pour la prochaine action, le canonnier devait agir en tant que chef de char. Lors des arrêts, il agissait comme observateur, notamment pour la sécurité locale. Il devait aussi contribuer aux tâches essentielles, comme la préparation de la nourriture et du lieu pour dormir, la maintenance du véhicule et à l'entretien des armes, etc. Normalement, le véhicule du commandant de troupe était le véhicule qui faisait le plus de kilométrage dans la troupe et il fallait en tout temps garder le véhicule et l'équipage prêt à bouger. Par contre en Bosnie à cause des congés (HLTA et R&R), souvent l'équipage 43 était réparti entre les patrouilles 43A et 43C. L'officier travaillait souvent au PC d'escadron à Zgon et se déplaçait occasionnellement en Iltis, notamment pour rencontrer le maire et le chef de police à Bosanski Petrovac.

Avant de quitter le camp pour exécuter des missions, les patrouilles (2 Coyotes) s'arrêtaient avant la guérite pour intégrer un interprète. Les interprètes étaient assignés aux unités au fur et à mesure qu'elles quittaient le camp. À plusieurs reprises, un interprète du nom de Ralph a été affecté avec la troupe 43. Il était un ancien combattant des forces bosniaques, un ingénieur de combat, qui avait lui-même installé des champs de mines dans la région. Il était très familier avec les emplacements minés et avait, à quelques reprises, conseillé le commandant de troupe ou de patrouille quant au parcours à prendre pour minimiser les risques de contact avec des mines. Le risque lié aux mines était un des risques principaux pour les troupes et la population civile en Bosnie. Les parties opposantes durant la guerre ont placé des milliers de mines partout dans la région. La plupart des zones ont été repérées et ont été indiquées par des panneaux d'avertissement. Également, la plupart de zones minées étaient inscrites sur les cartes utilisées par les troupes SFOR. Il existait néanmoins beaucoup de zones grises ou incertaines. Par conséquent, il y avait beaucoup d'accidents impliquant les résidents de la place dont des enfants, des bergers et leurs animaux, etc. Plusieurs grands projets de déminage étaient en cours, mais il restait beaucoup de travail à faire. Les commandants de patrouille appréciaient beaucoup les conseils de Ralph quant à ces zones grises, et, par conséquent, la troupe n'a jamais vécu de problèmes avec des mines. Comme l'interprète et Guy voyageaient dans le même véhicule, ils sont devenus amis. Quand Ralph n'était pas disponible, la troupe utilisait d'autres interprètes plus jeunes qui étaient très efficaces comme interprètes, mais qui avaient peu d'expérience avec les mines. Dans ce cas, il fallait être encore plus vigilant. La règle générale pour les troupes était de toujours rester sur les routes, et, quand ils étaient à pied de ne jamais marcher sur le gazon ou de sortir de l'asphalte.

Lors des patrouilles dans la région de Bosanski Petrovac, les troupes apportaient avec eux des sacs de lunchs jaunes contenant des sandwichs fournis par la cuisine du camp. Même si les lunchs étaient fournis, les troupes préféraient arrêter manger à un établissement local. Normalement, la nourriture dans ces établissements était bonne et le prix modeste soit de huit à dix dollars pour un repas avec une bière. Tôt dans la rotation, la troupe s'est arrêtée devant un bar qui s'appelait la Vienna et un membre

de la troupe s'est présenté à la porte pour demander si l'établissement servait des repas. Le vieux propriétaire a demandé au soldat de revenir dans une semaine et, quand la troupe s'est présentée une deuxième fois, elle a effectivement été accueillie à bras ouverts avec un menu écrit en trois langues : le serbo-croate, le français et l'anglais. Le vieux propriétaire qui souffrait économiquement aux suites de la guerre ne pouvait pas se passer d'une occasion en or de faire un peu d'argent. La bouffe était bonne et le restaurant est devenu un lieu d'arrêt favori pour les membres de la troupe. Durant la guerre, le propriétaire s'était réfugié à Vienne, en Autriche. Il venait à peine de revenir dans la région en 2002 et avait ouvert son commerce en lui donnant le nom la Vienna.



*Lunch de patrouille dans un restaurant du coin
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*



*Véhicule en patrouille dans le secteur d'opération de la
troupe
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*

Vers la fin de l'après-midi, les patrouilles repartaient pour le camp. En juillet, la température s'élevait souvent à 40 degrés avec un taux d'humidité de 70%. Dans ce climat chaud et humide, il y avait souvent des orages lors du voyage de retour. Pour éviter d'être complètement mouillées, les patrouilles s'arrêtaient pour laisser passer l'orage. Normalement, la pluie intense s'arrêtait après 10 à 15 minutes. Ensuite le soleil reprenait la place dans le ciel, et les patrouilles reprenaient leur route vers le camp. Rendues au camp, les patrouilles arrivaient par l'entrée principale, déchargeaient leurs armes, passaient aux pompes à essence, puis au stationnement pour décharger les véhicules et vérifier les armes et l'équipement. Il fallait ensuite régler les petits problèmes et fermer les véhicules. Le souper était servi dans une cafétéria centrale, et les membres de troupes étaient libres par la suite pour accomplir les tâches administratives ou pour poursuivre des activités personnelles.

Étant caporal-chef, Guy avait souvent des tâches à compléter. Par exemple, Guy était responsable de la gestion des fonds de la troupe. Au départ, il y a eu une première cotisation qui avait été collectée parmi les membres la troupe, 35 euros par membre. Ensuite, ces fonds s'accumulaient grâce à la vente de bière. Chaque membre de la troupe avait le droit de consommer deux bières par jour. Comme la troupe était souvent à l'extérieur du camp, la troupe avait ses propres provisions pour la route. Cette bière se vendait à 1 euro de plus que le prix coûtant, ce qui était quand même peu comparé au prix au Canada et

aux prix des liqueurs douces. Au retour au Canada, le solde de ce fonds, s'élevant à plus de 1 200\$ CA, a été utilisé pour éponger les couts de la fête de la troupe. En novembre 2002, la troupe a pu louer un grand chalet durant 24 heures à la station touristique Duchesnay au nord-ouest de Québec. De plus, on a eu assez d'argent pour payer le souper, un fondu chinoise et payer la bière pour tous les participants.

En plus des fonctions au sein de la troupe, il y avait des tâches communes au camp à Zgon. La surveillance à l'entrée du camp et sur le camp était assurée par des soldats-en-devoir provenant de toutes les organisations en permanence sur le camp. Ces soldats et caporaux se retrouvaient à faire la garde à l'entrée et faire des patrouilles sur le camp. Un caporal-chef était responsable de les superviser durant une période de 24 heures. Le caporal-chef devait se rapporter au sergent-major du camp de Zgon pour avoir les consignes. À quelques reprises, Guy fut en devoir, et pendant une période de 24 heures, il devait superviser les soldats-en-devoir. Ces derniers devaient assurer la sécurité du camp jour et nuit. Le personnel militaire qui quittait le camp passait par l'entrée principale et donnait leur destination aux soldats-en-devoir. Les travailleurs civils locaux étaient contrôlés à leur arrivée et à leur départ du camp. Il fallait fouiller les sacs et contrôler les cartes d'identité. Parfois, des civils locaux se présentaient à l'entrée du camp pour venir demander de l'aide ou se plaindre pour toutes sortes de raisons. Les soldats-en-devoir devaient porter au minimum leur veste tactique et l'arme. Le port du casque et d'autre équipement de protection pouvait varier selon le niveau de la menace.

En été, la troupe 43 avait été chargée par le commandement supérieur de SFOR de visiter régulièrement un établissement à Bosanski Petrovac, nommé Bar Numéro 9. C'était un établissement fondé par un joueur étoile de soccer de la région. L'établissement était sous la surveillance de SFOR parce que c'était une place où des conflits entre les communautés ethniques se développaient souvent et s'aggravaient rapidement. À quelques reprises, pour minimiser les risques de conflit, une patrouille était envoyée au bar. Les membres s'installaient dans le bar, en uniforme, pour agir quasiment comme videurs, sans avoir droit de consommer d'alcool. Pour plusieurs membres de la troupe qui agissaient en tant que videurs les fins de semaine dans les boîtes de nuit de Québec, c'était du déjà-vu.

Échanges avec les forces espagnoles

La troupe 43 était souvent assignée à des tâches spéciales, alors elle s'est déplacée souvent hors de la zone de responsabilité canadienne, dont deux fois à Mostar. La première fois, en juillet, c'était pour participer à une compétition de reconnaissance en véhicules blindés organisée par le groupe bataillon espagnol, EX DRAGON 02. L'escadron D avait constitué une équipe provenant de toutes les troupes, dont plusieurs de la troupe 43. Lors de la période de préparation, Guy avait été instructeur en reconnaissance de véhicule blindé de combat. Il avait monté des présentations PowerPoint et donné de nombreuses leçons pour que les participants à la compétition soient en mesure de reconnaître les différents véhicules blindés. À la fin de la compétition de reconnaissance, il avait joint l'équipe à Mostar, sur le camp espagnol pour célébrer la seconde place obtenue par l'équipe de l'escadron. Durant la compétition, les participants avaient fait la connaissance de membres de la Légion étrangère qui avaient eux aussi constitué une équipe. Durant la célébration, il y a eu plusieurs échanges de pièces d'uniforme et c'est lors de cette célébration que Guy a réussi à obtenir un képi de la légion.

En septembre, le second déplacement à Mostar était un échange d'une semaine avec les forces espagnoles. Une troupe de reconnaissance espagnole a pris la place de la troupe à Zgon, et la troupe 43 a conduit des patrouilles, fait un champ de tir (C-7 et G3 Esp) et a participé à un exercice hélicoptéré avec les Espagnols.

Lors de l'échange, Guy a noté plusieurs différences dans la façon d'opérer entre les forces des deux pays. Une des différences était au niveau de la nourriture. Un midi lors du champ de tir, les troupes ont échangé des rations de combat. Les rations espagnoles comprenaient une baguette de pain et des conserves. Dans chaque ration, il y avait une boîte de poissons, sardines ou calmars, et une boîte avec le repas principal qui pouvait être du ragoût. Quasiment personne parmi les membres de la troupe n'aimait ces rations, sauf un gars de la Gaspésie pour qui les rations avec des calmars et des sardines étaient un délice rare en Bosnie. Du côté des Espagnols qui s'étaient retrouvés avec les rations de combat canadiennes, il était aussi possible d'entendre des critiques. Finalement, ce fut le seul échange de rations de combat de toute la semaine. Sur le camp espagnol de Mostar, le souper était servi vers 21h, beaucoup plus tard qu'au camp canadien, et au souper, le vin et la bière étaient fournis gratuitement. C'est probablement la raison pour laquelle personne de la troupe ne s'est plaint des soupers sur le camp espagnol.

Une autre différence était à l'égard des langues. Guy avait l'impression que plusieurs soldats espagnols s'exprimaient dans la langue serbo-croate avec aisance. Contrairement aux Canadiens, les soldats espagnols communiquaient directement avec la population locale et n'utilisaient pas d'interprètes. Guy a vu combien la communication directe pourrait être utile lorsqu'il a formé une section démontée et a participé à un exercice hélicoptéré avec plusieurs autres membres de la troupe. Ils ont été transportés par hélicoptère Puma (*Cougar* en français) à un endroit éloigné où il fallait établir un poste de contrôle véhiculaire. Les membres de la section portaient leurs vêtements de protection, du camouflage, des foulards et leurs armes personnelles. Guy a agi en tant que commandant adjoint de la section et était responsable d'arrêter les autos et de les diriger vers la zone de fouille. Le commandant de la section supervisait la zone de fouille et, lorsque le premier véhicule est arrivé, il a signalé au chauffeur de couper

son moteur en utilisant sa main ouverte et la passant devant son cou. Le signal était bien connu par les soldats canadiens, sauf pour les occupants du véhicule qui venaient de vivre une période meurtrière où des groupes de milices tuaient leurs voisins en grand nombre; ce geste a semé la panique. Ils préparaient à fuir. Le sergent-major espagnol qui accompagnait la section a très rapidement reconnu leur réaction et s'est adressé à eux dans leur propre langue. Cette action a calmé les deux civils et l'exercice a poursuivi normalement.

Une autre différence était à l'égard des armes. La troupe canadienne a eu l'occasion de passer une journée complète sur le champ de tir avec l'unité espagnole et d'essayer leurs armes. L'arme qu'utilisaient les soldats espagnols, la G3, était fabriquée en taule pliée comparativement au C7 canadien, qui était une arme fabriquée avec du métal machiné. De la méthode de fabrication utilisée par les Espagnols résultait une arme qui prenait de l'expansion au fil des années à cause de la chaleur générée lors de l'utilisation. Guy avait l'impression que ceci causait plus d'enrayages et offrait donc une arme moins efficace. À la fin de chaque tir, les Espagnols passaient la tige de nettoyage de l'arme G3 par la bouche du canon et regardaient par la fenêtre d'éjection pour voir le bout de la tige métallique et confirmer qu'aucune balle n'était restée prise dans l'arme. Quant aux Espagnols, ils étaient très heureux de pouvoir utiliser la C7 et la C8. La C7 est un fusil d'assaut de fabrication canadienne dérivée sous licence du M16. La C8 est la version plus courte de la C7. La C8 est dérivée du M4 et normalement attribuée aux équipages de véhicule blindé et aux forces spéciales. Dans un équipage de Coyote, le chauffeur et le surveillant avaient des C7, les autres membres d'équipage avaient des C8.



*Guy sur le champ de tir dans le secteur espagnol
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*



*Kareem avec des rations espagnoles
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*

Durant la semaine au camp espagnol, la troupe a eu l'occasion de faire des patrouilles de présence conjointement avec l'unité de reconnaissance espagnole. Les activités se déroulaient lentement puisque la plupart des soldats espagnols ne parlaient ni l'anglais ni le français et qu'aucun des soldats canadiens ne parlait l'espagnol. Ils ont quand même réussi à effectuer quelques patrouilles. Guy a été impressionné quand la patrouille est arrêtée à un site de cantonnement, un bâtiment avec aire de stationnement et d'entreposage sécurisé, où le gouvernement entreposait des armes, des munitions et des véhicules. Il y avait plusieurs bunkers construits à même le sol et ensevelis dans des buttes de terre qui étaient utilisés comme entrepôt. Guy se souvient d'y avoir vu des caisses d'armes avec de vieux M16 de l'époque de la guerre du Viet Nam et des M60 d'origine américaine. Les armes avaient été fournies par le gouvernement américain pour équiper la nouvelle armée bosniaque. Les soldats bosniaques qui assuraient la sécurité du site étaient équipés de vieux uniformes de combat vert à camouflage tacheté d'origine américaine.



*Convoi vers le champ de tir
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*



*Véhicules de la troupe au champ de tir.
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*

Vers la fin de l'échange, certains membres de la troupe ont saisi l'occasion, durant leur temps libre, pour visiter un deuxième et plus important camp de l'OTAN situé à Mostar. Ces derniers voulaient visiter le PX (Poste exchange : magasin à rayons pour les soldats américains) situé sur ce camp. Il y avait aussi des magasins pour les militaires français et néerlandais. Ils sont partis en Ittis et se sont rendus à l'autre base militaire sans aucune difficulté. Cependant, pendant qu'ils faisaient leur magasinage, le niveau d'alerte a augmenté. Cela faisait un an exactement que les attentats du 11 septembre 2001 avaient eu lieu. Quand est venu le temps de retourner au camp espagnol, les gardes marocains, nouvellement arrivés en théâtre et chargés de la sécurité de la barrière principale, refusaient de les laisser sortir sans leurs armes et leurs vestes anti fragmentation, équipements qu'ils avaient laissés au camp espagnol. Après une brève période d'immobilisation, les Canadiens ont été escortés au camp espagnol par un détachement français de la Légion étrangère.

A la fin de la semaine d'échange, la troupe a été invitée à un souper d'amitié avec les Espagnoles et les Français. Plusieurs ont échangé des articles de vêtement et des badges d'unités.

De retour à Zgon, Guy a entendu que la troupe espagnole qui les avait remplacés était très efficace dans la collecte d'information, notamment à l'égard des trafiquants de drogue. Il a compris que les membres de la troupe espagnole avaient une allocation de fonds qui leur permettait d'entrer dans les bars et de payer des tournées pour ceux qui voulaient partager l'information. Les soldats canadiens n'avaient pas ce type de fonds.

Changements techniques et humains

En Bosnie, Guy a eu l'impression que les troupes avaient vécu plusieurs changements. Selon Guy, le changement le plus important était à l'égard de la technologie utilisée dans les radios, les véhicules et l'équipement. Dû à l'introduction de plusieurs nouveautés en même temps, les sous-officiers se trouvaient dans une position où ils ne connaissaient pas bien les technologies et ne pouvaient plus régler la multitude de problèmes liés à ces derniers. Ils étaient plus dépendants des jeunes soldats,

nouvellement formés, pour les régler. Cela a créé une demande pour des canonniers ayant une profondeur technique qui pouvait dépanner leurs chefs de chars.

En ce qui concernait les radios, la rotation 10 était la première rotation à utiliser les nouvelles radios digitales. Ces radios étaient munies d'un système de cryptage qui permettait aux unités de communiquer en clair entre elles. Auparavant, le cryptage des messages était effectué manuellement, ce qui ralentissait les communications. Cependant, les nouvelles radios étaient plus fragiles et plus difficiles à opérer. Les radios ne pouvaient pas tolérer de variations dans le niveau de puissance électrique comme les anciennes radios. Chaque variation de tension faisait perdre la programmation des radios de sorte qu'il fallait les reprogrammer. Des batteries à gel plus stables avaient remplacé les vieilles batteries au plomb afin de régler ce problème. Pour des raisons de sécurité de l'information, les radios étaient installées en permanence et barrées dans les véhicules. En ce qui concerne l'opération, il fallait régulièrement réinstaller une nouvelle crypto dans chaque radio.

