

Rough Transcript
CWO David Huedepohl, 20 Fd Regt (11 July 2016)

Deployment: Croatia 1993

Interviewer/Transcriber: LCol M.C. Vernon

Note: Quotations are not 100% verbatim

Timecode	Content
0:20	Joined in 1989 and deployed in 1993. Did construction jobs and heavy equipment operator position. Gave up as dead-end and went to Augustana University in Camrose as a mature student. Lots of free time at university compared to working. Partied too hard in first year and decided to take some time off. Went back to heavy equipment, then word came down about Yugoslavia tour opportunity. He didn't want to give up employment but it was getting colder outside on construction sites... "so I figured what the heck and put my name in". He had watched quite a bit about the region on the news. Felt he had a decent understanding of what was going on.
2:55	He remembers fighting in Sarajevo. Shot up and bombed. The former Olympic city. Almost comical in a black sort of way was the serial destruction of the Maslenica Bridge. No talk then of ethnic cleansing, but it was a civil war. He was working (then) towards a biology degree, which he later changed (post-tour) to political science.
4:30	Reaction? Some university friends "thought I was insane. Typical for a liberal arts university, though a couple other students were retired Patricias who supported me". Family reaction was mixed. Two uncles served in first Gulf War and were still in military. One retired after 30 years as a division sergeant major in Texas. So he had support there, but his mother didn't want him to go, didn't even want him in the army. Overall, however, quite a bit of support.
6:10	Not really looking for anything. Had been a reservist then for 3-4 years. He's a gunner, so this is not quite leaving comfort zone, but a secondary duty (the infantry aspect). Wanted to prove he could do that as well. "Why did I get into this? Why did I join the Reserves if I'm not prepared to go and do this?... I'm young and don't have family to hold me down. That's probably the main reason. Not looking for anything per se."
7:50	Training? Started out with pre-selection camps in Calgary and Edmonton, a two-week period. To make sure no one got to Winnipeg and had a heart attack. To confirm basic skill sets. Didn't know many people in other units, so this was a good opportunity to do that. It covered basic infantry skills, first aid, fitness. Once they made it through, went to 2 PPCLI in January 1993 to do their workup training in Winnipeg. It was very well done, the integration of a large number of reservists within the battalion. Most were welcoming. Training

	designed for active combat operation, along with peacekeeping. Full-spectrum warfighting. Very valuable and effective training prepared them well. He did first aid four times in total. Learned to administer IVs—"quite fun"
11:00	Were going to deploy to Yugoslavia in summer. In order to acclimatize/prepare, the battalion did its actual field training in Fort Ord, California, beginning in February 1993. Found out the base was shut down a bit later. This was highlight of his pre-training. Austere living conditions. Bivouac site looked like a cattle stockade. Built bivs inside the stockade. It rained a lot. Wasn't quite as bad as World War One, but "but we did quite a bit of trenching to keep the biv site dry." Training plan was very good: pairs leading up to company level assaults. "I've never had to do an ammo declaration that long after we were done." An entirely new experience to conduct infantry training at that level (artillery are usually more dispersed than an infantry battalion in the field.)
14:15	Regular/Reserve then? His prior experience had been very much "us and them, the separation between the low budget Mo and the Regular Force. We'd been looked at as the third class army. So I thought this might be a complete shit show. Do I really want to be a pariah? This crossed my mind. But to my surprise, it was welcomed that we got as integrated as we did. Definitely a very good reception."
15:45	Mix? In his company, up to 40% reservists. Vast majority of section members. Majority of leadership positions were Regular Force. 3 Platoon Comd was a reservist, and there were others in the company headquarters, including the operations officer. Not positive about the number, but a very large percentage. Actual number, couldn't say, but significant.
17:10	Expectations? "What I expected and what we actually encountered were very similar. Had heard about Cyprus and didn't expect that. Having watched news, I expected it to be busy. It didn't materialize immediately on our arrival. Didn't expect mess dinners or having to count ammunition as they did in Cyprus."
18:45	First impressions? Hit the ground around April 5, 1993. First thought: "We're in a warm country but it's bloody cold here!" Bussed from Zagreb to Camp Pollum where they drew weapons and frag vests. Outside Zagreb, noticed devastation. "In rural Alberta you don't normally pass a bunch of machine-gunned vehicles in the ditch. So I guess we're in a shooting war. Or at least where one has recently been going on." In town of Pakrac, they were living in a bombed-out hotel with a new roof. "Definitely austere... we were living in a tent in the ballroom of the hotel because all the holes hadn't been plugged yet." There had been a significant amount of fighting there. Two or three houses completely destroyed, beside an untouched house. Strange, "like when a tornado rolls through town, creating complete devastation." It

