

**Rough Transcript**  
**Maj Simon Cox, Calgary Highlanders (13 July 2016)**

**Interviewer/Transcriber:** LCol M.C. Vernon

**Deployments:** Bosnia (2002-2003), Afghanistan (2008)

**Note:** *Quotations are not 100% verbatim*

<b>Rough Timecode</b>	<b>Comments</b>
0:28	Joined/volunteered to deploy to be a platoon commander
1:00	Full platoon from Calgary Highlanders volunteered. It was a “perfect fit” after university.
1:30	Explains what Composite Reserve Infantry Company (CRIC) was. “Great opportunity, a new model”
2:20	His military family was entirely supportive. “Really happy” “Most of my friends were in the military” “Back in that day it wasn’t a dangerous mission. It wasn’t politically sensitive mission. It was just seen as a positive thing to go and do so I had tons of support to go and do that.”
3:10	Explains pressure to make CRIC a success. “They didn’t know us”, basically a Big Competition, including a month-long, challenging selection exercise. Four platoon commanders vying for three platoons. “Great training. Not easy.”
4:15	Regular Force: “I understand where the Regular Force was coming from. They didn’t really know any of us. They basically put an extra 25 or 30% of numbers as there were positions for the work-up training. So there was a big competition when we went and we started doing our work-up training in Wainwright and we did a full month of training before the battle group came together and did all the TMST [Theatre and Mission Specific Training] to lead up to that. Basically, it was just a big selection. So there was, for example, three platoon commanders and there were four platoon commanders that showed up. So one of us wasn’t going to go on the tour. So we had to prove ourselves and make sure that we were performing to a certain standard. And they ran a very aggressive, very challenging exercise for us that lasted just under a month. It was great training for us, it was a great opportunity, but it wasn’t easy. There was a lot of animosity. A lot of doubts that we would be able to perform up to the level that they wanted. And so that was definitely a challenge. We were kind of seen as the stepchildren of the battle group for a long time.”
4:45	<i>“There was the perception that we were also stealing some jobs. In fact, as soon as we finished that month of work-up training and we got to battalion and we were starting the work-up training there was a decision from Ottawa that cut one of the companies. So the CO of the battalion formed everyone up and said, ‘I’ve got to cut a company. And I’ve been</i>

	<p><i>told it has to be one of the two Regular Force companies. So I don't have a choice.' That's a politically-worded statement, but you know what he meant: 'If I had the choice I would have cut the Reserves because they're not mine.' We're the outsiders. 'And so I have to cut one of my companies.' And after that, you'd walk down the halls and you'd just get these sneers and stuff from the guys in the battalion: 'You're stealing our deployment. You shouldn't be here.' That was sort of pervasive in the attitude between the Regular Force and the Reserves in the early 90s, late 90s. It took a lot of work to overcome that. When guys went on an individual augmentation and they were put in a section, nine times out of ten they did a great job because they're good soldiers and you get to work with people one-on-one and there's no problems with that. I knew all the other platoon commanders at the time because I did all the phase [training] with them. They knew that I was a good guy and I was competent and I was just like they were so they were my friends. So there was no animosity on that level. But if you didn't have that personal connection or someone you worked with a lot, there was definitely a divide. Something you had to get over. Basically all you can do is ignore it and do your job, and try to perform the tasks that you're asked to do."</i></p>
7:00	<p>Mix of operational experience in the CRIC, from Croatia veterans to those with no overseas experience. But this was a stagnant tour, so it was enough to know your job and do it well.</p>
7:50	<p>Originally the CRIC was composed of an infantry platoon from each of 38, 39 and 41 CBGs. His platoon, 11 Platoon, was originally a mix of LER and Calgary Highlanders. Over time, there was even more mixing.</p>
8:50	<p>How did you prove yourselves? "I don't think it was ever widely acknowledged or accepted that Delta Company was doing a really good job. There was a ton of animosity and certainly favouritism played throughout the tour in terms of who gets the good taskings, and who gets to go to Zagreb for a weekend or whatever tasking, and we didn't get a lot of those things. And we didn't get a lot of support for the operations we were doing, but that didn't deter us. We went and we tried to do the best we could. If you look at statistics for the battalion as a whole, we were doing cordon and searches at a much higher pace and had much more success than anyone else in the battle group. Does that mean we were better than them? No, it just means we were focusing on our mission and trying to do what we were there to do, and we were being successful at it. I think there was a lot of pride and self-satisfaction in just doing that. You know, we don't need to be told that. You kind of know that you and your soldiers are doing what you're asked to do. And that was good enough for us."</p>
10:20	<p>Plenty of company cohesion after six months of work up training, followed by an eight month deployment.</p>
11:20	<p>Expectations? "Not sure what to expect. Heard stories about Croatia,</p>