Une autre responsabilité que Guy avait était d'agir comme le «PRONTO» de la troupe. Comme PRONTO, Guy avait un rôle d'assurer l'efficacité des communications au niveau de la troupe. Il était responsable notamment pour organiser les remplacements et des réparations des radios et des pièces d'équipement afférents. Cela s'effectuait principalement les dimanches après-midis au Camp Maple Leaf. De plus, il devait régulièrement visiter le quartier général de l'escadron pour échanger de l'information et pour obtenir les codes de cryptage. Par la suite, il devait distribuer et superviser la programmation de ces codes de cryptage dans les radios de la troupe. Souvent, puisque les membres de la troupe n'étaient pas très habiles avec les nouvelles radios, Guy a lui-même programmé les codes dans toutes les radios. Il s'est rapidement développé une expertise quant aux radios. Au début de la mission, sa troupe a été attachée à une des compagnies du 2 R22^eR pour une opération. Lors de leur arrivée à la position de la compagnie, Guy a trouvé que la compagnie travaillait encore sur les codes de la période précédente, puisque les membres de la compagnie ne réussissaient pas à programmer correctement les nouveaux codes de cryptage dans l'ensemble de leurs radios. Guy s'est assuré de maintenir les communications entre sa troupe, le PC d'escadron et le PC de la Compagnie par l'emploi de différents cryptos durant une semaine.

À quelques occasions, Guy devait organiser les communications de son véhicule pour communiquer avec des unités qui avaient des radios cryptées et d'autres unités qui utilisaient encore les anciennes radios analogiques. À d'autres occasions, lorsque la troupe était loin du quartier général, il fallait utiliser des postes de relai existant dans la région pour maintenir les communications avec le PC d'escadron.

En ce qui concerne les véhicules, les nouveaux étaient dotés d'équipement plus sophistiqué. Au niveau de puissance de feu, l'arme principale, un Canon Bushmaster M242 de 25 mm, était équipée d'un nouveau système de stabilisation qui permettait au canonnier de maintenir le tir sur une cible, même si le véhicule était en mouvement. Dans l'ensemble, le canon 25 mm était très fiable. Souvent, les enrayages se produisaient au début du tir parce que les opérateurs avaient mal préparé le canon. Pour préparer le canon au tir, il fallait placer les munitions de 25 mm maintenues par maillons dans les compartiments d'entreposage de munitions et les aligner dans le système d'alimentation. Le canon était doté de deux compartiments, appelés caissons, qui permettaient au tireur de choisir les munitions qu'il

voulait utiliser. La munition dans le « caisson primaire » était des fléchettes SABOT (APFSDS-T(C-137), obus perforant à sabot détachable stabilisé par ailettes et à composition traçante, qui étaient conçues pour percer les véhicules blindés, et la munition dans le « caisson secondaire » était soit du FAPSD-T (C-138) FRANGIBLE (fragments) ou HEI-T (Incendiaires), qui serait utilisée contre les cibles non blindées. Pour charger les munitions dans le véhicule, il fallait tourner la coque vers le côté et ouvrir une petite porte à l'arrière. Ensuite, il fallait charger les bandes de 15 obus de 25 mm, les « clipper » les unes après les autres pour remplir les compartiments en suivant le schéma et monter les premiers obus dans les différents couloirs du système d'alimentation électronique. Si ce processus a été suivi correctement, l'arme pouvait tirer jusqu'à 200 obus par minute. Sinon, l'arme pouvait s'enrayer lors de la première opération.

Une des difficultés vécues par la troupe était liée aux munitions. Chaque dimanche en après-midi, les membres de la troupe se rassemblaient au stationnement des véhicules pour effectuer la maintenance des véhicules, des armes et des autres éléments d'équipement. Une fois par mois, il fallait effectuer un décompte physique complet de toutes les munitions. Cela était ordonné par le quartier général afin de vérifier l'état des munitions et pour détecter des décharges accidentelles ou des incidents non communiqués. Pour faire le décompte, il fallait décharger le canon et les autres armes, et placer les munitions sur une bâche à côté du véhicule. Souvent, le déchargement et le rechargement des canons endommageaient les maillons qui liaient les obus ensemble. Les munitions étaient aussi endommagées à cause des déchargements en prévision de champ de tir. Lors des séances d'entraînement sur le champ de tir, les munitions réelles comme le APFSDS-T étaient retirées des véhicules et remplacées par des munitions TPDS-T (Target Practice Discarding Sabot ou sabot détachable pour cible d'entraînement avec traceuse). Les munitions fragiles et incendiaires étaient quant à elles remplacées par des munitions TP-T (Target Practice). Le fait de retirer les munitions endommageait surtout les munitions fragiles dont la pointe était protégée par un cône de plastique. Les cônes de plastique étaient souvent fendus ou arrachés. Aussi avec le temps des maillons rouillaient ou se brisaient. En juin, après l'inspection des munitions de la troupe par les techniciens en munitions, 80% des munitions fragiles ont été retirées et remplacées par des munitions HEI-T.

Plusieurs véhicules ont eu des problèmes avec les mécanismes de tringlerie, c'est-à-dire le mécanisme utilisé pour aligner le canon et le viseur. Lors d'un tel bris, le canon et le viseur n'étaient pas correctement alignés, donc le tir n'était pas efficace. Normalement, ce type de bris était très rare. Tous les bris de tringlerie étaient dus au fait que, lors de l'installation de la nouvelle suite de communication TCCCS/IRIS, une barre de tringlerie était séparée et mal réinstallée après le passage de fils électriques. Cela faisait en sorte que, lorsque l'on élevait le canon, le bras de tringlerie entre le viseur et le canon se tordait légèrement. Cela était imperceptible à l'œil, mais suffisant pour désajuster le tir. Ainsi, il devenait souvent impossible d'aligner l'axe de l'âme du canon et le viseur. Il fallait commander le bras tordu pour le remplacer.

Une autre source d'échecs était des omissions dans la routine de tir lors de l'opération du canon. Le tireur devait compléter quatre actions essentielles pour que le canon fonctionne. Il fallait enlever le mécanisme de sécurité, choisir le type d'arme, mettre la main sur la manette qui servait à pointer le canon, et tirer sur le déclencheur. Si une ou plusieurs étapes étaient sautées, le canon refusait de tirer.



Vue sur le véhicule permettant de voir la porte par laquelle des boîtes de munitions sont chargées et déchargées du véhicule.

Photo fournie par Guy Bériau



Vue sur le véhicule permettant de voir le système de surveillance sur le mât extensible. Le système avait deux caméras, une pour le jour et une pour la nuit.

Photo fournie par Guy Bériau

Un autre enjeu avec le véhicule Coyote était le poids du véhicule. Le Coyote a été fabriqué essentiellement avec les mêmes mécanismes que son prédécesseur le Cougar. Cependant, la coque a été rallongée, une tourelle plus lourde en acier a été utilisée et une suite de surveillance a été installée. Aussi, il était doté de nouvelles batteries à gel plus robuste pour supporter la panoplie d'équipement électronique. Le Coyote était plus lourd que l'ancien véhicule, mais des pièces de suspension du Cougar et des arbres de transmission plus fragiles ont été utilisés lors de sa fabrication. Le poids additionnel a augmenté les bris, notamment des colonnes de direction et des arbres de transmission. De plus, à la demande des Forces armées, le fabricant avait augmenté la puissance des moteurs de 275 à 300 chevaux spécifiquement pour Opération Palladium. Cependant, cette augmentation a été effectuée sans ajuster certaines composantes de moteur, comme le système antipollution. Cela a fait en sorte que plusieurs turbos ont sauté et ont dû être remplacés.

En ce qui concerne le système de surveillance, c'était un système exceptionnel. Il consistait d'une console de contrôle à l'intérieur du véhicule et, à l'extérieur, des caméras thermique et diurne, ainsi qu'un radar qui permettait d'observer des cibles à distance de jour et de nuit. Le système de surveillance pouvait à la fois être monté sur un mât de 10 mètres à même les Coyotes ou à distance sur des trépieds. Pour les équipages qui n'opéraient un tel système que depuis quelques années, la complexité du système faisait en sorte qu'il y avait beaucoup de problèmes d'opérateurs, particulièrement lors de la programmation initiale lorsque l'on établit un poste d'observation. Aussi, ce système avait certains points faibles, dont les câbles. Il fallait faire très attention pour ne pas les briser. Il y avait même un câble de fibre optique de 200 m pour les suites de surveillance sur trépieds.

Guy avait l'impression que toutes ces vulnérabilités techniques ont créé une demande pour des pièces de rechange et cette demande n'a pas été prévue. Au même moment, les Forces armées canadiennes ont commencé un engagement de longue durée en Afghanistan, ce qui a étiré les ressources financières

et logistiques des Forces. La Bosnie perdait progressivement sa priorité de support par rapport à l'Afghanistan. Donc, il y avait une longue attente pour des pièces de rechange; plusieurs véhicules et pièces d'équipement n'étaient pas fonctionnels à 100% pour des périodes étirées.



Guy avait l'impression qu'un autre enjeu auquel l'escadron devait faire face en Bosnie était le mélange des membres de l'escadron entre ceux qui venaient d'une unité de blindés et ceux qui venaient d'une unité de reconnaissance. L'escadron D était d'abord un escadron de reconnaissance, mais pour cette rotation il a été augmenté par plusieurs membres de l'escadron B du 12 RBC, l'escadron de chars Léopard C2 (Léopard IA5). Cette augmentation a sûrement été motivée par un désir d'équilibrer le nombre de déploiements à l'étranger entre les différentes sous-unités du 12 RBC. En Bosnie, SFOR avait besoin d'un escadron de reconnaissance et non pas d'un escadron de chars. Pour comprendre l'enjeu, il faut saisir les mentalités derrière les deux métiers. Les soldats qui travaillaient dans les chars d'assaut étaient des chasseurs qui devaient utiliser l'agressivité et la violence pour vaincre un ennemi. Les soldats qui travaillaient dans la reconnaissance étaient d'abord des collecteurs d'information qui devaient utiliser leur intelligence et l'agilité afin de voir sans être vus. Lors des exercices à Gagetown, les différences sont devenues apparentes, lorsque les patrouilles de reconnaissance devaient sécuriser à pied certaines zones avant de poursuivre la reconnaissance de la route. Certains chefs de chars sont devenus impatients, puisque les chars auraient utilisé leur protection blindée et leur puissance de tir pour effectuer l'opération beaucoup plus rapidement. En Bosnie, un sujet de discussion était le positionnement du canon lorsque les véhicules étaient stationnés. Les soldats blindés insistaient qu'il fallait reposer le canon légèrement sur le côté avant droit du véhicule comme avec le Léopard. Cela se faisait afin de protéger le mécanisme d'élévation du canon de 2,9 tonnes de 105 mm. Cependant les soldats de la reconnaissance insistaient qu'il fallait garder les canons au centre du véhicule, parallèle au sol, parce que un canon de 25 mm de 45 kg n'a pas d'impact sur le mécanisme d'élévation. Guy avait l'impression qu'à plusieurs reprises des différences d'approche ont causée de la friction entre les deux groupes. Cependant, ces différences n'ont jamais empêché l'escadron de compléter sa mission.

En ce qui concerne les vêtements, les troupes ont eu l'ordre de porter les casques de kevlar en tout temps dans leur véhicule dès l'entraînement à Gagetown. Cet ordre a été donné pour protéger la tête des membres d'équipages dans les véhicules à l'entraînement comme en mission. Cela a été une grosse adaptation pour les soldats des blindés qui étaient habitués à porter leur béret ou leur ancien casque d'équipage en plusieurs morceaux à l'intérieur de leurs chars. Plusieurs personnes au sein du Corps de l'arme blindée avaient protesté contre cette façon de faire et argumentaient sur la perte d'efficacité des équipages pour opérer leur arme dans la tourelle. Certains trouvaient ridicule que lors des premières missions plus risquées en Bosnie, les équipages en tourelle portaient le béret et que, soudainement dès qu'il était plus tranquille, il fallait porter un casque. Finalement, le temps a fait son œuvre, les membres d'équipages ont appris à travailler avec un casque et plus personne ne remettrait en question le fait de porter un casque de kevlar dans les véhicules de combat.

Un autre changement était l'arrivée des soldats féminins dans les troupes de combats. L'intégration des femmes dans les armes de combat visait à permettre à tous les citoyens canadiens de servir leur pays en fonction de leurs capacités. Plusieurs femmes se sont portées volontaires pour la mission en Bosnie, guidées notamment par leur engagement dans la communauté et par leur désir de changer les choses et d'améliorer la vie des autres. Il y avait une ou deux femmes par troupe et elles ont contribué pleinement à la mission. Auparavant, les soldats ne travaillaient qu'avec des soldats masculins; certains d'entre eux ne filtraient jamais leurs paroles ni leurs actions. Guy avait l'impression qu'avec l'arrivée des femmes, les membres de la troupe avait adopté des comportements plus respectueux entre eux.

Vers août, l'adjudant de troupe a distribué un questionnaire pour connaître l'expérience des réservistes en mission. Guy a répondu au questionnaire et ayant le désir d'élaborer sur le sujet, il a écrit une lettre pour exprimer ses idées. Il avait constaté quelques lacunes au niveau de l'employabilité des réservistes. Notamment, Guy avait été entraîné pendant huit ans comme « tanker » dans les véhicules Cougar ce qui ne l'a pas vraiment préparé pour un rôle dans une unité de reconnaissance blindé dotée de véhicules Coyotes et déployée dans le cadre d'une mission de support à la paix. C'est pourquoi il a suggéré plusieurs améliorations pour permettre à la réserve de mieux supporter la régulière lors de ces missions, notamment des exercices conjoints impliquant les troupes des forces régulières et de la réserve, une augmentation du nombre de réservistes disponibles pour de telles missions, et une évolution vers des cours standardisés entre la régulière et la réserve. Guy avait écrit sa réponse sous la forme d'un mémorandum à son commandant d'escadron, le Major S. Tremblay. Une semaine plus tard, le commandant du Groupe-Bataillon 2 R22^eR, le Lieutenant-colonel Lessard demandait à rencontrer le caporal-chef Bériau à son bureau. Guy a rencontré le Lieutenant-colonel Lessard qui l'a remercié pour la qualité de sa rédaction et pour l'avoir éclairé sur la réserve. Quelques années plus tard, vers 2004, Guy a su que sa lettre avait circulé à très haut niveau et a été grandement appréciée.

Vacances et périodes de repos

Pour le premier mois de la mission, tous les membres de la troupe étaient présents. Pendant ce mois, Guy était le tireur dans le véhicule du commandant de troupe. Par la suite, les membres de la troupe ont commencé à prendre leurs vacances et leurs périodes de repos. Alors, plusieurs membres pouvaient être absents. Chaque membre avait droit à une vacance d'environ vingt jours (HLTA - Home Leave Travel

Assistance) et à deux périodes de repos de quatre jours (R&R - Rest and Relaxation). Souvent la troupe a opéré avec quatre véhicules plutôt que cinq.

La tâche de proposer l'horaire des vacances a été déléguée à Guy. Pour le faire, Guy devait consulter les membres de la troupe et prendre en considération plusieurs facteurs, notamment la situation familiale de la personne, son niveau de séniorité, ses qualifications et ses préférences. Des blocs de temps avaient déjà été prévus pour ceux qui voulaient retourner au Canada et passer leurs vacances avec leurs familles. Aussi, l'horaire devait assurer la présence des personnes ayant les qualifications nécessaires pour diriger les opérations et pour opérer au moins quatre des cinq véhicules de la troupe. D'habitude, la troupe fonctionnait avec deux patrouilles, chacune composée de deux véhicules Coyote. Cependant, dans quelques périodes, pour permettre à tous les membres de la troupe de prendre des vacances, une jeep Ilitis a été utilisée comme deuxième véhicule au sein d'une des patrouilles. Quasiment tous les membres de la troupe pouvaient agir en tant que chauffeur ou observateur pour ce type de véhicule, contrairement au Coyote. Guy a présenté des versions préliminaires de l'horaire à l'officier et à l'adjudant de troupe, afin que ces derniers puissent prendre des décisions à l'égard des conflits et approuver le tout.

Pendant les vacances, Guy a changé de véhicule plusieurs fois pour remplacer des membres en vacances, souvent comme tireur, parfois comme chef de char et plus rarement comme surveillant et chauffeur.

Guy était le dernier membre de la troupe à partir en vacances. Vers la fin de la saison touristique, il est allé en Grèce où il a passé la moitié de ses vacances à Athènes et l'autre dans les îles. L'armée a payé ses vacances jusqu'à un montant équivalent à un voyage au Canada. Comme il était historien de formation, il a passé son temps à visiter les sites historiques.

Pour ses deux périodes de repos, Guy est allé à Vienne et à Budapest. Il a choisi ces deux destinations pour leur valeur historique. Il a beaucoup apprécié la ville de Vienne, qui était anciennement la ville capitale de l'empire d'Autriche-Hongrie. Il a visité le palais impérial et plusieurs autres bâtiments du 19^e siècle. À Budapest, il a visité l'hôtel Gellert, un hôtel et spa 5 étoiles. Il avait choisi cet hôtel pour profiter du spa thermal. Là, il se souvient d'avoir mangé un souper magnifique sur une terrasse avec orchestre autrichien, une vue panoramique sur la rivière Danube, et un sommelier qui lui a servi une bouteille d'eau minérale. Les repas étaient amenés sous cloches et le couvercle retiré lors du service pour présenter l'assiette au client. Ce qui l'a étonné le plus, c'était le faible prix du repas avec un tel service.