	was a surreal experience. Expectations... "am I really here? I guess I am. One thing that sticks out is the scent, the smell. Like walking through an old, ruined building. Must, mould, rotting garbage. A very eclectic number of smells all jammed together."
23:00	Flashbacks? Definitely, scents trigger memories. Certain types of things he avoids due to associations. "My first couple years after coming back were not the greatest when it comes to dealing with things."
24:00	Daily routine? In 2 Section they ran "the hot dog stand", the guardhouse outside company headquarters. Running patrols and sitting in observations posts. Fair amount of patrolling. The one thing ..."holy cow, we had no maps. We were using Michelin gas station maps. No grid marks. It took two months to get maps... but Michelin roadmaps, still better than nothing. Kind of surprising." The technology was not available then, like it is today, to print custom maps using Google Maps. Had to order maps from specialists, and it didn't happen over night. It makes sense in retrospect, but a heads-up would have been nice.
26:40	Equipment? Adequate at the time. Pretty much frontline Canadian military: M113 APC, Iltis, 5/4 transport. Used C7A1 with C79 sight. Thermal sights too, basically brand new. Scramble to get people trained on them. Kitted out as well as they could be. But not integrated battle group with artillery or armoured support. Had a mortar platoon, however. Basically a mechanized infantry battle group. Moved from Sector West to Sector South mid-tour. He was on leave at the time. "I get back and they're packing up the company area in Pakrac." In Sector South, reading memoirs and histories after the fact, he learned the political decisions behind the move. "This put the battalion behind the eight ball." In his opinion, it was not the smartest move, due to lack of resources.
30:20	Details? One of the big issues was getting TOW missiles for TOW Under Armour platoon. There were a lot of issues with moving the missiles. Both sides thought they might be getting to the other side, he's not sure why. He was surprised to see T54/55 tanks observing their move in trucks. Platoons got split up and spread around various observation posts, including overlooking the Maslenica Bridge, "surrounded by Serb forces." Stationed in a platoon house near town of Obrovac, with a wrecked castle in the vicinity. When stuff happened in the Medak Pocket, "we knew something was going on" due to increased firing and shelling in the are. "Blind artillery fire isn't really effective." They didn't know a lot about what was happening, other than a major operation underway and Canadian troops under fire. Then it petered out, with little information. He didn't find out details until later, while driving other soldiers who were heading home to Canada. A friend in Charlie Company filled him in. The activity he'd endured in September