	Bosnia, knew that war was over. But interested to see the ground, the state of the country. Not sure how it would play out. " Job was to mentor and support the police. No military threat. Criminal activity. Generally speaking, a great tour. Tons of opportunities to do patrols. Four days a week.
12:50	Had a full patrol schedule. Talk to locals, labour disputes, roadblocks.
13:20	Did a ton of deliberate operations to remove weapons and ammunition from population. There was a law that made it illegal to hold certain types of weapons. Amnesty for returning them. Did a ton of operations to promote this.
14:25	How did reservist background affect such relations? "It didn't hurt, but it wasn't the magic bullet we had." Whenever you get a diverse group of soldiers with different experience and trades, it helps with non-kinetic operations. It was quite easy to delegate to different sections.
15:30	Memorable day/incident? No significant or defining moment on this tour. But there was one company raid that was quite good. A week's leadup on a textile factory suspected of moving weapons and drugs through it. Large factory. Put surveillance on it for a week. Outer cordon. A really good accomplishment for us. Didn't find anything. But we executed the operation in the way we wanted to. The owner helped by kicking down doors. "You don't have to destroy your place, just go find the key!"
17:30	How did it live up to your expectations? Really happy with it. Lots of challenges, internal to the army, stale tour with army-isms. Frustrating to work through. Good learning experience. Translating and managing messages up and down. He was a buffer.
18:50	Army-ism? "A lot of pressure was given to us to do a certain amount of patrolling, but we had Iltises at the time and they would break a lot, and we didn't have enough sections or Iltises to do all the patrols that the battalion wanted us to do. So, it was bit of managing of expectations up and down to say, 'All right, guys, here's a really heavy patrolling schedule, I know you're tired, but get the minimum amount of sleep you have to get to be on the road, and then get back out there. All right? This is important.' But on the same side, we had to push up through our Ops up to battalion to say, 'I can't do all the patrols. I don't have the resources. I can't go knit an Iltis. Right? I can't create an extra section. They're tapped-out, they're doing as much as they can, so we need to adjust some things. So what do you want me to not do? And that message wasn't received very well. There was a bunch of arguing about it. But at the end of the day, you have to do the best you can with what you have and that message up is an important one: I can't do what you're asking me to do because I don't have the resources. It's not insubordinate. It's you helping the chain of command figure out how to accomplish the mission. There was a lot of stubbornness: 'We're tasking you, so you have to do it.' I'd love to do it, but how do you want

	me to do that when I don't have enough resources?"
20:40	Regular Force company had LAVs, not Iltises. "The Minister of Defence came out and they asked us to give him a tour of the area, so one of my sections took him on a patrol. They're going along in a few Iltises and one of the Iltises is going up a hill and it breaks and there's steam coming out of it and one of the aides came up to the section commander and started jacking him up: 'We know that the Iltises are crap. The Minister knows this is an issue but this is just outrageous that you're staging this Iltis breaking down when you have him on a tour.' And the section commander's like, 'What are you talking about? We didn't stage anything. This actually happens.' So it was kind of funny. He came back all razzled."
21:40	How successful was the CRIC concept? Very successful, with the proper amount of work up training. Could we sustain it on a mission by mission basis—probably not. Did another one afterwards, but had to open it nationally. Hard to sustain, but deployment of a reserve sub-unit was very successful.
22:45	How would this have worked for Afghanistan? He thinks it would have worked. There's some challenges with Afghan mission due to mounted training needed, but light force would have worked.
22:45	Better to have individual augmentation or Reservists in their own subunit? Both work. Don't know which would be better, but different scenarios call for different models. We should be open to analyzing this.
24:40	There are force generation issues for Regulars because battalions aren't full, so if you could put an entire platoon in a rifle company it would be less disruptive for them. If you can form a full company, that would help too.
25:40	How did you come home? We landed in Edmonton, did a couple days of outclearance then were released to go home. Not a lot of time to reintegrate. Not a stressful mission so we didn't have to work through issues before parting ways. "I didn't know what I was going to do." Took a Class B with the Skyhawks in Trenton. Didn't have a lot of difficulty transitioning, still working for army.
27:15	Any issues transitioning to civilian/non-mission lifestyle? Not really. "Found a starker difference following Afghanistan. More stressful. A week after I got home I started a job with the Royal Bank, I was being shot at two weeks ago, now I'm in an office. This is totally weird." Life is simpler on a mission thanks to the structure. People hate it at first. "You gain an appreciation for how simple life is in the army, then you have to figure it out for yourself. How am I going to make breakfast... A lot more complexities."