Pour sortir les soldats du secteur d'opérations, un autobus faisait le tour des différents camps militaires canadiens et les transportait vers le camp Black Bear à VK. À cet endroit, les soldats recevaient les documents de voyage et remontaient dans l'autobus pour arriver, vers 5 heures le matin, à l'aéroport ou à la gare de train à Zagreb. L'autobus arrêtait à Zgon vers minuit, mais avant de partir les soldats devaient assister à une réunion organisée par les polices militaires. Le but principal de la réunion était d'avertir les soldats de ne pas faire de connerie lors de leurs périodes de repos. Certains soldats se tiraient des ennuis puisqu'ils buvaient trop, s'impliquaient dans des bagarres, et endommageaient la propriété des autres. Guy se rappelle que les policiers ont raconté une anecdote pour démontrer comment c'était facile pour un soldat d'avoir des problèmes dans un pays étranger. Lors d'une rotation précédente, un soldat est sorti dans les bars à Budapest. Quand il a parlé avec une femme dans le bar, le

soldat lui a annoncé, à la blague, qu'il venait tout juste de s'évader d'une prison; il voulait dire qu'il venait d'un camp militaire en Bosnie où il se sentait prisonnier. La dame n'a pas compris la blague et a appelé la police qui est venue arrêter le pauvre soldat qui avait été pris pour un prisonnier évadé de prison.

Finalement, en septembre Guy a participé dans un voyage touristique organisé à Sarajevo. Ce voyage a été spécifiquement organisé pour les soldats à Zgon et n'a duré qu'une seule journée. Ils sont partis tôt le matin en autobus militaire. À Sarajevo, ils ont visité plusieurs sites touristiques et certains sites importants au point de vue de la guerre : *Sniper alley*, le monument à Tito, le marché public, le stade olympique, et le PX. Guy a profité de la visite au marché public pour acheter des badges souvenirs de l'époque de la guerre et des vieux billets de banque d'avant la guerre et durant la guerre en Bosnie.

Collecte d'armes – Opération HARVEST

Vers la fin de la rotation, le commandant de l'escadron a demandé au commandant de la troupe 43 de compléter la collecte d'armes dans le secteur d'opération de la troupe. Dans le cadre de l'opération HARVEST, sur 6 mois, chaque troupe avait pour objectif d'aller dans toutes les résidences de sa zone de responsabilité pour faire de la collecte d'armes. Jusqu'à ce moment, la troupe 43 n'avait effectué que peu de visites parce qu'elle était souvent assignée à des tâches spéciales qui la conduisait loin de sa zone de responsabilité.

« L'opération de récolte d'armes et de munitions avait pour but de sécuriser la population afin d'éviter que d'autres conflits se reproduisent. Cette opération a porté fruit avec la collecte de plusieurs armes non enregistrées de presque tous les pays et tous les calibres. Pour avoir une arme légale, les citoyens devaient l'enregistrer au poste de police locale où un permis de possession leur était remis. Durant les journées où la troupe faisait du porte-à-porte pour cette opération, les gens demandaient souvent de l'aide, car la pauvreté était encore bien présente dans le pays. La troupe avait découvert une maison qui avait un toit percé. Donc, entre les patrouilles et la collecte d'armes, la troupe avait refait le toit de la vieille dame. Plus tôt, la troupe a visité une école et le directeur de cette école leur a dit que cet établissement n'avait aucun moyen pour se chauffer durant les mois d'hiver. Grâce au fonds hollandais Humanitarian Assistance Project (HAP) la troupe a pu acheter deux poêles à bois pour que les enfants puissent être au chaud pendant l'hiver. Plus tard, la troupe avait fait un geste humanitaire en donnant des vêtements à une dame âgée qui n'avait quasiment rien pour s'habiller. Ceux-ci n'étaient que quelques exemples des gestes que la troupe a posés pour remettre le pays sur le bon chemin. Bien que l'opération ne fût pas une opération d'aide humanitaire, le porte-à-porte que la troupe a effectué permettait aux membres de la troupe de se rapprocher de la population et de rencontrer les gens avec qui ils n'auraient normalement eu que très peu de contacts ou de possibilités de connaître leurs besoins. » Caporal Boucher, Troupe 43 – extrait du livre souvenir de la rotation 10.



*Membres de la troupe 43 lors de la réparation de toit
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*



*Des armes récupérées lors de l'opération Harvest
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*

Pour effectuer l'opération, la troupe choisissait un quartier et visitait toutes les résidences. Grâce aux interprètes, ils expliquaient l'objectif de la visite et demandaient si les résidents avaient des armes qu'ils voulaient rendre. Parfois, ils demandaient aux résidents la permission d'inspecter les lieux et de faire des fouilles pour des armes, mais, souvent, les résidents rendaient eux-mêmes des armes et munitions. La quantité d'armes soumises était souvent au-delà des attentes. La grande quantité d'armes dans la région ne s'expliquait pas seulement par la guerre récente, mais aussi par l'expérience du pays lors de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. Lors de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, les groupes ethniques du pays se sont réunis pour se libérer eux-mêmes de l'occupation. Après la Guerre, sous la direction de son président, le pays s'est systématiquement préparé pour une autre guerre en stockant des grandes quantités d'armes. Le pays a même développé une industrie domestique de fabrication d'armes afin d'être complètement autonome. En suivant cette démarche, la troupe a collecté un grand nombre d'armes et de munitions qu'elle a remis à un groupe d'ingénieurs qui les transportait vers un lieu central pour la destruction.

Un jour, lorsque le véhicule dans lequel Guy agissait en tant que tireur était stationné près de la ville de Bosanski Petrovac, un homme âgé s'est approché du véhicule avec une vieille grenade. C'était une grenade du type qui devait être lancée par une arme russe. Puisque le commandant de la troupe et son interprète n'étaient pas présents, la responsabilité de traiter avec ce monsieur tombait sur Guy. En utilisant des gestes, Guy a réussi à demander au monsieur de poser la grenade à terre à une distance sécuritaire du véhicule. Par chance, un policier bosniaque parlant l'anglais est passé et a pu traduire ce que disait l'homme âgé. Il a pu expliquer que la grenade avait été trouvée dans le jardin de l'homme. Le policier avait probablement fait du service militaire, car il a pris la grenade, a montré la goupille sur la grenade et a expliqué que la grenade était sécuritaire. Ensuite, Guy a utilisé la radio pour appeler les ingénieurs qui sont venus ramasser la grenade et la transporter dans leur roulotte renforcée.



*Photo de la troupe 43 en Bosnie – Guy est dans le premier rangé à gauche
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*

Lors du dernier mois de la rotation, la troupe a intensifié ses efforts de collecte d'armes afin d'atteindre les objectifs quantitatifs. Au début, la troupe visitait trois ou quatre résidences par jour. Lors de ces visites, selon les instructions de SFOR, les troupes devaient avoir un comportement non menaçant envers les résidents. Plusieurs résidents ont accueilli les soldats en leur offrant un verre de Slivovitch, une boisson alcoolisée locale. Pour minimiser les problèmes liés à l'alcool, les véhicules désignaient un membre – souvent le tireur - pour accepter cette hospitalité. Comme Guy ne consommait pas d'alcool, il agissait souvent comme tireur, mais laissait l'opérateur de surveillance et le chef de char apprécier les alcools de fabrication artisanale. Vers la fin du mois, pour atteindre les objectifs quantitatifs, le nombre de visites a été augmenté à dix résidences par jour, et par conséquent, les membres de la troupe n'avaient plus le temps d'accepter l'hospitalité des résidents.

Retour au Canada

À la fin de la rotation, l'escadron est reparti pour le Canada le 4 octobre 2002. Avant de partir, les participants à la mission ont reçu deux médailles. La première était la médaille canadienne du maintien de la paix. La deuxième était la médaille de l'OTAN Non-article 5 pour les opérations dans les Balkans. C'était le commandant de l'escadron, le major Tremblay et le sergent-major de l'escadron, l'adjudant maître Blouin, qui ont fait les présentations.



*Photo de Guy dans le parc de véhicules
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*



*Présentation des médailles
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*

Guy est retourné à Montréal pour terminer ses études. Étant donné que la session universitaire devait débuter en septembre, il a communiqué par téléphone avec des professeurs pour obtenir une dispense pour son arrivée tardive. Finalement, la session n'a pas commencé en septembre comme prévu, faute d'une grève de quatre semaines. Guy a donc été capable de recommencer l'université au même moment que les autres étudiants.

En 2004, il s'est enrôlé dans la force régulière en tant qu'élève-officier et a progressé dans sa carrière au sein du 12 RBC. En 2009 il a participé sur un autre déploiement, mais cette fois-ci en Afghanistan, en tant qu'officier d'état-major à Kandahar. En Afghanistan, il était responsable de la planification des interactions entre les drones et les unités qui opéraient au sol dans le secteur d'opérations canadiennes.

La vie par la suite

Lorsque Guy est passé en entrevue dans le cadre de la préparation de ce document, il était capitaine et officier d'état-major au 5^e Groupe-brigade mécanisé du Canada à Valcartier, où il agissait en tant que G3 Entraînement, officier responsable de l'administration des demandes d'entraînement individuel et collectif. Il continue à vivre entre Montréal et Québec depuis 2002.



*Ferme dans le secteur d'opération de la troupe
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*



*Véhicule Blindé Légers III (VBL-III)
Photo fournie par Guy Bériau*

Mike Bisson's Story

2004 - Operation Palladium at Camp Maple Leaf



*Recce troop preparing to leave on patrol
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*

Authors' note

The principal authors of this text, aside from the individual recounting the story, are John Cochrane, a former member of the unit, and his niece Marina Tinkler, a Concordia University literature student. This record of events was prepared in 2015, many years after they occurred. The authors prepared this record principally using information obtained during interviews with the individuals involved. Where possible, this information was corroborated through interviews with others and a review of pictures and other publicly available information. The record presents the events as the individuals involved remember them several years after they occurred.

Mike Bisson's Story

Lt Mike Bisson was deployed to Bosnia as part of Rotation 14 under Operation Palladium in 2004. This was the last main rotation of Canadian troops in Bosnia, as rotation 15 was a clean-up mission lasting only approximately two months. Mike was assigned as a troop leader in A Squadron, the reconnaissance squadron of the 12^e Régiment blindé du Canada (12 RBC).



*Photo of Mike's recce troop comprised partly of militia soldiers and partly of regular force members of the 12 RBC
Photograph provided by Mike Bisson*

The reconnaissance squadron was comprised of three reconnaissance (recce) troops, a squadron headquarters group and a rear echelon group. Each recce troop had 5 vehicles, organised into 2 patrols of 2 vehicles and the troop commander's vehicle. In each patrol, one vehicle had a surveillance device on a mast and the other vehicle had a device on a ground mount. Mike's troop was formed of 14 militia soldiers and 5 regular force soldiers, the latter including the troop second-in-command (2ic).

Initially the rotation was to involve a full battle group formed around one of the R22eR battalions. Partway through the training, the plans changed and the rotation staffing was significantly reduced. Instead of a battle group, Canada deployed a recce squadron as well as other necessary support elements such as a reinforced engineer troop and a combat support troop. A camp security platoon was concurrently deployed to the Canadian logistical and administrative headquarters at Camp Black Bear in Velika Kladusa.

Several other Hussars were deployed at the same time including Master Corporal Pilon, who was a driver in Mike's troop.

Preparation

Preparatory training for the mission started in mid-May 2003. Training on individual skills was conducted from May to September. This training focused on the Coyote vehicle, operation of its surveillance equipment, and crew commanding skills. During this period, Mike developed hairline fractures on both feet. This resulted in a more serious injury on a 13-km road march when the hairline breaks became full fractures. Although he finished the march, he had to visit the hospital and was put in casts up to his knees for several weeks. Fortunately, the Squadron stood down for several weeks of leave at that time so he was able to recover and return to work for the commencement of the collective training in the fall.

The collective training required the squadron to operate in the field from September to late October. The squadron participated in a series of exercises, starting at the patrol level and then progressing to the troop and squadron level. This also included numerous range practices.

On October 23, the squadron officers were transported from the field to the garrison to attend a dinner at the officers' mess. This turned into a raucous evening during which the mess's grand outdoor fireplace became a casualty of the festivities. The incident, which resulted in substantial property damage, attracted the attention of the base fire department as well as the military police. Subsequently, each of the officers was assessed a portion of the damages.

In early November, the squadron started practicing joint tactics with an Infantry company. In December, the downsizing of Rotation 14 was announced. Around this time the squadron deployed to Fort Drum for a massive exercise with the Battle group. The training served as a rehearsal exercise for the Operation Palladium squadron, while the greater emphasis was placed on the Battle group, whose members were now undergoing their confirmatory exercise for Afghanistan. The squadron practiced working with the infantry in many different situations. They, for instance, visited model villages and learned how to interact with a foreign civilian population. The exercise started out simulating a relatively calm environment, then practised tactics and procedures to be used if the situation deteriorated and culminated in a full-out war. Mike remembers that he felt cold throughout the 18-hour road moves to and from Fort Drum as the heater in his vehicle was not functional. After the exercise, the squadron made it home in time for Christmas.

After their return from a 10-day Christmas leave, the Battle group (BG) conducted a large live fire exercise on the battle run in Valcartier deploying all units including the TOW missiles and even the rear echelon. The battle run is a stretch of land approximately six kilometers long and one kilometer wide

that is used for live fire exercises principally involving armoured vehicles. The battle run has slightly hilly terrain through which the vehicles advance in bounds. One or more vehicles take up firing positions and observe to the front while the other vehicles leapfrog forward along established trails to the next logical firing position. The infantry vehicles follow and deploy as needed. As the vehicles move through the area the range control staff use an electronic system to make different targets appear. The targets were programmed to drop down when they were hit.

Prior to moving to the range, the squadron armed the 25 millimetre chain guns in the turrets of the vehicles with live ammunition. The chain guns were M242 Bushmaster machine guns that could fire 200 rounds per minute. Two types of ammunition were loaded: armoured piercing fin stabilised discarding sabot trace (APFSDST), which was designed for use against armoured targets, and high explosive incendiary trace (HEIT), which was designed for use against soft-skinned targets. Even the smoke grenade dischargers on the front of the armoured vehicles were armed. Finally each of the participants loaded his or her personal machine gun and pistol. The use of live ammunition significantly increased the risks associated with the training but it also helped prepare the troops for Bosnia where they would be operating all the time with live ammunition.

Mike's troop was tasked to lead the BG to the range area. The move started at 2 AM from the base with the vehicles wearing tire chains in view of the slippery road conditions caused by freezing rain. On their way to the range, the lead vehicle missed the turn off to the forming up area and proceeded directly to the start line at the range. Since the BG vehicles all followed, there was a large traffic jam at the range as they all turned around and returned to the forming up area so that they could cross the start line in formation.

Once the units had returned to the forming up point and deployed, they advanced to the start line. As they crossed the start line the TOW missile batteries engaged several targets off in the distance. The reconnaissance squadron led the advance through the battle run. When they encountered smaller targets, they engaged them using their chain guns. When they encountered larger positions, the situation was escalated and the infantry was asked to organise quick attacks on those positions. At the end of the battle run, a larger dug-in target was encountered requiring a full-on infantry attack. This attack commenced with a simulated bombing delivered by air force jets and was quickly followed by an artillery bombardment. Finally, the infantry elements advanced on and swarmed the objective while the armoured vehicles provided fire support at a distance. Mike found this exercise to be a huge confidence builder. Up until that time the troops had only fired the weapons from static positions. They now had the opportunity of working together and seeing the full power that could be used if and when needed. Further, they had handled all the different types of ammunition safely and successfully.

In February there was a confirmatory exercise in the Shawinigan area for the squadron. The squadron was focused on practising tactics like crowd control, house searches, road blocks, etc. The last scenario on this exercise involved a cordon and search operation at a house in Shawinigan owned by someone who had agreed in advance to lend their home to the training effort. Initially, the task of conducting the search was given to Mike as a troop level task. After assessing the situation, he requested assistance as it seemed like a larger endeavour. The task was escalated to a squadron level and the squadron and their 20 or so armoured vehicles moved in to form a security cordon around the immediate

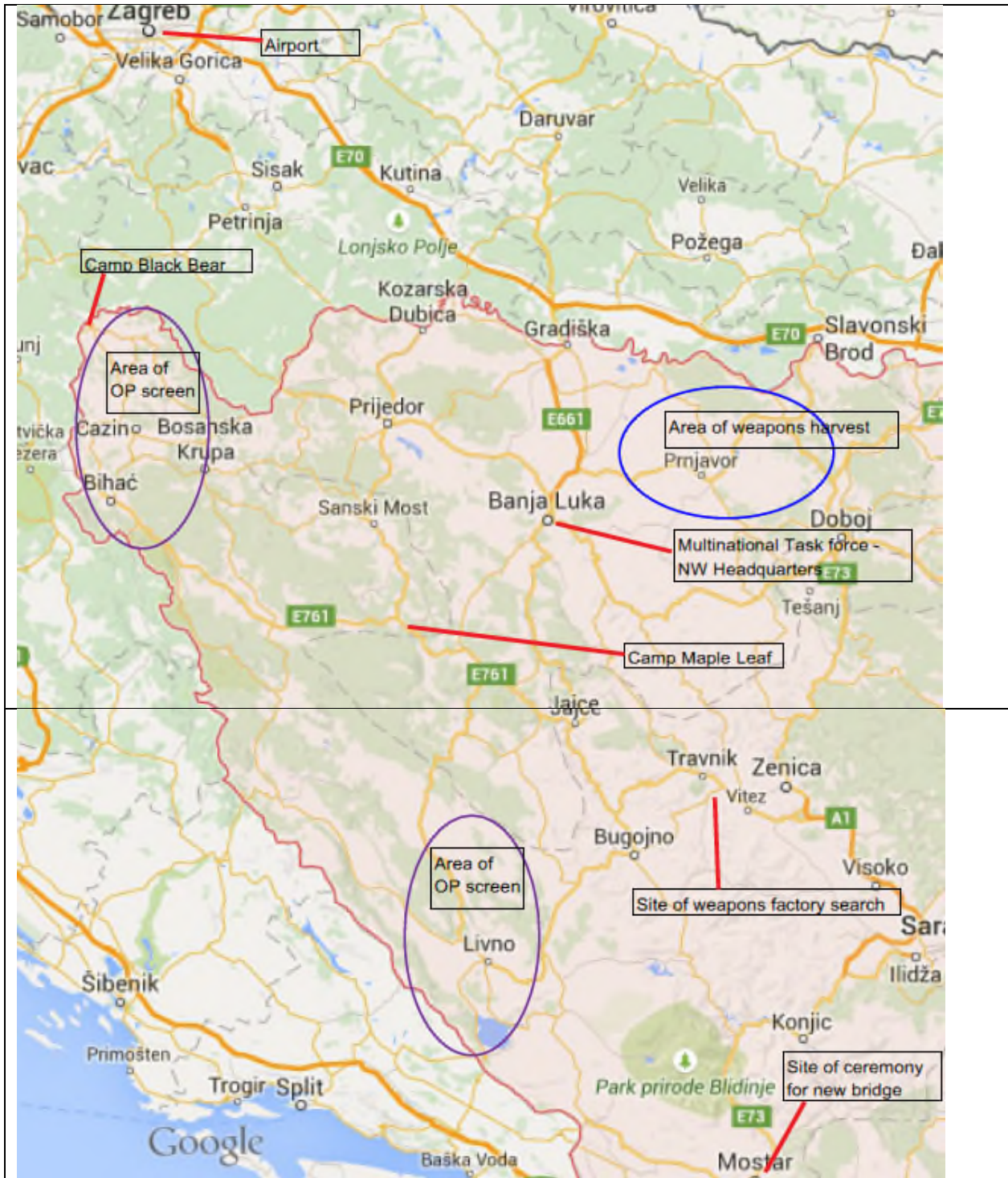
neighborhood while the infantry moved in directly to the house to conduct a simulated search for weapons. Two helicopters circled overhead to observe for any unusual movement. Given that this was a training mission the infantry knocked at the door rather than kicking it in. This was a good thing because the house that was indicated on the satellite photos given to the soldiers was not the house of the individual who had granted the army permission to use his home. This discovery marked the end of the house searching exercise and the army's public relations team was rapidly put in touch with the surprised homeowner.