	then made more sense. Passage of info had been minimal.
34:45	Medak reaction? No mention of ethnic cleansing at the time. Troops sent in who then came under fire. His friend was messed up then and for years after the fact. Didn't find out more until years later. Grumbling, rumours, but no facts for nearly 10 years. "Most people in the army didn't know anything about it. Holy cow. Surprise! We're not just out here looking great in our blue helmets."
36:20	He didn't think too much about the lack of recognition at that time. Integration: left 5 October and was in his living room 72 hours later. Land in Winnipeg, turn in kit, a few night's sleep, chili supper at section 2IC's house, then gone. Got a picture and a plaque. "How we came back was completely wrong, but for the time... operational stress wasn't really on the radar... When it comes to operational stress and PTSD, we were one of the research pilot programs. Got half inch thick booklets with thousands of questions. Don't know the outcome. Got another one or two after coming back. Didn't know the results." Compared to Afghanistan and how troops were brought back, this was result of lessons from the early 90s in Yugoslavia. "In hindsight, what the hell are you doing taking guys from a combat zone and sending them back to their jobs at Macs or university. Which explains why my first years back weren't peaceful existence. For quite a few guys, it was a serious problem."
40:00	Mood on return? Glad to be back. Mom picked him up. "You need to take me to a 24-hour convenience store, cause I need a Slurpee!" Didn't think he had any issues. In hindsight, with a more mature outlook, he sees it differently. Then, didn't seem like there was anything to worry about. Literally back at work at mobile gravel crushing company by 14 October. First indicator that things weren't well was working in unpaved work area. "I turn off the paved highway, get down 300 metres and I freeze. I had to sit there for half an hour. Holy fuck. There are no mines. You can drive." It makes sense after spending six months worried about mines. Won't adjust in a heartbeat. Just went on with his business. "A lot was stupid male pride. I can deal with this. Move on. Fight your way through it."
43:15	What other indicators? Doing a threat analysis no matter where he was—urban area, country. "There could be bad guys there, there could be an ambush there..." He didn't think it was per se abnormal. It should have been a trigger. "Hey, this isn't really normal. Normal people don't do this. People who are stable don't wander around and view their entire environment like a potential threat."
44:50	Relations? Friendships didn't overly change. Never had a large circle of friends. "My circle of friends back then is pretty much circle of friends now. Lots of acquaintances though." Since he hasn't driven them all off, "I think it's gone pretty well."
46:00	Contact with other vets? Fairly minimal for a fair number of years. A

	few in Calgary, in contact via letter and phone back then. He was in 78 Field Battery and no one there had deployed with him. It helped that one sergeant in battery had been on Op HARMONY Roto 1, the people they'd replaced. So he wasn't completely at loose ends due to continued service. Maybe 15 years later, mid-2000s, they put together a company reunion at Junior Ranks mess in Red Deer. A little last-minute. Got 18-19 people who could make it. Many were still in, but deployed elsewhere and unavailable. Now he knows about those soldiers from A Company, 2 PPCLI, via Facebook. "It was a significant period of my life and I want to keep in contact."
49:00	Reintegration? Don't need to have gone to Cyprus, but it would have been nice to remain longer with battalion "prior to being cut loose. Don't blame the battalion. It was the army culture at the time...It wasn't done through any nefarious plan." What they learned from those tours helped people understand what not to do in Afghanistan. Would have helped to get people back to peacetime battalion routine, "probably would have helped quite a few guys."
51:10	Who was most affected? People that suffered were the reservists per se, "maybe those who came from a unit that sent just one guy. Like one Rocky Mountain Ranger who returned home to middle of nowhere with no one to talk to. At least there were other Calgary Highlanders, or for those in larger centres. You had someone to shoot the shit with in the mess. Harder for guys who didn't have someone else to talk to." Can't say there weren't Regular Force with same problems. "PTSD is a strange thing, some guys affected by things others might think are insignificant... There's no rule book."
53:45	Memorable day/incident? "Everybody remembers different things. Someone will tell a story, I don't remember. Things you remember, good and bad, it's interesting what they remember. Whether they choose to remember." Good memories: going on leave, getting away for 72 hours. One thing that stands out: Platoon and section commanders all disappeared for the day. Everyone else got sent across to Serb side of Pakrac. Big hole in the driveway as they exhumed bodies buried there. A group of four people killed in the fighting. They'd been killed by grenades while sitting in their living room. They were tasked to repatriate the bodies to the Serb side. His first close encounter with atrocity. These were non-combatants, in mid-60s (one couple). No reason for them to be killed or disposed of in this manner. UNCIVPOL were there, taking photos. Expects this info was sent to Hague for investigation. Definitely a manner that's extremely vivid and hasn't changed. And why he "can't stand the smell of pig barns and sour milk. Pretty much the smell of a decaying human body."
57:55	Hardest part of being in a blue helmet between the opposing sides? "The hardest part was seeing things we could do to make things better,