29:00	Afghanistan. Motivation? Had worked Class B for a number of years, getting tired of it, considering whether to join Regular Force or start civilian career. Knew a bunch of guys who went over in 2006 and 2007. "The culture in the unit around that time was heavily oriented around doing your part, the CH have to do our part for this mission." So it was a pretty easy decision. "I'm a qualified infantry officer: if I'm not going to go, who else is going to go? I've got to do my part. That was the decision made."
30:55	Family reaction this time? Originally applied for Afghan National Training Centre, fairly mundane and non-combat. The way I sold it to my spouse is "don't worry, it's not the OMLT". Got a call on leave about changes, moving ANTC people to OMLT. "That's the job I want, but I had to go back to my spouse and sell it... back-pedal from my earlier comments". So there was not great support. My family, my dad, gave great support. "This is what you do, who you are, so go do it."
33:10	OMLT=Operational Mentor and Liaison Team. Role to mentor the Afghan National Army. Four company commander teams: captain, warrant officer, driver and gunner. A detachment attached to an Afghan company for entire deployment. Zhari District. Also provided enablers they needed: artillery, air support, medical, conduit to Canadian units.
34:45	What did you want from this tour? "Like any soldier, a desire or passion to experience combat, how you'll measure up. But be careful what you ask for. Certainly had burning desire to get into combat. I see it in guys when I got home. I understand where you're coming from, but you don't necessarily want to go through it because there's a lot of negativity and bad things too. It's dangerous. You could see things you can't unsee." Most of all, in OMLT, a unique challenge, unsure what to expect. What are societal differences? Talking through an interpreter in combat. Outside of the box.
36:40	Work up training? Unique training, lots of weapons training, call for fire, close air support in emergencies, did a lot of shooting. Worked with Canadian soldiers who were acting as Afghans in Wainwright. "We ran some of the best training I've ever seen in the army"
38:25	Civilian roleplayers effectiveness? Not very effective. They were acting and trying to mess you up, which is totally not what the Afghans are doing, as they try to survive. It was more collaborative in Afghanistan. Wish it was more constructive.
39:35	Regular/Reserve dynamic? Almost no animosity this time. Chris Thombs, whom he knew from the Skyhawks, didn't know he was Reservist. "Zero animosity... we were all there together. They selected people pretty carefully. Treated you like a soldier. Only reservist in my team, three great soldiers and we worked as a team." He lists their names: WO Lance Neilsen, Bushy, Scott. Deployed to Sangusar,

	isolated from everyone else.
41:50	First impressions? Kandahar was huge. Various briefings: "Don't pick up a mine. OK, thanks." Road move to strongpoints. Drove in Bison. "I hope I'm not going to die in this little box...so we tried to go to sleep". Ended up at FOB Wilson. Afghan company was playing soccer. Went to another base, walked 4 kilometres with their rucksacks to their strongpoint. 150 pound rucksacks with ammo, gear etc. Did the handover en route. Not a lot of time to take in the sights. "Could be in combat at any time." Very rapid introduction.
44:50	How well prepared were you? Very well. Boss told him Sangusar is totally isolated. "Probably can't get to you quickly." They were given a medic, a fifth person. He often accompanied Afghans on his own. "If you get into combat and get wounded are they going to leave you or not? You don't really know." Just start doing your drills, reaction to effective enemy fire, purely based on training. Didn't take long to get into combat, the day after they arrived: "Let's go see the battle space, the easy place first... hit Route Ottawa, the resupply route. This is the line. They're watching us right now. If we keep moving, they'll delay us, there'll be a line of defence. Farmers farming and watching us. They'd drop their rakes and go and grab weapons. Tactical indicators. They're going to bump us. I see Taliban guy get hit. Guy fires an RPG. Everyone else dives to the ground but I'm standing up going 'holy fuck, is that an RPG?' ... And it's coming right at us. Hits a wall and explodes. Get my head in the game. And that was the first day, the first patrol we were on."
49:15	Learned very quickly the ANA are checked out. They're warriors, knew how to do fire and manoeuvre. Knew the basics. Not a lot of teaching about how to fight. It was more about "how do we get them to do their job aggressively instead of drinking tea in the strongpoint"
50:20	How did you do that? A lot of different ways. Persuasion. Talking with them. Freedom of movement derives from patrolling all the time. A lot of it was also working the chain of command. Afghan commander was risk averse. Troops were willing to do it, but weren't allowed to do it. "Great, we see their ambush, so let's counter-ambush it...they'd get told no. We'd stand there for an hour working through this communication problem."
52:40	Relationship with company commanders? First one was good, had some stressful moments, but generally we were brothers in arms. He spoke English. "The defining moment is if you're in combat and do what you're supposed to do... our strongpoint got hit every couple of days, the ANA loved it when I grabbed the C6 and fired back..." Medic won an MID after Taliban fired recoilless rifle and caused injuries. Medic applied tourniquet and called in medevac under fire. The ANA were super appreciative. "Thank you for being here with us."
55:10	Integration? "A bugbear of mine was BG was there to tick career