In spite of the unfortunate mix-up between houses, the final assessment was that the Squadron had passed their confirmatory exercise. After approximately ten months of pre-deployment training, the members of the squadron had successfully acquired the skills required for an overseas theatre of operations. By that time, Mike felt that the reservists in the troop had acquired a level of competence approaching that of their regular force counterparts. Before leaving for Bosnia, the squadron sent its vehicles to Western Canada and was entitled to 10 days of leave.

Arrival in Bosnia

The squadron departed from Canada on the 23rd of March 2004 and arrived at the airport in Zagreb, Croatia on the 24th. From there, the squadron travelled by bus to Camp Black Bear in Velika Kladusa, Bosnia where the Canadian National Command and National Support Elements were located.

At Camp Black Bear, the squadron received their in-theatre safety and intelligence briefings. Bosnia was no longer in open conflict and the principal problems were mainly economic. A significant portion of the country's infrastructure had been destroyed and many of the old paramilitary organisations had evolved into criminal organisations. Some of these criminal organisations had stolen and cached large quantities of weapons, including many machine guns and even some anti-aircraft missiles. In a post 9/11 context, they now were interested in smuggling and selling these weapons to outside interests. The smuggling of women to Europe for prostitution was also on the rise. These criminal organisations continued to cause chaos and conflict between the ethnic groups. They often bribed local authorities and tried to kill those that were not corrupt.



Above: Map with approximate locations of camps and operations

One of the biggest threats arose from old unmarked antipersonnel and antitank mines. Mines caused many civilian injuries and local civilian contractors were being employed to clear them. This dangerous

work was still ongoing. The members of the squadron needed to be very vigilant with respect to this risk. Monthly refresher training sessions were held where graphic films depicting amputations resulting from mine injuries were shown to remind the soldiers of the risk.

Another risk arose from the animosity of some Serbs towards the outside military forces. This was present everywhere but it seemed to bubble up especially after Serb weddings where the attendees would typically drink a lot of Slivovitz (plum or prune Brandy) and then start firing their weapons into the air. Yet another risk was that of road accidents as the terrain was very mountainous and the roads were sometimes difficult to negotiate with a large heavy armoured vehicle.

The newly arrived troops travelled to Camp Maple Leaf, where they conducted their handover with the departing Royal Canadian Dragoons reconnaissance squadron during a period of one week. The previous rotation had already downsized and closed 4 or 5 outlying camps that had been operated by the Canadian contingent. The only Canadian controlled camps left in the area were Camp Black Bear in Velika Kladusa and Camp Maple Leaf near Kljuc. In NATO's North-West sector, the Canadian reconnaissance squadron was the only unit with armoured vehicles. As a result, it was often called upon to complete tasks that needed such vehicles, even in areas under control of other SFOR member countries. After the handover, preparations were made for Operation Harvest, an operation in which the squadron would go into an area, establish a security cordon and conduct a systematic house to house search for weapons. This was to be a squadron level operation in Prinjavor.



*Ground view of Camp Maple Leaf, the squadron's base of operations
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*

*Aerial view of Camp Maple Leaf
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*

Helping to protect the Task Force headquarters

Before departing on Operation Harvest, the Multinational Task Force North West HQ in Banja Luka called for assistance after receiving an intelligence report of an impending attack. The Headquarters was located in a complex that had at one time housed a car parts factory. Mike's troop was assigned to go to the HQ as the quick reaction force. Once on the ground, one vehicle was tasked with guarding the

airfield with British infantry soldiers and the other vehicles were given the task of patrolling the surrounding area to look for prepared rocket or mortar firing locations.

Mike remembers that the surrounding area was not easy to negotiate with heavy armoured vehicles. At one point two of the vehicles got stuck and one of them started sliding down an embankment into a stream. The crews had to work hard but finally they were able to extract the vehicles using tow lines attached to the other vehicles and a winch and line attached to a tree. They did eventually find sites that had been staked out and cleared of overhanging growth for the purposes of firing mortars or rockets at the HQ. These findings were assessed to be the evidence of a credible threat. A further gathering of intelligence prompted British troops to apprehend the would-be-perpetrators and seize a van full of rockets.



First operation to harvest weapons

The squadron then deployed on the planned two-week-long operation in Prnjavor, which was principally a Croat rural area. There, they conducted squadron-level cordon and search operations looking for weapons in cooperation with the local police. During this operation all of the members of the squadron were ordered to wear their flak jackets as there was a risk of personal injury from old munitions. The squadron would move in and form a loose cordon around a group of farm buildings. Some of the squadron would then dismount and conduct the search with the police.



*Engineer vehicle and their trailer used to carry explosives collected from homes
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*



*Engineer carrying grenades to trailer
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*

This operation yielded little at first. It was suspected that the local police had informed the population of the impending search and provided them with enough time to remove weapons from their homes. At one location, a local civilian helpfully directed members of the squadron to a cache of SA-7 Soviet surface-to-air missiles stored in a barn. The troops assessed the situation and came to the conclusion that the local had offered up an easy find in the hopes of putting a stop to the weapons search. This tactic was not successful and the search continued. During this and the subsequent operations, hundreds of weapons were found including many AK47 rifles, Dragunov Warsaw Pact sniper rifles, pistols of all kinds, and even several interesting homemade or embellished weapons. One such weapon was an old rifle whose wooden stock was beautifully-decorated with an inlaid crucifix and Cyrillic writing. Also, numerous explosives and grenades were found. At one location a widow surrendered 2 old cases of TNT that were stored in her house. The sergeant conducting the search helpfully moved them out of her house to the side of the road, a move that greatly upset the engineers who stated that TNT becomes unstable over time and could have easily detonated from any small spark.



Examples of weapons collected – Photos provided by Robin Thibault

At another run-down farm house, a widow invited the troops into her home but became fearful and started to cry when she learned that their purpose was to search for weapons. She then opened a compartment in an old couch revealing a fully loaded AK47 wrapped up in an oilskin. She revealed through the interpreter that she was crying because she was afraid of retribution. The weapon had been hidden there several years prior by a passing fighter who had threatened to kill her if he came back and found that it was no longer there.



*Engineer preparing to destroy munitions found during searches
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*



*Engineers preparing to destroy weapons and ammunition collected during the operations
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*

The squadron had been trained to expect that after they accomplished their operation, they would return to sleep at an established camp. In the downsized theatre of operations, this type of infrastructure was no longer in place for Roto 14. Instead, during the Harvest Operation in Prinjavor the squadron set up its command post in the yard of an abandoned house. The space only provided sleeping accommodations for the squadron HQ and one of the other troops. The squadron established a rotation system whereby one troop stayed at HQ, where the cooks were, and the other two slept at improvised locations in the surrounding area. One night, Mike's troop set up camp for the night at an abandoned campground. He remembers that it rained that night and the water pouring out of a broken gutter on one of the buildings provided a perfect shower for the troops.

On one occasion during the operation, Mike's troop was sent to help the Engineer troop recover one of their vehicles that had rolled down a steep embankment towards a river. As the vehicle was passing an oncoming logging truck, the shoulder of the road under the heavy armoured vehicle collapsed. Several members of the crew were injured and the Interpreter suffered a broken leg. At first the Canadian government took the position that the interpreter's injury was a problem to be handled by her locally. After an outcry by the soldiers, who were cognizant of the fact that this dedicated woman had worked with and helped the Canadian forces for a number of years, the government eventually agreed to pay her medical expenses. The soldiers in the squadron also gave her money out of their own pockets to help her through her recovery period.

Operation to monitor the northern border

After Operation Harvest, the squadron redeployed back to camp for 2 weeks. There they underwent range training, and performed administration and maintenance work.

They started leave rotation (referred to as Home Leave Travel Allowance or HLTA), during which each soldier was also entitled to a two-week home leave and two 96-hour leaves. Once this started, the troop was always short one vehicle so the troop leader often substituted as a patrol leader.

The next operation was in the area of Velika Kladusa where the squadron deployed a fixed OP screen to monitor the Croat border. An OP screen is a line of observation posts reporting into a single information collection point, which is the squadron command post. During the operation, Mike's troop deployed two vehicles and four soldiers in a single OP at a forward position and kept off-duty staff and remaining vehicles in a rear position. As troop leader, he used his vehicle as a resupply vehicle and shuttle between the two locations. The OP was behind an old dilapidated hut overlooking the Croat border. The mast for the observation system on one of the vehicles was extended up over the hut.

The observation systems in the vehicles were equipped with radar and night vision devices. The operator working at the console inside the vehicle could adjust the sensitivity of the radar and direct the infrared camera. It was possible to have the system sound an alarm if any movement was detected. In the other vehicle, the patrol also had a ground-mounted observation system. The ground mounts had 100 meters of fibre-optic cable allowing the device to be set up on one side of the woods and the vehicles to remain on the other.

During the operation, the patrols also established random road blocks for vehicle searches. The squadron did observe some illicit activity in the dark and reported it to the police who were sent to investigate. From the information received later by Mike, the smugglers had small quantities of weapons, alcohol, cigarettes and cheese.

Operation at Livno in the south

At one point, Mike's troop was sent to carry out an operation in Livno in the south of the Northwest Task Force's sector of responsibility. This was a six-hour drive to the south, so the troop was augmented with a mini echelon comprised of a fuel truck and a water and rations truck. Near Livno, they met up with the Dutch Civil-Military Co-operation team (CIMIC), who introduced them to the local police and informed them that a Romanian Infantry platoon was also about to be deployed to the area. Mike got orders to clear and secure an intersection close by and shortly afterwards several helicopters landed and delivered the Romanians.



*Base for OP set up in a sandpit – armoured vehicles are on the right and police vehicles are on the left side of the sand pit. The border with Croatia is in the rear behind the sand pit.
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*



*Helicopter landing to deliver Romanian Troops
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*

The troop's task was to help the police monitor the border with Croatia. To do this, the troop set up an OP in a sand pit, deployed observation equipment and pointed the camera and radar out over the piles of sand. When activity was observed, a Police Lada would be dispatched to investigate. The country was very mountainous with high winding roads. The OP had a good view over the countryside but there was not much activity in the area.



*Setting up dismantled version of observation equipment
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*



*Silhouetted view of observation equipment
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*

Mike remembers being informed, during one of the coordination meetings, that the Romanian infantry unit that was monitoring an adjacent section of the border had intercepted a fuel tanker truck that

was attempting to smuggle women across the border. The human cargo was rescued from the fuel tank where they had been severely injured from chemical burns and from inhaling the fumes.

Operation to search a weapons factory in Novi Travnik

After a period in Livno, the troop deployed back to Camp Maple Leaf. They then continued a repetitive patrolling pattern. The troops were sent out for two-week periods to remote areas to either search for illegal weapons or set up observation posts. During this time, Mike heard that one of the other troops had discovered a mass grave.

One of the areas where Mike's troop was sent was Novi Travnik, in the Dutch area of responsibility. In this area, which was principally populated by Muslims, he noted the presence of some very large mosques. He was told that the Bosnian Muslims are not as fervent as those in some other countries but that they are happy to accept money from rich donors, such as the Emir of Qatar to build large mosques especially since the construction projects generated much-needed local employment.

Mike was also impressed by the forests and the farms and the scenic terrain in this area. However, he was constantly reminded of the destruction brought on by the war when he saw people living in bombed out buildings. Canadian helicopters were deployed with the squadron for this operation, so a temporary landing pad was established beside their camp. One night, a local teenager slipped through the razor wire fence set up around the landing pad and damaged the helicopter by pulling as many wires as possible out of its control panel. The repairs to put it back in working order took over a week.

During this operation the squadron conducted numerous road blocks and cordon and search operations.



*Performing car searches – note sheep in the rear of vehicle
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*



*Armoured vehicle used to restrict passage at a road checkpoint
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*



*Mike and his interpreter and a representative of the Dutch military planning the search with the manager of the weapons factory
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*



*MCpl Pilon performing the search of the weapons factory
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*

They were also tasked with checking on the security at an old weapons factory. It was apparently still authorized to produce weapons for export but it was not allowed to stock any significant quantities of ammunition. Mike's troop was assigned to the search along with Italian Carabinieri (paramilitary police) with a team of explosive-sniffing dogs. Inside the factory administration area, they found evidence that the staff had left on very bad terms. The furniture was overturned and documents thrown around the rooms.



*Search team in a room full of mortars all prepared for shipment
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*



*Trooper perusing documents found during the search
Photo Provided by Mike Bisson*

Some of the soldiers looked more closely at the documents on the floor and discovered that the Iraq government under Saddam Hussein had been a customer of the plant. In the plant and the warehouse, they found rows of weapons waiting to be shipped. It appeared that all activity stopped very suddenly

when the war broke out. A thorough search of the factory resulted in the seizure of ammunition and an anti-aircraft weapon.



*Police and their dog at the search of the weapons factory
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*



*Troop seizing an anti-aircraft weapon that had not been authorized to be at the Factory
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*

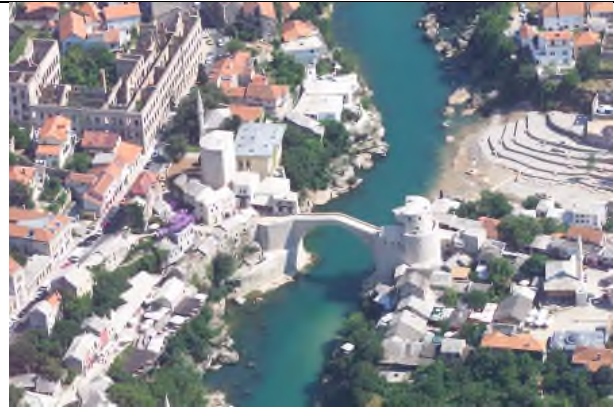
After returning to Camp Maple Leaf, Mike was able to leave for his first 96-hour leave period. With another one of the squadron officers, he went to Munich and spent most of his leave in a Bavarian Hofbräuhaus (Beer hall).

Opening of the new bridge at Mostar

Upon his return, the squadron was deployed to the Spanish-French-German section in the south to provide security for the official opening ceremony of the Mostar Bridge¹. It was a long drive taking over twelve hours. Mostar was a town in a valley between two mountain ridges. The river that passes down the valley had been the dividing line between the Bosniak forces on one side and the Croat forces on the other. In the town of Mostar, the river passed through a deep gorge and the bridge was quite high up.



*Picture of Mostar Bridge with visitors inspecting bridge
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*



*Arial view of Mostar bridge showing area on right
where the opening ceremony was held
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*

The ancient stone bridge that had spanned the river was destroyed during the armed conflict. When NATO initiated a project to rebuild the bridge, the construction team recuperated some of the old stones and integrated them into the new structure. Since the project was so symbolic a grand opening ceremony was planned for its completion. Pavarotti was invited to sing with the Sarajevo Orchestra and Prince Charles was invited as a guest of honour. The squadron was sent into the surrounding mountains to set up OP's to watch for and to react to potential suspicious activity in the area. The Multinational Force Headquarters was concerned that certain groups might try to disrupt the ceremonies. Other units from SFOR were tasked with providing security for the ceremony area as well as the Mostar airport and the near-by NATO base.

Before the ceremony, Mike deployed with a couple of drivers to conduct a reconnaissance and determine the location of the troop's observation posts. After performing an aerial reconnaissance in a helicopter, they set out in a jeep to further assess the potential locations. Prior to leaving in his jeep, Mike had requested a mine field overlay and was told that none was available. He was also told that in this sector, the NATO troops did not patrol as much as they did in other areas because many of the mine fields were unconfirmed. As Mike and his driver approached one of the proposed locations, they reached a point where the jeep could go no further, so Mike continued on foot. During his walk, he noticed blown-up concrete bunkers and wires going in and out of the ground. He carefully retraced his steps and returned to HQ. At that point, the engineers arrived with an overlay of the region, which indicated the locations of the mines in the sector. A review of this overlay revealed that Mike had been walking in an anti-tank minefield. Fortunately, none of the mines blew up, possibly because they had been deactivated or because they were set to explode only if run over by something heavy.



Mike’s troop ultimately established their OP’s high in the mountains on the sun-scorched rocks and shale. Being June there was no wind and it was very hot. To protect themselves from the sun and provide a measure of cover in the open area, they set up camouflage nets over the vehicles and personnel. While they were operating the observation posts, no suspicious activity was detected and the opening ceremonies proceeded without incident.