	but we weren't allowed to." Such as seeing UNHCR convoys loaded with food that pass through your town but never stop. "Why are you there if you're not there to help? Questions like that." As a result, he changed his university major to political science to answer such questions
60:00	Leave centres? He made it to two. One was Opaca on the Adriatic, a holiday resort. Nice hotels along the sea. Fresh seafood. Not much nightlife per se. The inflationary rate was huge, 3000% and then 30,000% and they were paid in Deutschmarks, so their money went far. Then leave centre moved to Belakon Lake in Hungary because Croats were going to use Opaca for their own leave centre. Belakon was originally a Roman spa town/leave centre with hot springs. It had a nightlife that never shut down. Not surreal. A break, but not really. You got away, but you didn't. One night at 3 am he wrote a letter to a friend, who dug it out a few years ago. Looking back, "There is something seriously wrong with this guy. He's got some issues!"
1:04:00	Blowing off steam? Alcohol policy was "drink what you want, be responsible, but if I bug you out and you aren't in the tracks with your weapon on time, you're going to jail. Be an adult. Don't get to the point where you can't function." They had a weight pit. So if you weren't on duty, you could work out. How effective? He only remembers one alcohol-related incident in Sector South. "Treat them like adults and they'll act like adults."
1;06:00	How did it change you? As a soldier, it drilled home the importance of teamwork, knowing your job, the jobs of people around you, and gave him sound building blocks for later in his career. Amateurs study tactics but professionals study logistics. You need the tail or else the guys in the pointy end will only be useful for a short time. The importance of all-arms cooperation and a greater appreciation for the various trades—engineers, logistics, bin rats. It set him on a learning path. If it didn't serve a function as a trade, we wouldn't have it. "As a private you look up at sergeants and think I can't wait to be one of them, they don't do ANYTHING. Then you find out they work even harder, and that bomber is the best rank."
1:09:20	Regrets? "Zero regrets. No ulterior motives. One of the reasons I joined was to do stuff like that. So, zero regrets." They were offered direct entry contracts at the end. He wonders what his life would be like if he'd joined the Regular Force. The next summer he did his leadership course in Wainwright and met former members of 2 PPCLI who said they missed his cohort. "It was nice to know we weren't just a bunch of guys who showed up and then were gone. That we were missed."
1:11:40	If he'd taken it, he would have been out of the army by 2007 and probably wouldn't have been a CWO, due to a Crohn's Disease diagnosis. He works with some people who were released from the CF for the same reason. Probably would have had a few more tours if he'd

	stay in. Would have been a civilian by 2007.
1:13:00	Other tours? He wanted to go on Task Force 1-08 to Afghanistan and was just starting the screening process when he was diagnosed with Crohn's.
1:13:45	He's seen a lot of people who've stayed in for a few years. He'd encourage anyone to join, if only for a short time. What people can take away from the experience is things that will assist them in the civilian world. It makes them greater citizens. More understanding of the importance of living in a democracy with a social contract. They will be part of a select fraternity, organization. They make a contribution not everyone is capable of doing, or it's just not their bag. Most former soldiers don't miss an election; they vote. Not only do we get all these nice things from living in a democracy, but we have the responsibility to get involved. "It's a dual existence: you're a civilian, but you're not. You moonlight as a serving member of the armed forces." You get both perspectives. He works for Federal Corrections. Many coworkers are in their mid-20s and interested in the Reserve. You'll learn a lot about yourself as a human being. It will improve every other aspect of your life.
1:18:20	How are Afghan vets doing, relative to his generation? "Honestly, I think they are doing a lot better, though they still have issues. But the understanding of issues and the resources that are there, are much better. Back in the early 90s it was just 'shut up and soldier on'. It wasn't what can we do for you, it was what have you done for us lately." At the end of the day, you have to acknowledge you have a problem and get help. If you don't, you're no better off. "But now there's an acceptance we send people off, they do bad things, they see bad things, and that affects them." It's better now, but not perfect. Re-evaluating programs is necessary. We've deployed a lot of people in the past 15 years. PTSD from Yugo: some guys had problems right away, and others 10-20 years later. "We're seeing a precursor of what's going to happen in 10 years from now." Twenty years from now we're going to see a greater number.
	Additional visuals desired: --copy of the letter he wrote his buddy from the leave centre at 3 am?