	boxes...but I thought a lot of BG was focused on its own missions, not collaborative. Put an Afghan face on your mission. Threw it around cheaply. This is their country. They don't go home after six months. They've been in Kandahar for five years..." Didn't find that they were well-integrated overall. Were in the OMLT. Later tours went that way with partnerships. There was no BG presence in Zhari during his tour... until the end. A couple of joint operations, but not integrated.
58:40	To what extent could you go native? "I couldn't just take stuff off, had an ongoing struggle with soldiers to put on helmets and flak vests. We were always super geared up, self-reliant. I carried M203 as a captain, plus radio, tons of ammo, 10 litres of water... the way we went on operations." Tons of autonomy. Ran plenty of courses. Had to teach them how to use their mortars. They couldn't even count to ten.
1:01:40	It was important on a social level to get to know them, but one at a time due to the chance of food poisoning from eating with them. Couldn't afford to lose more than one guy at a time. Very austere. Didn't do it very often.
1:02:45	The first company was quite good, experienced. Most soldiers would do their job well. But they got rotated and a new company came in, a much bigger challenge in combat after they closed Sangusar and moved to FOB Wilson. "The company commander was an oxygen thief...hanging back while his troops fought."
1:05:00	Went on a patrol to distract Taliban. At Taliban Road, Contact Corner. "We saw a guy cross the road with an AK, he looks at us, so we both shoot at him and then the world erupts. All the ANA guys dive in the ditch. Platoon commander had to grab the PKM from the guy cowering with it. Just the mentors and a few others trying to win the firefight." Journalist Louis Palu videotaped this. Describes ineffective fire.
1:07:15	There's a whole bunch of self-defining moments. Every day outside FOB Wilson an IED would go off at 5 a.m. "That's how we would start every day". Describes a busy day of IEDs, civilian contractors, police station, then... two police officers kidnapped so kandak operation mounted to recapture them. Assaulted across a field to the house where they were reportedly being held. "My company was to assault the objective, through a wadi and across a field to a house. Got engaged on our flank as we're lining up. PKM shoots at me—holy fuck. Recoilless rifle fires at me, slow-motion, no time to react. Threw me into the wadi. Louis Palu got blown back ten feet. Cpl Bushy thought we'd blown up. Help me out. We suppressed the fire on the flank... We did five missions in one day. Didn't find the police officers. Exhausting. Just a typical day."
1:12:35	The police had allegedly raped young boys in the village. They were killed for this and hung up. "It's not a very nice story. Dangerous. Never any question from Afghans or us that we were going to do this." Sense of commitment on everyone's part, regardless of the accusations.