Once the Mostar mission had been completed, the squadron returned to Camp Maple Leaf in late June. At that time, Mike was able to take his HLTA. This time, he chose to visit Australia with one of the members of his troop. The vacation departure routine was to go to the Canadian headquarters at Camp Black Bear, and change into civilian clothes, take a minibus to the airport in Zagreb and board a flight to Frankfurt and beyond.

Last squadron exercise

In mid-July, the squadron moved to Kotor Varoš, an area in the northern part of the sector dominated by Serbs. For this operation, the squadron was based at an abandoned lumber mill where they set up their tents in a big building. During a three-week period, the squadron set up OP's and road blocks and performed cordon and search operations.

It was on this mission that the Multinational Force HQ delivered some Jeep Grand Cherokees to the squadron to be used rather than the military vehicles. This marked a change in the approach of interacting with the local population. The troops were encouraged to blend in with the population and use a softer approach. When they drove to remote villages to talk to people, their stance was less intimidating. They still had the right to search a house, but they would now ask people if they had weapons in their home and request their permission to see them. They, and their interpreters, were encouraged to mingle with the local population, especially in cafés, to gather intelligence by asking about criminal activity in the sector. When doing this, Mike met some young adults who had learned their English by watching TV. He also met a Serbian doctor and his spouse who had previously lived in Canada and worked at Casino Rama in Ontario. The couple had returned to Bosnia so that the doctor could practice his profession, something he was not allowed to do in Canada.

Winding down

After the squadron operation, Mike's troop was tasked to return to Livno and provide support for the police by setting up OP's and reporting possible smuggling activities. It was a long drive, so the troop left Camp Maple Leaf every morning between 4 and 5 am and returned late in the evening. Throughout this operation, Mike noted that the OP's would get packed away much faster if he told everyone that he was trying to get them home in time for last call at the mess. Each soldier was allowed 2 beers per night, if they were not on quick reaction force.

Near the end of their rotation, the squadron received a number of journalists and academics writing about Canada's last involvement in Bosnia. Mike remembers taking one journalist from a small town in Quebec to a village that had been the object of an ethnic cleansing operation by the Serbs. They visited the village, the killing ground that was by a bridge and the Muslim cemetery that had been set up subsequent to the war. The graveyard held wooden markers, painted green with white crescent moons, lined up in rows and pointed towards Mecca. The reporter had a visceral reaction, particularly because the interpreter describing the horrifying event was originally from that area.

During this time, Mike was also asked to come to the North-west Multinational Task Force headquarters to play the bagpipes at a change of command parade. He was one of three pipers who performed on the ramparts of a medieval castle at dusk. They piped during the inspection and the subsequent signing

ceremony. He felt that the presence of the pipes made the ceremony much more impressive. After the ceremony, he had to depart and return to his troop. It was a three-hour drive in an uncomfortable panel van. He remembers feeling envious of the other pipers who had proceeded to the headquarters' mess after the ceremony.

At the end of the rotation, the squadron prepared the vehicles for shipment back to Canada. The vehicles were stripped of their equipment and washed in preparation for an inspection by the Canadian food inspection agency. The vehicles were apparently then shipped to Camp Black Bear, inspected and cleaned again and then shipped to the port city of Split in Croatia to be shipped back to Canada.

The squadron also started collecting ammunition in preparation for departure. This step produced a surprising amount of ammunition, far above what each person's or vehicle's allotment was. This might have been explained by successive rotations hoarding ammunition to make sure that they would always be able to turn in the quantity officially allocated to them.

In the meantime they used the rented SUVs to conduct missions. At one point the local police requested assistance because they said they had information that there was a weapons cache at a UN refugee camp occupied principally by Romani people, also known as gypsies. This request was honored and the squadron accompanied the police but very few weapons were found. Mike had suspicions that the local police were taking advantage of the presence of the NATO forces to legitimise their harassment of the Romani people.

Mike took the opportunity to use up his second and last 96-hour leave period and went to London to stay at the military-run Union Jack Club hotel where he had a jolly good time.

In the last week of September, all of the reservists in the squadron were demobilised and transported home. They flew on a military airbus from Zagreb with a stop-over in the UK (RAF Brize Norton) and eventually to Quebec City. There was a small welcome party, including a driver and minibus from the Hussars. The flight arrived 6 hours late but Mike's family was still waiting and happy to see him.

Life thereafter

At the time of the interview, Mike was a member of Regiment of Hull where he held the rank of major and served as the officer commanding the Headquarters squadron. He had served with the Royal Canadian Hussars for 12 years until his civilian employer posted him to Ottawa in 2011. He was employed at Public Safety Canada and was happily married and the father of a newborn child.

Footnotes

1. According to a November 9th, 1993 article in the U.K's Independent, the STARI MOST, Mostar's spectacular 16th-century stone bridge and one of Bosnia-Herzegovina's greatest architectural treasures, collapsed in a barrage of Croatian shells. The collapse was a tremendous blow for the 25,000 Bosniaks trapped on the city's east side and a strategic victory for the Croats. The bridge was the only access to a source of drinking water which people retrieved by scurrying across at night under threat of sniper fire. Built in 1566, supposedly with mortar made from egg whites, the 66 foot Stari Most was the last and most treasured of seven across the Neretva river gorge.

Some Croatian sources said the Stari Most was destroyed in response to a string of defeats the Bosniak army had inflicted on the HVO (Croat forces) in central Bosnia.

L'histoire de Pierre-Jean Pilon

2004 - Opération Palladium à camp Maple Leaf



*Village en proximité de camp Maple Leaf
Photo fournie par Mike Bisson*

Commentaires des Auteurs

Les auteurs principaux de ce texte, autre que l'individu qui a raconté ses expériences, étaient John Cochrane, ancien membre de l'unité, et Marina Tinkler, sa nièce et étudiante à l'université Concordia. Cette version historique des événements a été préparée en 2015, plusieurs années après leur déroulement. Les auteurs ont préparé le texte en utilisant principalement les informations qui leur ont été fournies lors des entrevues avec les personnes concernées. Lorsqu'il était possible, cette information a été validée via des entrevues avec d'autres participants, et par un examen des photos, textes, et vidéos qui étaient disponibles. Les présentes textes sont des récapitulatifs, comme les individus concernés rappellent les événements quelques années après leur déroulement.

L'histoire de Pierre-Jean Pilon

Pierre-Jean a été déployé en Bosnie entre le 26 mars et le 20 septembre 2004. Il a agi en tant que chauffeur de Coyote au sein de l'escadron de reconnaissance du *12^e Régiment blindé du Canada* (12 RBC). Le Coyote était un véhicule blindé léger (VBL) conçu dans les années 1990 spécifiquement pour les opérations de reconnaissance.

Au printemps de 2003, Pierre-Jean a répondu à un appel émis par le Régiment cherchant des volontaires pour participer à un déploiement en Bosnie. À cette époque, il complétait son DEC à l'École nationale d'aérotechnique à St-Hubert. Puisque le marché du travail n'était pas très favorable suite aux attaques du 11 septembre et puisqu'il recherchait l'aventure, il a soumis sa candidature. Parce qu'il fallait absolument être à Valcartier le 15 mai 2003, il a donc demandé et obtenu la permission de compléter ses examens de fin de cours quelques semaines à l'avance.

La préparation

À Valcartier, l'escadron de reconnaissance dispensait des cours de formation dans le but de s'assurer que chaque soldat pouvait faire au moins deux types de travail. Puisque Pierre-Jean s'était auparavant qualifié en tant que chauffeur du Coyote, il s'est inscrit au cours d'opérateur du système de surveillance du Coyote. Le système de surveillance comprenait une caméra avec un zoom de plusieurs kilomètres et une fonction de vision nocturne combinée, puis un appareil de radar qui pouvait être installé sur un mât extensible. L'opérateur s'assoit devant un écran dans le compartiment arrière du véhicule. Il pouvait également pointer une cible et utiliser un laser pour mesurer la distance entre la cible et le poste d'observation. Ainsi, il pouvait calculer la position exacte de la cible. S'il faisait appel à l'artillerie, ce système lui permettait de déterminer les corrections à faire si le feu n'était pas sur la cible.

En parallèle, d'autres membres de l'escadron suivaient des cours de chauffeur et de tireur. Après avoir suivi les cours sur les connaissances individuelles, tous les membres de l'escadron ont eu droit à quelques semaines de vacances d'été.

À l'automne, l'escadron a organisé plusieurs exercices de campagne. Au début, ils s'entraînaient principalement dans des espaces ouverts du côté nord de la base militaire. Ils portaient pour des périodes de deux ou trois jours et revenaient ensuite à la garnison. Durant ces exercices, l'escadron de reconnaissance effectuait des patrouilles, des postes d'observation, des points de contrôle de véhicule et des escortes de convoi.

En octobre, l'escadron s'est déplacé vers Portneuf pour pratiquer les opérations en milieu urbain. Pierre-Jean se souvient d'un incident survenu durant un déplacement sur des chemins en terre battue alors que son véhicule était à l'avant du groupement tactique. Un autre véhicule s'est approché trop près du bord de la route et a glissé dans le fossé. Quand l'équipe de Pierre-Jean a essayé de les y déloger, son véhicule est aussi tombé dans le fossé. Puisque les deux véhicules bloquaient la route, personne n'a pu passer pendant une heure ou deux. Pierre-Jean s'est rendu compte plus tard que cet évènement fâcheux a quand même aidé à le préparer pour le déploiement puisque, en Bosnie, les

membres de la troupe se sont souvent retrouvés dans des situations similaires où les bords de route se sont affaissés sous le poids des véhicules blindés.

En novembre, l'escadron s'est déplacé à Fort Drum, au nord de l'état de New York. Là, ils ont pratiqué les mêmes types d'opérations. Pour s'y rendre, il fallait se déplacer en rame de convoi pendant plusieurs heures. Un samedi matin, le convoi a pris l'autoroute 40 de Québec à Montréal, a traversé Montréal via la Métropolitaine, et a continué sur la route 417 jusqu'au pont des Mille-Îles allant vers les États-Unis. À Montréal, le chef d'équipage a surveillé de près le côté du véhicule puisque le champ de vision du chauffeur était limité et les chauffeurs montréalais n'hésitaient aucunement à approcher et à dépasser sur le côté droit du véhicule. Au poste frontalier, l'agent s'est approché du véhicule, et Pierre-Jean devait répondre aux questions pour tout l'équipage. Sur la route, vers le sud, plusieurs Américains ont signalé leurs supports aux soldats, pensant probablement que ces soldats étaient des US Marines, car ces derniers utilisaient sensiblement le même type de véhicules. Tout le long du trajet, il faisait froid alors un petit pare-brise avait été installé devant la tête du chauffeur qui était sortie du véhicule. De plus, Pierre-Jean avait ouvert un panneau entre le compartiment du chauffeur et le moteur pour laisser circuler un peu de chaleur.

En janvier 2004, la troupe a participé à un exercice de tir réel sur la base de Valcartier. L'escadron devait avancer sur un trajet prédéfini pour pratiquer tir et mouvement. À certaines places, les cibles contrôlées par un système mis en place par Lockheed-Martin apparaissaient, et les tireurs des véhicules devaient les engager avec le canon 25 millimètres. Pendant ce temps, Pierre-Jean devait suivre les instructions du chef d'équipage et faire avancer le véhicule. Les panneaux d'évacuation du véhicule étaient fermés alors il fallait utiliser les épiscopos pour voir la route. À quelques reprises durant l'avance, les douilles éjectées par le canon se sont accumulées devant les épiscopos et ont bloqué sa vision. Lorsque cela arrivait, Pierre-Jean devait avertir les autres membres de l'équipage et arrêter rapidement afin de disperser les douilles et libérer son champ de vision.

En février 2004, l'escadron s'est déplacé dans la région de Shawinigan pour entreprendre son exercice de confirmation. Là, ils ont établi leur camp de base dans le manège militaire du 62^e Régiment d'artillerie.



Le déploiement vers la Bosnie

Vers la fin du mois de mars 2004, l'escadron est parti en avion militaire vers l'aéroport à Zagreb en Croatie. De là, ils ont été transportés en autobus au camp *Black Bear*, à Velika Kladusa, où était situé le dépôt logistique et administratif des Forces canadiennes (FC) en Bosnie. À cet endroit, il fallait compléter les arrangements administratifs associés à la mission. Le centre administratif activait la paie de danger, organisait les vacances et gardait en sécurité les passeports verts de tous les soldats.

Après avoir passé la nuit à cet endroit, les membres de l'escadron se sont dirigés au camp *Maple Leaf*, à Zgon, le centre des opérations pour l'escadron de reconnaissance. Ce camp couvrait une surface d'environ 400 mètres par 200 cent mètres. Il était entouré par deux rangées de fils barbelés et l'entrée principale était fortifiée et sécurisée par un peloton de fantassins. Le camp *Maple Leaf* était au milieu de collines et de forêts, et était bordé d'un côté par une rivière. À l'intérieur du camp étaient situés plusieurs bâtiments servant à des fins d'administration et de support logistique. Les FC avaient aussi construit des

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dortoirs pour les troupes. Les ingénieurs avaient embelli et aligné de nombreux conteneurs de transport (deux de haut) sur lesquelles ils avaient ajouté des portes et des balcons donnant accès aux chambres. Les soldats dormaient généralement deux par conteneur. Les toilettes et les douches étaient situées au fond des rangées.

	
Aire de stationnement des véhicules à camp Maple Leaf Photo fournie par Mike Bisson	Secteur résidentiel à camp Maple Leaf Photo fournie par Mike Bisson

Aussi, sur le camp, il y avait une cafeteria gérée par des Canadiens; on y employait des civils bosniaques. On y retrouvait aussi un petit Canex, c'est-à-dire un dépanneur géré par les FC. De plus, il y avait deux messes: un mess combiné pour les officiers, les adjudants et sergents et un autre mess pour les grades subalternes. Aux mess, les soldats avaient droit à deux boissons alcoolisées par jour. Lors de chaque service, la serveuse poinçonnait un trou dans une carte de contrôle qui avait été remise à chaque soldat. Évidemment certains soldats ont trouvé des façons imaginatives pour contourner ses mesures de contrôle, ce qui a eu comme résultat certains problèmes de comportement. De plus, certains soldats donnaient des pourboires importants aux serveuses afin que ces dernières poinçonnent les mêmes trous sur les cartes plusieurs fois. On achetait aussi les cartes appartenant à d'autres militaires et on trouvait même des moyens pour aller en ville acheter des boissons alcoolisées même si cela n'était pas permis. Le prix des boissons alcoolisées en ville n'était vraiment pas élevé. Finalement, lors de ses temps libres, les soldats avaient accès à un gymnase, à une salle d'information et au cinéma. Ils pouvaient aussi louer des bicyclettes et faire des balades dans un village situé à proximité. Généralement, l'escadron travaillait de façon intense six jours par semaine. Les dimanches étaient plus détendus, et les cuisines servaient le petit déjeuner jusqu'à 11 heures le matin. En après-midi, les chauffeurs pouvaient effectuer la maintenance et amener leurs véhicules aux mécaniciens pour régler les problèmes mineurs.

L'escadron de reconnaissance était l'unité la plus importante au camp *Maple Leaf*. Aussi, résidaient à ce site une troupe d'ingénieurs, un peloton de fantassins et tous les éléments de support: il y avait donc environ 300 militaires canadiens.

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Les troupes en ont effectué plusieurs opérations d'une durée d'environ deux semaines chacune à l'extérieure du camp. Puisque la guerre était terminée depuis plusieurs années, les FC effectuaient des opérations de maintien de la paix et de support envers les autorités locales.



*Passage de la troupe dans un village lors d'un déplacement
Photo fournie par Mike Bisson*



*Pause-café sur la route
Photo fournie par Mike Bisson*

Première opération de récolte d'armes dans la région de Prnjavor

La première opération pour l'escadron en était une de deux semaines dans la région de Prnjavor située au nord du camp *Maple Leaf*. Cette opération visait la collecte d'armes dans les maisons des civils. Pierre-Jean se rappelle qu'il a plu pendant toute cette période et qu'il fallait porter son imperméable. Le chauffeur restait généralement avec son véhicule lorsque les autres membres d'équipage et l'interprète se présentaient aux maisons pour effectuer les fouilles. Parfois, on inversait les rôles pour éviter l'ennui. Souvent, les propriétaires des maisons accueillaient les soldats avec une bouteille de Slivovitz¹ et invitaient les soldats à boire avec eux. Comme ils voulaient promouvoir des bonnes relations avec la population locale, les équipages avaient chacun «un buveur désigné». Souvent, ce buveur désigné était le tireur qui avait moins à faire puisqu'aucun tir n'était requis sur aucun ennemi. La plupart de ces fouilles ont été effectuées par les soldats eux-mêmes parce que les paysans du coin démontraient beaucoup d'animosité envers les policiers locaux et que ces derniers réagissaient avec beaucoup d'agressivité. Généralement, les Canadiens ont été tolérés et souvent les occupants des maisons faisant l'objet des fouilles produisaient eux-mêmes des armes et des sacs de mines, des grenades et d'autres explosifs qu'ils avaient entreposés dans leurs maisons pendant plusieurs années.

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*Opération de récolte d'armes
Photos fournies par Mike Bisson*



*Opération de récolte d'armes – Soldat avec interprète
et police locale
Photos fournies par Mike Bisson*

Au début de l'opération, les troupes étaient stressées lorsqu'elles trouvaient des armes ou des explosifs. Elles appelaient tout de suite l'équipe d'ingénieurs pour venir recueillir sur place les explosifs avec leur roulotte dotée de protection. Au fur et à mesure que l'opération progressait, les troupes transportaient de manière plus détendue les explosifs aux ingénieurs ou aux points de collectes intermédiaires.

À quelques reprises, les résidents ont remis des armes AK-47 avec des chargeurs pleins de balles. Pierre-Jean se souvient des instructions qu'il avait reçues de faire attention à ces chargeurs qui semblaient être pleins puisqu'ils pouvaient être des «chargeurs de vengeance». Dans la guerre qui a précédé l'intervention des forces de l'OTAN, les combattants avaient l'habitude de toujours garder un chargeur de vengeance sur leur corps. Leur logique était que l'ennemi qui les tuerait allait fouiller leur corps et voler leur arme et leurs munitions. Les deux côtés utilisaient sensiblement les mêmes armes. Alors le chargeur de vengeance était conçu pour exploser dès que l'ennemi tirait deux ou trois balles: l'ennemi perdrait la vie.

Durant cette période, les troupes effectuaient leurs tâches de nuit sur une base de rotation: une troupe restait au poste de commandement et était désignée comme force de réaction rapide; une autre avait pour tâche d'établir un poste d'observation et de surveiller la frontière avec la Croatie; une troisième était en réserve et trouvait un lieu dans les environs pour se coucher. Pierre-Jean se souvient que le volume d'activités détectées par les postes d'observation était très faible. C'était un environnement rural, montagneux et très peu éclairé. Depuis le poste d'observation, il pouvait voir les résidents éteindre leurs lumières avant de se coucher.

Un soir, alors qu'elle était en devoir, la troupe a dû se déplacer vers le lieu d'un accident de la route dont l'accotement s'était effondré sous l'énorme poids d'un véhicule d'ingénieurs. Plusieurs personnes ont été blessées quand le véhicule a glissé dans un ravin. La troupe avait la tâche de sécuriser la route en attendant la remorqueuse.

Routine de camp et véhicules

Entre les différentes opérations, les troupes retournaient au camp *Maple Leaf* pour des périodes de maintenance, d'administration et de repos.

Peu après son arrivée à camp *Maple Leaf*, Pierre-Jean a vécu quelques difficultés avec son véhicule. Au début, il a noté que le véhicule manquait d'huile et d'autres liquides. Il avait l'impression que le chauffeur de la rotation précédente n'avait pas effectué sa maintenance lors des dernières semaines. Pierre-Jean a passé une journée complète à régler la situation. Par la suite, lors de la première mission à l'extérieur du camp, un incendie s'est déclaré dans le compartiment moteur, en pleine route vers 22 heures. Une immense flamme est sortie du compartiment moteur, ce qui a eu pour effet de déclencher le système d'extinction de feu dans le compartiment. Bien que le feu ait été rapidement éteint, il fallait faire appel à une remorqueuse afin de retourner le véhicule au camp et de le faire inspecter par les mécaniciens. Le mécanicien lui a annoncé qu'un des conduits d'essence s'était rompu et avait laissé couler l'essence dans le compartiment du moteur. Après quelques heures de réparations et le rechargement de l'extincteur, le véhicule pouvait rejoindre la troupe.

Suite à ces réparations, le véhicule a bien fonctionné pendant tout le déploiement. Pierre-Jean était d'avis que le véhicule a malgré tout bien fonctionné en Bosnie. Comme c'était un véhicule à roues, il était facile à conduire sur les routes carrossables.

Opération de surveillance de la frontière dans la région de Velika Kladusa

La deuxième tâche importante pour la troupe était d'établir un poste d'observation sur la frontière entre la Bosnie et la Croatie, dans la région de Velika Kladusa, où était situé le camp *Black Bear*, le dépôt administratif et logistique des FC. Les membres de la troupe en devoir passaient des quarts de 12 heures dans ce poste d'observation permanent alors que le reste de la troupe restait dans les quartiers au camp *Black Bear*. Le but de l'opération était de détecter, le cas échéant, les activités de trafic d'armes ou d'humains. Dans cette zone, il n'y avait pas de poste frontalier permanent. Le poste d'observation a été établi avec des véhicules Coyote côte à côte. Il a été installé derrière un boisé, sur une dalle de béton, à côté d'une maison abandonnée. L'équipement de surveillance a été déployé et les membres ont commencé à surveiller le moniteur. Lorsque les opérateurs ont détecté des mouvements sur les routes qui traversaient la frontière, ils ont informé le représentant des agents douaniers affecté au poste d'observation. Ce dernier a communiqué avec d'autres agents qui devaient intervenir là où les personnes traversaient la frontière. Pierre-Jean avait l'impression que les contrebandiers avaient passé le mot que les troupes surveillaient le secteur puisqu'ils étaient très peu actifs.



*Véhicule lors de l'arrivée dans un village - Op GUI SARME 01 au 12 Juillet 04
Photo fournie par Mike Bisson*



*Plusieurs enfants curieux approchent une patrouille
lors d'une pause - Op GUI SARME 01 au 12 Juillet 04
Photo fournie par Mike Bisson*

Compétition de conditionnement physique et connaissances de base – le Northwest Cup

À un moment donné, Pierre-Jean s'est joint à une équipe qui se préparait à participer à une compétition de connaissance de base et de conditionnement physique entre les soldats venant de différents pays de l'OTAN et postés dans le secteur nord-ouest, notamment le Royaume-Uni et les Pays-Bas. L'équipe de 35 personnes s'est préparée pendant une période intense de deux semaines puis elles sont parties pour la compétition qui a eu lieu à un camp militaire serbe. La compétition, qui se déroulait sur une période de trois jours, comprenait une compétition de tir et une marche forcée de deux jours sur 50 kilomètres. Sur le trajet, les participants devaient arrêter à dix postes pour compléter des tests de connaissances sur les armes, sur l'identification de véhicules blindés, etc. Malgré le fait que les participants canadiens venaient principalement du corps blindé et que les soldats des autres pays étaient principalement des fantassins, l'équipe a réussi à se classer au deuxième rang derrière un peloton de parachutistes provenant des Pays-Bas.

Pierre-Jean se rappelle avoir vu des soldats de la Bosnie lors de sa visite au camp serbe. À cette époque, ils étaient organisés en deux groupes: un qui était mené par un Serbe et qui portait un type d'uniforme et l'autre qui était dirigé par un Bosniaque et qui portait un uniforme différent.

Mission au sud, dans les environs de Novi Travnik

La troupe a eu comme mission de faire une patrouille vers le sud pour aider les soldats hollandais et britanniques à effectuer une fouille dans une ancienne usine de tracteur qui fabriquait des armes. La fouille était organisée à l'avance et, cette journée, aucun travailleur n'était présent, seulement certains cadres. Pierre-Jean a participé à l'opération et a vu plusieurs grandes salles pleines de mortiers.

Aussi dans cette région, la troupe a effectué plusieurs points de contrôles de véhicules et des opérations de fouille dans le but de ramasser des armes. C'était un secteur bosniaque et les membres de cette

communauté étaient relativement ouverts à la présence des soldats de l'OTAN, mais ils semblaient encore dérangés par les fouilles d'auto.

Pendant ce temps, la troupe passait les nuits sur le site d'un ancien camp des soldats des Pays-Bas. Ces soldats avaient quitté en emportant avec eux tout leur équipement et l'infrastructure. Tout ce qui restait était un espace de gravier plat.

Les vacances

Durant son déploiement, Pierre-Jean a eu droit à trois semaines de vacances. Il a organisé une visite en France où sa conjointe est venue le rencontrer à Paris. Les deux ont visité la Loire, la Normandie et la Bretagne avant de passer quelques jours à Paris.

Il avait également droit à deux laissez-passer d'une durée de 96 heures. Il est donc allé visiter des vignobles en Slovénie et la ville de Split en Croatie.

Opération de surveillance de la frontière dans la région de Livno

Lors de son retour de vacances, la troupe dont Pierre-Jean faisait partie a eu comme mission d'aller vers le sud pour aider les autorités du secteur de Livno à surveiller la frontière et à décourager les activités de contrebande. Comme pour les missions précédentes, les membres de la troupe ont monté des postes d'observation pour surveiller les routes qui traversaient la frontière. Lorsqu'ils observaient des véhicules, ils avertissaient les douaniers. Ces derniers quittaient le poste d'observation pour intercepter le ou les véhicules en question.



Dernière opération – dans la région de Kotor Varoš à l'est du secteur.

Vers la fin de la rotation, la troupe a eu pour mission d'effectuer des patrouilles de présence et de fouilles de maison dans le secteur de Kotor Varoš. Durant cette mission, la troupe devait travailler avec

un groupe de soldats britanniques. Pierre-Jean avait noté que le comportement des deux groupes était très différent. Les soldats canadiens avaient reçu des instructions pour adopter un comportement plus détendu et pour favoriser les contacts avec la population. Ils gardaient leurs casques, leurs vestes de protection en kevlar et leurs armes personnelles dans ce qu'ils appelaient leur *go bag* du véhicule. Le *go bag* contenait tout ce dont un soldat avait besoin en patrouille: ses munitions, sa nourriture, son eau, des vêtements supplémentaires, etc. Ils portaient quand même leurs bérets, mais gardaient leurs pistolets cachés sous l'uniforme. Le quartier général canadien encourageait ses soldats à entrer en contact avec les résidents du secteur soit dans les cafés soit près de leurs maisons. Cette stratégie visait à faciliter la prochaine transition lorsque les forces de l'OTAN devaient quitter le pays.

Les soldats britanniques, eux, portaient toujours leurs casques et leurs vestes de protection. Ils avaient en main leurs mitrailleuses. Ils adoptaient une posture agressive lorsqu'ils traitaient avec la population civile locale. Leur comportement mystifiait Pierre-Jean avant qu'on lui explique que cette unité se préparait pour un déploiement vers Bassora, en Iraq et considérait son temps en Bosnie comme un exercice de confirmation avant le déploiement vers un secteur beaucoup plus dangereux.

Lors de cette opération, la troupe a commencé à utiliser des véhicules VUS. Les troupes s'arrêtaient souvent à des cafés du coin. Comme chauffeur, Pierre-Jean buvaient des boissons non alcoolisées comme du cola, mais les autres pouvaient boire de la bière. La nourriture à ces cafés était bonne. Le menu offrait principalement des plats d'agneau et de la pizza. Il n'y avait qu'un type de pizza italienne à croute mince. Lors de ces visites, Pierre-Jean a compris que les restaurants de la région offraient deux coupes d'agneau: une plus grasse pour les hommes et une maigre pour les femmes. Ces plats étaient servis avec beaucoup de légumes.

Vers la fin de la rotation, on a demandé à la troupe de collaborer avec la police locale pour exécuter une fouille pour des armes dans un camp de gitans. La troupe s'est installée à environ un kilomètre du camp et s'est assurée de rester visible et prête à agir en cas de problème. La force policière a complété sa fouille sans incident et n'a trouvé que quelques pièces insignifiantes.

Retour au Canada

Durant les trois dernières semaines, les membres de troupes ont nettoyé et retourné leurs véhicules et équipements. En ce qui concerne les véhicules, il fallait vraiment les frotter et les laver afin d'assurer qu'aucun morceau de terre ou de boue ne reste collé. Lorsque les véhicules étaient propres et les équipements démantelés, il fallait les conduire au dépôt logistique à camp *Black Bear*.

Ils ont aussi aidé à réemballer et à préparer pour le voyage de retour les équipements entreposés au camp *Maple Leaf*. Plusieurs pièces d'équipement avaient été accumulées durant les années où le camp a été occupé par les Canadiens. Pierre-Jean se souvient même avoir trouvé des casques bleus utilisés douze ans auparavant lorsque la mission était gérée par les Nations Unies.

Un fait surprenant a été constaté au moment où les troupes devaient retourner leurs munitions. En Bosnie, les balles étaient signées et comptées. À la fin de chaque rotation, chaque soldat devait retourner le même nombre de balles qu'il avait reçu au début. S'il en utilisait au cours de la mission, il

devait le reporter à ses supérieurs. Lors des rotations successives, les soldats ont pris des précautions pour ne pas en manquer jusqu'à la fin de leur déploiement. Par exemple, lors de chaque visite aux champs de tir, ils trouvaient le moyen d'en mettre de côté. Sur plusieurs années, les soldats de chaque déploiement ont fait des réserves de balles et ont conseillé à leur successeur de faire la même chose. De plus, ils ont passé leurs stocks de réserve aux nouveaux arrivés. Parce que c'était la dernière rotation, les soldats n'avaient pas de choix que de rapporter toutes ces réserves au quartier-maître des munitions. À la surprise de tous, les quantités remises excédaient de beaucoup celles que les individus devaient avoir dans leur possession selon les documents signés par chacun.

Après que l'équipement eut été retourné aux équipes logistiques, les soldats sont partis vers le camp *Black Bear* pour effectuer l'administration du départ et, par la suite, pour se rendre à l'aéroport de Zagreb. À Zagreb, l'avion a été retardé d'environ 4 heures par le brouillard. Après un arrêt en Angleterre, l'avion a poursuivi son trajet vers la ville de Québec. De Québec, le régiment avait organisé un transport en fourgonnette. Pierre-Jean est arrivé chez ses parents, à Montréal, au milieu de la nuit six heures plus tard qu'il l'avait planifié. À cette heure, les personnes présentes à la maison, qui devaient travailler le lendemain, étaient couchées. Sur la table de la cuisine, il a trouvé un papier sur lequel quelqu'un avait écrit «Bon retour! Utilise pas la douche, elle est brisée ». Il se souvient d'avoir philosophé que c'était un drôle de retour.

Depuis sa jeunesse, il avait écouté des nouvelles concernant la guerre en Bosnie à la télévision, ce qui lui avait donné l'envie de faire un déploiement outremer dans ce pays. Il a pu réaliser son souhait de participer à une mission des FC à l'étranger.

La vie par la suite

Lorsque Pierre-Jean est passé en entrevue dans le cadre de la préparation de ce document, il était lieutenant et chef de troupe de reconnaissance au Régiment de Hull. Il était employé au Quartier générale de l'Armée à Ottawa où il travaillait pour le compte du Directeurat du développement de la force terrestre. Il était responsable à maintenir l'organisation et l'établissement de la force terrestre. Il vivait à Gatineau depuis 2013

Notes de bas de page

¹Selon Wikipédia, la slivovitz est un spiritueux slave sec fait à partir de quetsches, proche de la rakia. On la trouve dans les commerces aux alentours de 45%, mais la slivovitz originale distillée et consommée en milieu rural avoisine les 80% d'alcool. Les familles campagnardes en font souvent de grandes quantités (entre 100 et 200 litres) après la saison des quetsches, le plus souvent en apportant leur récolte à des distilleries coopératives. Cette réserve permet de faire l'année. Le produit est aussi utilisé comme désinfectant ou nettoyant. On en trouve en Macédoine, Serbie, Bosnie-Herzégovine, Croatie, Bulgarie, Tchéquie, Slovaquie, Pologne.

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Robin Thibault's story

2004 - Psychological operations at Multi National Task Force – North West Headquarters



*Signs of ethnic cleansing in an area near the HQ
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

Authors' note

The principal authors of this text, aside from the individual recounting the story, are John Cochrane, a former member of the unit, and his niece Marina Tinkler, a Concordia University literature student. This record of events was prepared in 2015, many years after they occurred. The authors prepared this record principally using information obtained during interviews with the individuals involved. Where possible, this information was corroborated through interviews with others and a review of pictures and other publicly available information. The record presents the events as the individuals involved remember them several years after they occurred.

Robin Thibault's story

Background

From March to September 2004 Lieutenant Robin Thibault served as the Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) operations officer at the headquarters of NATO's Multi National Task Force North-West (MNTF-NW) in Banja Luka, Bosnia. During his time in Bosnia, he received his promotion to Captain.

In Bosnia, PSYOPS¹ were aimed at disseminating information to facilitate the work of the military by impacting the attitudes of the local civilian population.

Preparation

In the spring of 2003, Robin was a troop leader at the RCH. During the summer, he was acting as a course officer running a driver course at Canadian Forces Base Valcartier. He was very interested in obtaining an overseas posting and had applied unsuccessfully for a number of positions. A call was then issued for candidates for PSYOPS in Bosnia. He applied immediately, was accepted and left the driver course to start his pre-deployment training.

For his pre-deployment training, Robin was attached to the *Secteur du Québec de la Force Terrestre* Intelligence Section (SQFT G9) in Camp Valcartier. The section did not have any pre-established training program for a PSYOPS role because of its unique nature, so the person in charge improvised a series of diverse courses and other training activities for Robin. Most of the courses and activities he attended were focused on preparing other members of a battle group from the *5e Groupe-brigade mécanisé du Canada* for deployment to Afghanistan.

In the summer, Robin was sent on a course at the Pearson peacekeeping college in St-Jean with some Civil-Military Co-operation (CIMIC) operators. In the fall, he was assigned to help the G9 section organise some tactical exercises without troops (TEWT's) that were being run to train the officers of the brigade group. TEWT's are training activities that give practice to officers by presenting them with a series of problems or tactical situations and asking them to prepare their assessments, plan their tactics and issue their orders. These activities are typically performed by officers while the NCO's prepare the troops and move them forward to receive the orders and commence an operation. After the TEWT's, he participated in a large exercise at Fort Drum in northern New York State aimed principally at validating that the Battle Group was ready for deployment. During that exercise, he was asked to play various roles including that of the National Police department director, to help the troops practice their liaison and coordination skills.

Robin participated in further training activities with a Mentoring Observation Stabilisation Team (MOST) of about 40 individuals. He was then sent on a 2-week long PSYOPS course in Chicksands², just north of London, England.

Upon his return from London, he rejoined the MOST group and moved with it to the Peace Support Training Centre in Kingston to take a UN observer-style course. The course was aimed at training both police and military personnel. Robin was impressed with the professionalism of the training. As a training aid, the facility had set up a village like those found in Bosnia with booby traps in the houses.

Deployment to Bosnia

In March, Robin was deployed to Bosnia with a Canadian contingent. The contingent flew to Zagreb, Croatia from Trenton, Ontario, in a military passenger plane and then travelled by bus to camp Black Bear in Velika Kladusa (VK). Camp Black Bear was the logistical and administrative headquarters for the Canadian Forces in Bosnia. Then he travelled to Banja Luka where the headquarters of the Multi-National Task Force North-West was situated in an abandoned metal factory.