1:13:45	MID details. Built several police stations in Pashmul. "There's an area called the Graveyard, where you'd always get in a firefight." Decided to take the Taliban buildings by force. Going to do fire and manoeuvre across a 70-80 metre field to get to the buildings. Very deliberate. Lance went with a section to establish a foothold, but they get into contact. As situation evolves, it erodes. More Taliban popping up, flanking lead section. Couldn't suppress Taliban, so made decision to cross field and reinforce them. "I'm going, come with me or not. Bushy followed me. A few followed me. Machine gun coming between Bushy and I, holes in our equipment... start fighting around the corner. Told Lance to breach the wall. Here's my bayonet, dig a hole in the wall, as we're fighting at each corner." As they were doing this, he talks to WO Buchanan their JTAC. Bushy tackles him due to MG bullets impacting near his head. Force entry into village. Occupy giant crater from 2000 pound bomb dropped on an earlier day. Called in artillery: "Man I hope I got my coordinates right cause this is super close." F16 dropped a bomb on a nearby house, chunks landing on them, it was so close. Jet suppressed enemy with his cannon too. Forced Taliban to withdraw. "So I was awarded an MID..."
1:20:10	How many were actively involved? Ten man section, reinforced by four. More moved up after they gained access to the village, including a brave machine gunner. Eventually the whole company came up. Ended up with 70 in the village. Trickling in.
1:21:30	Are all these incidents ingrained in detail? Yes, a lot of them. "I remember a lot of things very distinctly. I can't believe it's been eight years. It's like yesterday. You smell something and it reminds you of something from one of those days."
1:22:35	What kind of state were you in when it was time to return from Afghanistan? Hyper-vigilant. Very stressful all the time. Always the threat of a firefight. "Am I gonna blow up? Am I gonna blow up? Wears on you. You get irritable. We were there for just under nine months." Guys ready to go home near the end. Irritable, stressed. "But the funny thing is, during the handover, we didn't want to leave. This is why we joined the army. Didn't join for garrison, boot-polishing. We were doing everything we joined to do... I want to go home, but I don't want this to end. I want to stay."
1:24:45	How effective was OMLT model? Highly effective. How much do we do? How much do we let them do? Hopes ANA are better soldiers for the time he spent with them. "There's no solution we the Western world can provide for them. They need to do it themselves." Had to teach them logistical resupply, like battery resupply. "As long as we're there, we're handicapping them in their full development"
1:27:00	Bond with fellow Canadians? Very close then. Very comfortable. Not hierarchical. Everyone had defined role. Totally reliable, independent.



	<p>“Today, we don’t talk a lot, but a reunion would be like no time had passed.”</p>
1:28:30	<p>Decompression. Went back to KAF for briefings, then to Cyprus. Lots of guys just wanted to get home. Lectures were “worthless. Not helpful. Didn’t speak to the experience we went through.” But time to relax was valuable. Couldn’t scuba dive. Lots involved getting drunk, not what he wanted. A few went deep sea fishing. Watched sun set. Peaceful, time to unwind. Did get drunk a few times. Chance to work out the knots. “It took months to get the chemical rebalanced in your body. The human body regenerates through sleep, tossing and turning, nightmares, so four days is not sufficient. Cyprus was critical to keep an eye on guys. If you’d just dropped us in Edmonton, there would have been way more incidents of drunk driving etc.”</p>
1:31:55	<p>Reception in Edmonton? In Cyprus, staff stood and clapped. Good feeling. Same thing in Edmonton. Welcomed at LTF. Ribbons everywhere on highway. Positive community involvement.</p>
1:32:50	<p>Any anger? “I was angry. Not at army or my experience, but I was angry a lot of times for stupid reasons. A physiological reaction to stress. For dumbest things. Took a lot of time. Soul-searching. Talked to a few counselors. Had some conscientious issues, we killed a lot of people, some of them were kids. So you’ve got to work through that. Did I do a good thing? Did I do my mission? Did I cross the bounds, am I a bad person? You’ve got to work through that. Talk about it. It’s natural for soldiers who’ve been in combat. It’s OK to talk about it. If you don’t confront it, it just sits there. You’ve got to confront it and get over it.”</p>
1:34:55	<p>How helpful is military counseling? System is great, getting you in touch with counselors. “Didn’t think counselors really understood, using breathing exercises, mantras, but at least I talked to somebody.” Going to a civilian counselor—they didn’t understand the experience. Overall, really good. Military has come a long way, tons of resources.</p>
1:36:45	<p>How have these deployments affected/changed you as a person/soldier? Both highlights of professional development. Not a lot of time to train with Reserves. Wanes after being a platoon commander. Skill fade now. Personally, “the army has defined who I am as a person, no regrets or reservations about what I’ve done, wouldn’t trade for anything. Way beyond normal civilian career.”</p>
1:38:45	<p>“I could probably talk about this for hours” Any regrets about not joining Regular Force? Yes and no. Took on a new challenge on the civilian side and that’s going really well. Can’t do everything. Really happy with where I’m going. “Have noticed a big change in the army... a lot of people came out of Afghanistan going Reserves are capable and important, we’ve got to give them the tools and training, and that’s a big development. Compared to the nineties, the Cold War mentality. I experienced that shift. Things I hear, the future looks good for the</p>

Maj Simon Cox, 13 July 2016

	Reserves.” The us/them culture is still naturally there, but “ a lot of people changed their tune. Institutionally, ...we have a renewed role. We’re not there... the army has challenges... have to share what we have... but the intent is there and the attitude has changed. The first step to being successful.”
1:43:10	Like to deploy again, but not right now. New business and two year old daughter. But if Canada needed me to deploy... maybe in 5-10 years... the next chapter, the next deployment.