During the first week of his deployment, he attended local familiarisation training run by the task force for new arrivals at the Hotel San in Laktasi. It consisted of a week of various briefings, presentations and meetings. At these presentations, Robin remembers hearing that the opposing parties were no longer in direct conflict, and that the key risks were the presence of unmarked minefields and booby-traps, the presence of criminal organisations involved in smuggling and other illicit activities, and the widespread availability of weapons that the local population had stashed for use in case the hostilities recommenced.

He remembers an incident on the first night at the hotel that helped him better understand the local situation. It started when he heard a car screeching its tires in the parking lot followed by a local person shouting something that sounded like insults or threats at the occupants of the hotel. He remembered feeling somewhat vulnerable given that he and the other hotel guests had checked in their fire arms at the front desk when they entered the hotel. In his pyjamas, Robin ran down to the lobby and informed the Dutch security team responsible for local protection. By the time the security team ran outside to see what was happening the irate individual had disappeared. This was an example of how some of the local residents often expressed their animosity to the NATO forces. Certain Serbs in the area around the hotel seemed to resent the presence of the NATO troops.

PSYOPS team structure

The headquarters oversaw NATO's operations in what was often referred to as the Northwest or the UK sector of Bosnia. The headquarters oversaw troops principally from the UK, the Netherlands and Canada. Its area of responsibility was equal to roughly one third of the country – the northwest corner. This area encompassed sections of the country that had either been designated as Serb or Muslim and Croat. During Robin's period of employment at the headquarters, it was commanded by a Canadian, Brigadier General Stuart Beare.



*A picture of the metal factory showing the helipad and some of the buildings in the background. An armoured vehicle from Mike Bisson's troop is seen deployed on the tarmac in reaction to an intelligence report that insurgents were planning an attack on the headquarters
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*



*View of town adjacent to the metal factory
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

At the headquarters, the PSYOPS team was part of the Information operations group (INFO OPS), which was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel David Broadfoot, a British officer and the Information operations chief for the task force. The INFO OPS group also included two other sub-groups: media operations and public affairs.

The PSYOPS team itself included the following sections:

- A document production section that produced printed material and visual art
- A web design team
- A magazine section that published the *Mostovi* magazine
- An FM radio station; and
- A tactical PSYOP section, that conducted field surveys or performed other duties as required.

It was staffed by 8 NATO personnel and 15 to 20 local employees. Its offices were situated in the yard of the metal factory near the NW task force's HQ.

Robin was operations officer for the PSYOPS team initially under the command of Major David McBirnie, head of the PSYOPS operation for the NW task force. Part way through the tour, Major McBirnie was replaced by Major Kirsty McQuade, who took it upon herself to teach Robin a lot more about PSYOPS. Every morning Robin would accompany his superior to the General's morning briefing and take notes from the back of the room. At these meetings, his superior would often report on the status or progress of PSYOPS. Robin was often called upon to help prepare the briefing materials. At these meetings, much information was passed so Robin was well informed about current operations.

The PSYOPS team had 10 priority messages that they tried to promote in their communications to the local population. Notably, the team tried to promote peace & tolerance, to encourage people to surrender weapons, to stop or report illegal logging, and to favour a secure environment. The messages were directed principally to the younger population who might not be so set in their ways.

When Robin arrived, the team and the facility were already well established and running smoothly. The fact that they were running smoothly gave Robin more time to work on special projects and to get out and see some of the surrounding country side. He regularly had to travel to the higher headquarters, located at Camp Butmir near Sarajevo, to liaise and get instructions from the SFOR Chief PSYOPS group that coordinated the PSYOPS strategy for the entire country.



Robin with some of the people he worked with in Bosnia. From left to right: Kirsty McQuade, the PSYOPS commander at the MNTF-NW headquarters, Bojana Zelenika, the PSYOPS interpreter, the local police commander, a British soldier assigned to security at the headquarters, a local policeman and Robin Thibault.

Photo provided by Robin Thibault



At the Banja Luka Metal Factory, Robin shared accommodations with an Italian Carabinieri who was attached to the Headquarters as a liaison officer. From left to right : Alfred, Robin and Paulo. Picture taken at the Carabinieri Camp in Camp Butmir.

Photo provided by Robin Thibault

Typical activities of each of the PSYOPS sections

The document production section was employed principally in preparing signs and posters that were used to support military objectives. It was managed by a Dutch officer and staffed with one or more graphic illustrators. They would design the content of the documents and send them to be printed at a local print shop. The posters or pamphlets would then be distributed to the troops for dissemination. An example of the posters that they would prepare was a poster that announced an upcoming weapons collection operation. There was a blank space in the middle of these posters where the area being covered and the dates of the operation could be written. With the help of the local police, these posters would be placed at stores, bus stops and other locations approximately two weeks ahead of an operation with a view to avoiding surprises when the troops arrived to collect weapons.



The web design team was responsible to maintain an information site for the task force and provide information to the citizens. It was operated by a Dutch Warrant Officer and a team of local civilians. It was mainly an information site that reinforced the same messages as the other departments. At that time, web traffic was very low, as the use of the internet had not really developed and few of the locals had computers.

The magazine section published a monthly magazine, called the *Mostovi*, which meant “bridges”. A Canadian officer was the chief editor but all the articles were written by a team of four local journalists in their own language. The magazine was the only magazine available in Bosnia and Herzegovina that used both the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets. The magazine had on average 12 pages per issue and many pictures. Pictures were used notably in an effort to get people to read articles prepared using one alphabet or the other. The age of the target audience ranged between 15 and 35 years. The content was aimed at providing its readers with an unbiased view of events. It included many entertainment features and educational articles. It also had articles about SFOR activities or articles promoting tolerance or peace but those articles never took up more than two of the twelve pages. During Robin’s tour, the magazine staff also starting including articles promoting local individuals who were making

positive changes within their communities. Pictures, text and illustrations from a variety of sources were assembled by the magazine team.

Sometimes the magazine would work with the radio station on a joint campaign, for example to sensitize the population to the problems of displaced people and refugees. The magazine had a circulation of over 30,000 copies. Originally, the magazine was distributed to the local population by the NATO soldiers located in the different camps within the sector. As the number of soldiers had been drastically reduced and many of those camps had been closed just before Robin's arrival in preparation for the planned termination of NATO's involvement in the region, this method of distribution became impractical. A Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman who was in the area mentoring local policemen offered an alternative solution by proposing that the magazine be distributed by the local police. He thought that this could help the local police establish the same link with the community that the NATO task force had been trying to establish. After reflecting on the offer, Robin agreed to pursue this approach, given that the task force was in a transitional phase trying to strengthen the local authorities.



*On left - Printed version of the MOSTOVI Magazine after they were received from the outside print shop
On right – printed version of MIRKO magazine produced by the SFOR PSYOPS group and aimed at even younger children
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*



*Meeting of magazine and production staff proposing documents for publication
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

The radio station, called Oksigen FM, strove to build a wide audience among the young adult population. It played modern music targeting that population and occasionally broadcast messages that would promote peace and tolerance. The station was managed by a flamboyant former British Captain, David Baily, MBE. It operated solely in the local language using local DJ's and producers. Occasionally it would pass on public service messages or participate in a coordinated campaign relating to one of the task force's activities or priorities.



In the summertime, the radio station organised a number of events at which young people were invited to camp out and listen to music played by DJ's brought in from the UK, or by the station's own DJ's. Robin remembers attending several of these events to see how things were going and to enjoy the music and the sunshine. Before leaving the camp, however, he was warned by the station manager not to attend in uniform because the young people were not likely to be as accepting of the radio station and its messages if they were clearly reminded that it was being run by the military.



*Local radio announcers at Radio Oksigen broadcasting at a music festival they organised
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*



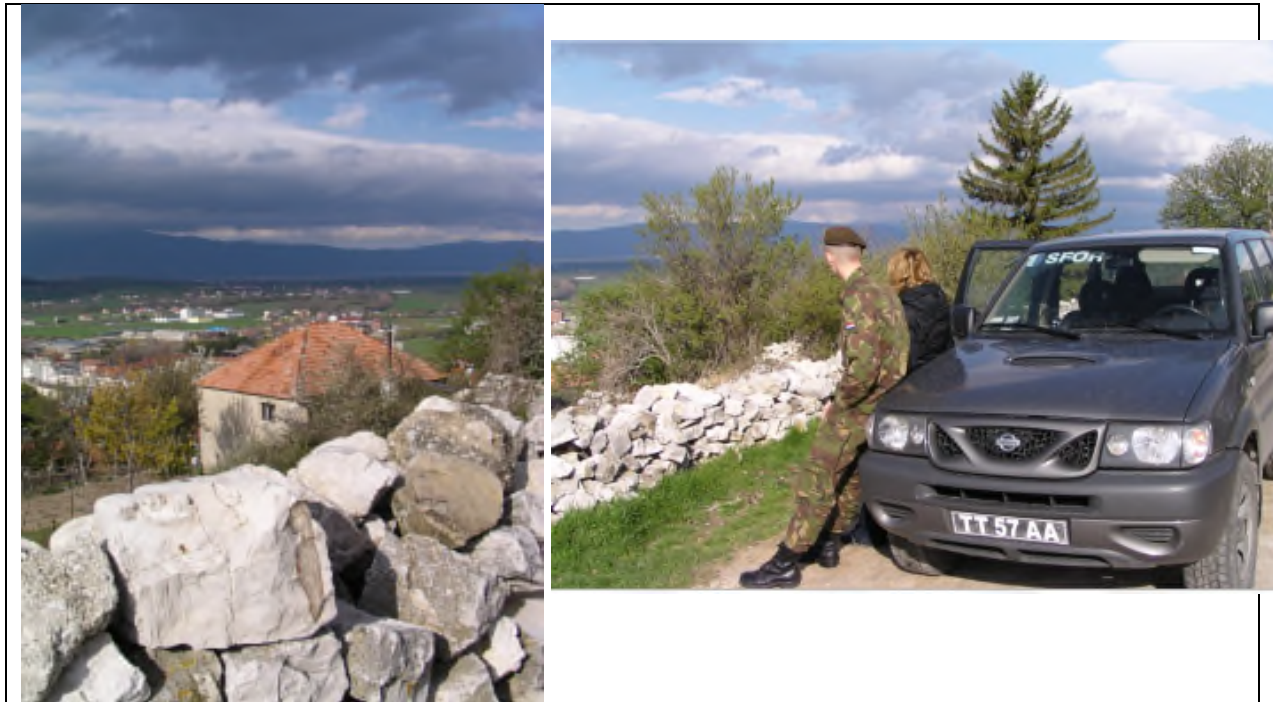
*David Bailey, the radio station manager and former army captain from the UK
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

Initially, the PSYOPS team did not have a tactical section, so Robin was tasked to supervise the creation and operation of such a team. The tactical section would go out into a specified area to collect information necessary for the planning process. Initially, since all the other operations were running smoothly and since he wanted to acclimatize himself to the country, Robin undertook some of these missions himself. Eventually, he assigned others to the task, and requested the assistance of the US PSYOPS team to help him train the MNTF-NW team.

Tactical PSYOPS logging survey

Early during his tour, Robin was asked to visit the town of Livno to perform a survey regarding illegal logging. The town of Livno was situated high in the mountains in the south-western part of the Dutch sector near the border with Croatia. An assessment of the situation was requested by the task force commander who was wondering if it was still necessary to have his troops organise roadblocks with a view to preventing illegal logging. Up until that time, SFOR troops would set up checkpoints with the local police so that the latter could check the drivers' papers and ensure that the logging taxes had been paid on the logs they were carrying. The regional government had a stamping system for each log harvested but some truckers were inclined to avoid buying the required stamps. This practice was of concern to NATO, because the local governments that NATO was trying to foster would not have sufficient funds to operate if its citizens were not paying their taxes.

To conduct the survey, Robin travelled in a single vehicle with his Dutch military driver, private Croun, and a civilian interpreter, Bojana Zelenika. On the road to Livno, he saw many houses that had been destroyed or damaged during the war. He wondered more than once if they had been victims of ethnic cleansing battles. When he arrived at Livno, he noted that the road sign that welcomes travellers to the town had been marked with numerous bullet holes. In Livno, Robin met with representatives of the local government and the European police. One of the people he met felt that the local police were not doing their job. Another person he met was reluctant to explain everything because she had already briefed soldiers from previous rotations who did not seem to have passed on the information when they left.



*Robin's Dutch driver Private Croun and interpreter Bojana take a roadside rest stop near Livno during the information gathering mission regarding illegal logging
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

After meeting with the local authorities, Robin noted that the countryside in the immediate vicinity of Livno was comprised of high rocky hills that were generally devoid of trees. Since illegal logging could not be a problem in an area that was devoid of trees, he decided to move his survey further north to the town of Drvar. In that area he found lush farming valleys surrounded by hills covered by dense forests. With the help of his interpreter, he performed a non-scientific survey of approximately 10 families in the valley using five basic questions. Curiously, he found that the families on one side of the valley were very worried about illegal logging and the families on the other did not seem to be bothered at all. Overall, however, the families were welcoming, helpful and generally concerned about the situation and the impact that the logging activity had on the environment. When he returned to the Headquarters he reported that both the authorities and people were concerned with illegal logging and he proposed that the task force continue targeting potential illegal logging. It had been a multi-day trip and the three of them had stayed in local hotels and eaten in local restaurants. Robin had carried sufficient cash to pay for the rooms, gas and meals for the three of them.



*Magnificent view of the countryside taken during a flight to higher headquarters
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*



*Destroyed building in Mostar that apparently contained numerous booby traps
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

This survey was Robin's first experience working with an interpreter and over several days he developed a very high opinion of Bojana and her ability to communicate with people and get them to open up. This had also been Bojana's first job as an interpreter for SFOR. She was the product of a mixed marriage. Her mother was a Croat and her father was a Serb, making them people that were mistrusted by both ethnic communities. Prior to the war, they had lived in Croatia, but when the war broke out, they were visiting their cottage near Laktasi and were stranded there until the end of the hostilities. Subsequent to the logging survey, the local agency which provided the interpreters for the task force tried to substitute another interpreter in her place, a move that Robin resisted because he now felt confident about her abilities and trusted her. Robin also suspected that the manager of the agency was trying to give preferential treatment to one of her friends. Robin's superior must have felt the pressure because he came and met with Robin to try to get him to change his mind. Robin insisted that she not be replaced as she had proved herself to be a trustworthy and competent co-worker.

For the remainder of the rotation, Bojana was employed as the interpreter for the tactical PSYOPS team that was mainly focused on conducting surveys with the public before and after NATO operations. Bojana also acted as Robin's interpreter whenever he left the compound. At end of tour, Bojana thanked Robin for his support by giving him a gift comprised of a homemade wooden box that contained two bottles of wine, one being a Serbian wine and the other being a Croatian wine. It was a token of thanks

for the fact that Robin's loyalty had enabled her to support her family through very difficult economic times. The mixture of wines was symbolic of Bojana's own history. Robin recognized the importance of the gift, given the sacrifice that Bojana would have had to make to assemble it. Consequently, Robin thanked her and promised that he would keep them for a really special occasion, and indeed at the time of this interview he had not yet opened them.

Tactical PSYOPS exchange with the Americans and a visit to Srebrenica

On another occasion, Robin and the members of his tactical PSYOPS team travelled to Tuzla in the US sector of Bosnia for an exchange meeting with the American tactical PSYOPS team. This particular visit was organised by Robin principally so that the American Tactical PSYOPS team could explain their approach, techniques and procedures to Robin and his newly formed tactical PSYOP team.



*A visit with the US PSYOPS team in the American Sector to learn more about the operations of their tactical PSYOPS team.
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*



*American Tactical PSYOPS leader (Sergeant at right) with his interpreter at left giving out soccer balls to the children at the Srebrenica orphanage
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

During that mission Robin asked if it would also be possible for the Americans to organise a visit for the team to the town of Srebrenica, the site of a widely-reported massacre in 1995. The American team responded by organising an official PSYOPS visit to a nearby orphanage, following a route that passed through the town.

The massacre occurred in 1995 when peacekeeping activities were under the command of the United Nations. At that time, the town was a Bosniak enclave surrounded by Bosnian Serb Communities. The UN had declared the enclave to be a safe area and had initially deployed a company from the *Royal 22e Régiment* there to observe the peace. In 1994, the Canadians had been replaced by a Dutch Battalion and in 1995, the hostilities between the opposing parties intensified and the Bosnian Serb Army launched an operation with the intent of taking control of the town.

Representatives of the Dutch Battalion helped the opposing parties negotiate an arrangement whereby the 30,000 or so Bosniak residents of the city were to be evacuated by bus to Tuzla or other Bosniak

communities further west. When the busses were loaded, the Bosnian Serb Army made sure that the men embarked on separate busses from those carrying the women and children. As the busses passed through nearby Serb dominated towns, those carrying the males were detoured and taken to killing grounds where approximately 1,700 men were killed. Many of the Muslim men that had been present in the town had not boarded the busses, either because they were combatants or because they did not trust the Serbs. They preferred to try and infiltrate through the forests. Many of these men were hunted down and killed after the evacuation. After the war, the incident was investigated by the United Nations and declared to be a massacre. Further, the UN sponsored a project to exhume the bodies from the mass graves, identify each individual and bury them in a proper Muslim cemetery. In all, over 6,000 Bosniak male bodies had been recovered to the cemetery.

In the surrounding communities, many Serbs also died when ethnic cleansing activities had been carried out earlier by the Bosniak combatants.

Robin wanted to visit the site since it had been a frequent topic of discussion in Canadian messes. Upon hearing the news of the massacre, many of the Canadians who served in Srebrenica or in support of the Canadians stationed there expressed their frustration regarding the futility of their efforts aimed at avoiding just such an event.

On the day of his visit the weather was sombre, cloudy and overcast. Robin visited the cenotaph and the site of the hillside cemetery.



*Monument and graves at the Muslim cemetery outside the town of Srebrenica, a town that had experienced an ethnic cleansing operation in 1995
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

Robin remembers seeing that the village was now inhabited by new residents who did not at all seem friendly. They merely stared at Robin and the soldiers that were with him with an untrusting look.



*A visit to the town of Srebrenica, a formerly-Muslim enclave that had experienced an ethnic cleansing operation in 1995. Local residents were wary of the visitors
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

Weapons collections and destructions

Several times during the tour, the PSYOPS team was asked to support the weapons harvesting operations. Typically, they would prepare and distribute announcements indicating that an operation was about to begin. The troops would then move in and conduct the search and the tactical PSYOPS team would follow to collect information. Sometimes, the military police would set up observation or control points between the time that the operation was announced and the time the operation started in an attempt to observe people who might be attempting to move or hide weapons.

On one occasion, Robin was asked to escort a CBC Radio reporter to visit the troops in the field and take him to see a weapons clearing operation. He remembers taking the reporter to the Prnjavor area where the 12 RBC recce squadron was performing just such an operation.

Later on during the tour, Robin travelled with the public affairs team to witness a mass destruction of weapons at a foundry in one of the Bosniak cantons to the south. The representatives of the headquarters set out in a convoy of three vehicles, attended the ceremony, and returned to the camp later in the evening. The destruction was carried out by soldiers from the Army of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the half of the country occupied by Bosniaks and Croats). It was conducted in a very public way and a lot of pictures were taken with a view to publishing them in a related article in the Mostovi magazine. The destruction was carried out by local rather than NATO troops to reinforce the idea the local government was taking things in hand.



*Weapons destruction session organised by the local army and documented by the Headquarters photographer for inclusion in Mostovi magazine
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

Other trips, activities and visits

On a monthly basis, Robin travelled with the major commanding the PSYOPS groups to attend coordinating meetings with the Chief PSYOPS at higher headquarters. Most of these meetings were held in Camp Bitmur near Sarajevo. During one of these meetings, one of the participants expressed an interest in having the meetings held at different locations so that they could see each other's operations. When travelling to and from some of these meetings, Robin and his superior often took small detours to visit sites of interest, such as the site of the winter Olympics.



*Picture of road formerly known as sniper alley. In 2004, the Civilian population was again using this road normally.
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*



*Photo of the bridge at Mostar in the French-German-Italian sector that had been rebuilt by NATO to symbolise the bringing together of the different groups
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

On one occasion, Robin was asked to participate in a shooting competition organised by the Armed Forces of the Srpska Republic (the Serbian half of Bosnia). He participated in the pistol shooting competition in which all participants were asked to use a Russian Tokarev pistol. The team representing the Republic of Srpska placed first in the competition. Robin remembers that it was his first time interacting with officers from the two armies of the new Bosnian Federation. The soldiers from the Republic of Srpska wore a uniform in the Soviet style whereas the soldiers from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina wore a uniform that resembled those worn by American soldiers. The two armies were trying to break the ice and seemed polite to each other.

On another occasion, Robin had the opportunity to briefly work with the local civil defense organisation. When Rob arrived at the HQ, he found that his predecessor had been overseeing the preparation of a video that could be used to explain a weapons harvest operation to the local population. The video was almost complete except for a sequence that showed how the explosives were destroyed at the end of the operation. Since Robin had purchased a high-quality video camera just before leaving Canada, he volunteered to film the sequence himself with his own camera.



*Local civil protection authorities arrive to help Robin film the destruction of munitions – this film clip was needed for a larger movie that was being prepared by the PSYOPS team
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

Arrangements were made with the local civil defense organisation to destroy some explosives and make the film. They showed up in their blue truck marked with the yellow triangles carrying their blue protective gear. The demonstration worked well and the filmed segment was useable. Robin remembers however that it was very hot that day and the explosives experts from the civil defense organisation did not want to wear their blue protective clothing. They donned it only for a short time and asked Robin to take his pictures and video quickly so they could remove it and complete their work.



*Robin all kitted up in protective gear with his movie camera preparing to film a segment for an explosives awareness training video
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*



*Picture of mine awareness training at a school – picture used in the Mostovi magazine
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

Living quarters and mess life

Robin bunked in living quarters that had been installed on the grounds of the metal factory complex across the alleyway from the PSYOPS offices. He shared his accommodations with an Italian Carabinieri officer, who served as a liaison officer at the headquarters. When Robin moved into the accommodations, his predecessor sold him a TV that had been passed down through several successive rotations. He later found out from his Italian roommate that the price of the TV had been significantly inflated by its last owner.

He found that the HQ in Banja Luka had a good mess life. Mess members were issued cards that entitled them to consume 2 beers per day. Each time they were served a beer the bartender punched the client's card. These cards were printed by the PSYOPS team. Robin suspected at one point that some of the print shop staff may have been selling cards on the side but no one was ever caught in the act.

One day, during an INFO OPS meeting with LCol Broadfoot, Robin joked about finally having received from Canada a "PSYOPS influencing warfare device" that could be used to quell any belligerent. When those in attendance looked at him with a perplexed expression, he explained that he was referring to his bagpipes. He had just received them after having sent for them once established in his new accommodations. Robin started playing the pipes with the 401 Squadron Pipes and Drums when he was in the air cadets, and had maintained his skills ever since. Being a Highlander himself, LCol Broadfoot was delighted to hear about the presence of the pipes and asked Robin to play them the very next day when the headquarters was visited by a very important visitor and Highlander, General Allister Irwin – The Adjutant general of the British Forces and a former member of the Black Watch (UK). After listening to the music, the visiting general stopped to talk to Robin and to shake hands. He looked at Robin's nametag and inquired as to how it could be possible that a person with a French name like Thibault could be playing the pipes. Rather than recounting a long and potentially boring story, Robin jokingly responded that his real name was MacThibault, a name that some of Robin's friends used on occasion.

The news about the presence of the pipes circulated around the mess and Robin was subsequently asked by the General to play the bagpipes at his upcoming change of command parade at the Task Force headquarters. When he was asked to do this, Robin was told that he would be accompanied by Mike Bisson, another Hussar who was also deployed in Bosnia at the time and who was also in possession of his bagpipes. Mike and Robin had known each other for many years and had played together in the 306 Wing Air Force Association Pipes and Drums in Montreal, after the disbandment of the 401 Squadron. Being a gunner, the General had also requested that the artillery band from Shilo, Manitoba, perform at the parade. At the change of command ceremony, the two pipers as well as a third piper from the artillery band were stationed on top of the ramparts of an old castle where the change of command ceremony was held. The third piper originally wanted to lead the piping but when he heard the quality of Robin's and Mike's piping, he decided that it would be better to let them lead. Robin remembers playing an emotional rendition of Amazing Grace during which the pipes played the first verse alone and were then joined by the full band. The presence of the pipes was very appropriate because the incoming commander – British Brigadier Mark Dodson – was a Highlander.



Robin Thibault and Mike Bisson, both of the RCH and a third piper were asked to play their bagpipes at the General's change of command parade which was held in a medieval castle. The pipers were situated high up on the ramparts above the parade. Photo provided by Robin Thibault



Robin meeting a very important visitor and Highlander, General Allister Irwin – The Adjutant general of the British Forces and a former member of the Black Watch (UK).. Photo provided by Robin Thibault

As unusual as it may seem to have two armoured officers act as pipers for a change of command parade in collaboration with an artillery band, Robin felt honoured to have been able to participate in a tribute to a departing leader whom he greatly respected. Robin also found that his participation and his unusual skills helped him get to be known and meet people at the headquarters that he would otherwise never have met.

Vacation and leave

During his deployment, Robin was entitled to one longer leave (HTLA) and two shorter 96-hour leave periods. During his HTLA leave, he spent two and a half weeks visiting Tunisia and Corsica with Andreas Beauchamp, an intelligence operator from the headquarters. On the first 96-hour leave, he travelled to the Island of Vis off the coast of Croatia, where he attended a scuba-diving course organised for a group of Canadian soldiers. To get to the Island, the group travelled to the port city of Split, then took a ferry to the Island. Robin remembers an incident during this course when a fire broke out at the diving school. The soldiers on the course immediately leapt into action and quickly extinguished the fire themselves. While they were standing around congratulating each other and waiting for the course to resume, they heard a European-style siren coming from what they thought was an approaching fire engine. When this vehicle finally arrived, it turned out to be a two-wheeled moped equipped with a fire extinguisher and manned only by its driver. This was the island's fire department. Robin could hardly believe his eyes. On his second 96-hour leave, he went on another scuba diving vacation in Martar, Croatia with two of General Beare's drivers from the 12 RBC, Patrick Fortin and Duane White. The proximity of the beautiful Adriatic coast made this a popular destination for the Canadian soldiers.

Reflection on the importance of the PSYOPS mission

As he was preparing to leave, Robin reflected on the role of the PSYOPS team in the Bosnian conflict and his personal involvement. Over the period from 1991 to 1994, the Bosnian republic had descended into a hellish, bitter internal conflict among the three principal ethnic groups. Since the Dayton Peace accord had been reached in 1995, the opposing sides and their leaders had gone through a healing process and were trying to return to a normal state.

The NATO forces had been stationed in the area to help implement the Dayton accord and then to supervise and support it. While the traditional military units, with their weapons and armoured vehicles, were good first at separating the combatants and then at patrolling, confiscating weapons and addressing physical problems, they were not well equipped to have any enduring impacts on the thoughts and attitudes of the people. Without changes in those attitudes, war was likely to return as soon as the NATO forces departed. It was the responsibility of the PSYOPS teams to use a more sophisticated approach, to promote tolerance, and to foster a lasting peace. This was done using the tools at its disposition and by focusing on the younger generation and hoping that, as they grew up, the country would return to a more normal state. This was not something that the Canadian Armed Forces were typically equipped to do. However, because they were grouped with the British forces, they were able to benefit from the British Army's extensive PSYOPS capabilities and the strategies that it had developed over its extensive military history. The psychological operations must have had some impact in Bosnia because, in 2004, the ethnic communities had progressed sufficiently in their healing process that NATO decided that the mission could be downsized and passed over to the European Community.

Robin realized that his experience at Banja Luka was a very unique once-in-a-lifetime experience for an armoured officer. He was very happy to have been involved in this type of operation and to have gained an understanding of how it works and what benefits it might have. Finally, he was proud of the achievements of the PSYOPS team and his contribution to the team's success.



*Medals parade just before departure
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*



*Robin meeting other Canadian troops and Mike Bisson
at a sidewalk café near the end of the tour when the
troops had been instructed to mingle with the
population in preparation for the downsizing of the
mission.
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

Return to Canada

At the end of the rotation, Robin was replaced by Rob Knibbs, an officer from the Royal Regina Rifles in Saskatoon, who was responsible to wind down the operations. At that time, NATO was transferring its responsibility of overseeing the security of the country to EUFOR – which was a much smaller task force formed by the European Community. In the following months, the PSYOPS operation at the metal factory was dismantled.

Robin returned to Canada with a contingent of other Canadian soldiers. They arrived on September 26th at Quebec City, where he was met by his family.

Upon his return to the unit in Montreal, he expressed his interest in going on another mission to the Deputy Commanding Officer of the Royal Canadian Hussars. Shortly after that, based on his PSYOPS experience, he was given a class B call out at the PSTC in Kingston, Ontario, and headed off on another adventure.

Life thereafter

At the time of the interviews, Robin Thibault was serving as a member of the Royal Canadian Hussars as a captain and squadron commander for its reconnaissance squadron. He was also employed in Montreal as a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police where he was part of the C Division Integrated National Security Team (INSET). He had left the Regiment when he first joined the RCMP but had opted to return when his civilian employment brought him back to Montreal.

Being a hussar and meeting other Hussars



*Chance meeting with some other Hussars while on the road. They were working in the 12 RBC Recce squadron
From Left to Right: Lt. Mike Bisson, Lt Robin Thibault, Cpl Duplessis, and Cpl Pierre-Jean Pilon.
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

“When in Bosnia, I always appreciated meeting other Hussars in the field, whether it was the troops serving in the 12 RBC recce squadron or Hussars working in other capacities. Whether in the field or in sidewalk cafés or on leave, or whether they were officers, senior NCO’s or junior ranks, I always felt a strong affinity with them. Those of us that had the privilege of working in Bosnia or Croatia over the 12 years of UN and NATO involvement can all accept a small portion of the credit for having helped that country and its population to return to some degree of normality. From the UN mandate, to the Dayton peace accord, to the hand over to EUFOR, members of the Royal Canadian Hussars and other members of the Canadian Armed Forces have earned their place in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

Robin Thibault, August 28, 2015

Footnotes

¹According to Wikipedia, Psychological Operations are planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning and ultimately the behaviour of governments, organizations, groups and individuals.

²The Defence Intelligence and Security Centre (DISC) is the location of the headquarters of both the Defence College of Intelligence and the British Army Intelligence Corps. It is located at Chicksands, Bedfordshire, approximately 35 miles (56 km) north of London.

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Tribute to fallen comrades



*Cemetery surrounds a small church in Bosnia
Photo provided by Robin Thibault*

Tribute to fallen comrades

This document is dedicated to the memory of the 25 or so Canadian Armed Forces personnel who died during the Bosnian and related conflicts and to the memory of members of the Royal Canadian Hussars who passed away subsequent to their return from the theatre but before this document was published.



A tribute to one of the deceased from each category is outlined on the following pages.

CORPORAL DAVID GALVIN

Corporal David Galvin was a member of the Sherbrooke Hussars, a unit that is closely affiliated with the Royal Canadian Hussars. He was the first reservist to die in an armed conflict since the Korean War.



David Joseph Patrick Galvin passed away at the age of 28 on November 29, 1993, in Zenica, Bosnia. Son of Mrs. Ina Galvin, of Bolton Centre, Quebec. Cpl. Galvin attended Massey Vanier High School where he won several medals for his wrestling abilities. He was a member of the Sherbrooke Hussars militia regiment attached to the 12^e Régiment blindé du Canada (12 RBC) during a deployment with the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR). Cpl. Galvin was killed while serving as a crew member on a Cougar armoured vehicle escorting a humanitarian aid convoy near Zenica. He was fatally injured when the vehicle, travelling in very poor weather and icy road conditions, slipped over the edge of a bridge and into a river bed. For his service in Bosnia he received the Canadian Peacekeeping Service Medal, the United Nations Protection Force Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR) medal, the Dag Hammarskjöld Medal, and the Memorial Cross ER II. His mother, Mrs. Ina Galvin was the Royal Canadian Legion National Silver (Memorial) Cross Mother for 2001. The National Silver Cross Mother is chosen annually by The Royal Canadian Legion to represent the mothers of Canada at the National Remembrance Day Ceremony in Ottawa on 11 November. As the Silver Cross Mother she laid a wreath at the base of the National War Memorial on behalf of all mothers who lost children in the military or merchant navy services of the nation. Ms. Michele Fontaine, Cpl. Galvin's widow, was also awarded a Silver (Memorial) Cross.

CAPORAL ANDRÉ «TATOU» ROY



Le caporal André Roy, mieux connu par ses camarades sous le nom de Tatou, est décédé le 25 mai 1996 à la suite d'un accident de moto, quelques années après son retour d'une mission en Bosnie.

André s'est enrôlé au Royal Canadian Hussars en 1990 où il est devenu membre de l'escadron B à St-Hubert. Peu de temps après son enrôlement, il s'est placé premier lors de son cours de recrue. Il s'est joint aux Hussards puisqu'il était attiré par l'aventure militaire et par son grand intérêt pour les chars d'assaut. Malgré sa petite taille, il se faisait respecter par ses camarades. Ses amis disaient qu'il avait la personnalité d'un combattant viking.

André était très loyal à l'escadron et à ses amis. Au Régiment et ailleurs, il était inséparable de ses deux bons amis Sylvain « Slide » Bourque et Antonio-Luc « Shovel Cat » Pelchat. Malgré le fait qu'ils étaient trois hussards, ils se sentaient davantage comme les trois mousquetaires. Ils se connaissaient depuis l'âge de 16 ans et ont évolué ensemble au corps de cadets. C'est André qui a convaincu ses deux amis de rejoindre le RCH avec lui.

André a servi en Bosnie sur Opération Cavalier entre les mois d'avril et octobre 1993. Lors de cette mission, il a agi comme chauffeur de véhicule blindé au sein du 12^e Régiment blindé du Canada. Des patrouilles de cette unité escortaient des convois humanitaires des Nations Unies. Ces convois devaient franchir les frontières entre les différentes forces qui s'opposaient et amener de l'aide aux réfugiés civils durement touchés par la guerre.

Après avoir servi en Bosnie, il est retourné aux études et a suivi un programme de formation de mécanicien à l'École de l'automobile de Montréal.

En 1994, il a voyagé à Vimy, France, lorsqu'il était membre d'un contingent de Hussards qui a représenté le Régiment lors des célébrations du 50^e anniversaire de la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en Europe.

Lors de son décès, il a laissé dans le deuil son amie Rose-Aimée, la personne qu'il considérait comme étant la femme de sa vie; ses parents, Marcel Roy et Hélène Arseneault; sa sœur Nathalie; son beau-frère, Jean François Richard et son neveu Gustave Richard. Depuis son décès, sa sœur a donné naissance à trois autres enfants – Loïc, Maël et Valène, qui ne connaîtront jamais le plaisir de rencontrer leur oncle André.

Au ménage militaire sur le chemin des Côtes des neiges à Montréal, la cloche du mess des sous-officiers - une douille de 76mm modifiée - est dédiée à la mémoire d'André.

« Mes parents et mes amis, je vous laisse mes plus grandes valeurs en souvenir, soit le courage, la loyauté et l'honneur. Je serai toujours avec vous. » - André Roy

Prière du Souvenir

Ils ne vieilliront pas comme nous, qui leur avons survécu

Ils ne connaîtront jamais l'outrage, ni les poids des ans

Quand viendra l'heure du crépuscule, et celle de l'aurore

Nous nous souviendrons d'eux

- Laurence Binyon



Remembrance Prayer

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning

We will remember them.

- Laurence Binyon

End of document

Thank you



*Convoy passing through tunnel on road near Camp Maple Leaf
Photo provided by Mike Bisson*

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