

**Rough Transcript**  
**LCol Chris Hunt, LdSH/KOCR (12 July 2016)**

**Deployment(s):** Kosovo 1999, Afghanistan 2006

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

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

<b>Timecode</b>	<b>Content</b>
0:15	<p>Reaction to Kosovo? He was a recce troop leader with the Strathconas. Got the word in February 1999. They went from training 3 PPCLI to deploying themselves, with an engineer squadron. They conducted a robust series of ranges. Used brand-new Coyote vehicles. Loaded them on trains to Montreal, then via ship to Greece. After some theatre mission specific training, they departed in May. It was his first year of troop leading. "I couldn't have asked for anything better." Some personnel changes prior to departure.</p> <p><i>"The road move was a couple of hundred kilometres from the port in Greece. And things happened very quickly. When we first got into Macedonia the whole squadron pulled into a civilian gas station and fuelled up. If I remember right, the squadron 2IC [second-in-command] at the time was saying that he'd been given 60,000 Deutschmarks from the Canadian task force logistics staff to pay for that refuelling at that time."</i></p> <p><i>"So we all proceeded through there. We went into our assembly area. I think we were only in there for about 24 hours and the ceasefire agreement had been signed at that point. Through the road move north we didn't know if we were going to have to force our entry into Kosovo or if we'd be going in to enforce a peace agreement. We were prepared for either. As it turns out, and quite thankfully, it was to enforce a peace agreement that had been signed at that point, or ceasefire agreement."</i></p> <p><i>"So we quickly connected with some of the allied battle groups there, and we were working with a British armoured battle group. My troop was detached from the squadron and attached to this battle group. Not under direct command, but more for administrative, order of march purposes. We connected with them, spent a night in an assembly area with them as part of this large British battle group. There were other battle groups that were close by: other British battle groups plus Germans, French. Basically there was over a division that were ready to roll across the border at that point."</i></p> <p><i>"The next morning we received our orders and we rolled out. I believe it was June 3<sup>rd</sup> when we crossed the border into Kosovo. It was a massive road move operation timed down to the minute. As we were proceeding</i></p>

	<p><i>through Skopje, the capital, and then between Skopje and the border with Kosovo, we passed tens of thousands of Albanian refugees from Kosovo and the camps and they lined the highway and were cheering, 'NATO, NATO...' as we were proceeding towards the border. So it was a very powerful moment. It reminded me of the pictures you saw from the Second World War of towns being liberated, and the kind of reception. So it pumped us up and made us feel like we were doing something important."</i></p> <p><i>"We didn't know what to expect when we crossed the border or how operations would proceed over the next few days. The Serbian Army was still completely intact within Kosovo..."</i></p> <p><i>"My troop were the first conventional Canadian troops to cross into Kosovo as part of the British battle group, which I believe at the time were the King's Royal Hussars, if I remember correctly. What struck me crossing the border and pushing down the main highway was just the difficulty of the terrain. It was a 20-kilometre long defile, basically a mountain valley with almost two dozen major bridges and major tunnels over the space of that 20 kilometres. Had we been required to fight our way into Kosovo, in hindsight I believe it would have taken several months or at least several weeks, and been very costly in terms of casualties. The terrain was ideal for the defence and I was quite happy that we were able to roll through that defile without any problems. A few hours before we started that march up the main highway, one of the other British brigades which comprised of the Paras [the Parachute Regiment] and the Gurkhas had done airmobile landings all up and down that defile and had secured the bridges and the tunnels and ensured that we weren't going to have problems as we were rolling north. Nevertheless, had the Serbian Army chosen to oppose the entry into Kosovo, it would have been a very difficult battle to get our way in there..."</i></p> <p><i>"Yet at the same time we were surrounded by thousands of soldiers, hundreds of armoured vehicles. The day we entered Kosovo it reminded me of scenes out of that movie <b>A Bridge Too Far</b>, when you see the massive armoured columns rolling. It was like that. And at the same time, there were squadrons of heavy lift helicopters taking Gurkhas and Paras ahead of us to secure the route. And there were literally squadrons of fighter bombers flying over top of us to provide that top cover. So the amount of military force being applied, you felt like you were part of a massive operation and there was a confidence that came with that as well."</i></p>
7:50	What precipitated this? The year prior to deploying, he'd only heard 'Kosovo' once or twice in the news. The situation between the Serbs

	<p>and Albanians in Kosovo worsened. It broke into open conflict in the fall of 1999 [1998]. The Serbian Army was fully engaged in combat operations against the Kosovo Liberation Army (Albanians). Families forced to leave, or opted to leave. Over a million fled into neighbouring countries. This was creating regional tensions. There were concerns this would lead to a larger conflict. In the spring of 1999, NATO launched an air campaign against Serbia to compel it to cease operations in Kosovo. Serbia and Kosovo were targeted. "What became evident to us was the ineffectiveness of the air strikes against tactical forces. Serbs were well-trained mechanized force, adept at hiding from air force. They employed good deception measures, using plywood tanks with fake thermal signatures. They'd paint bridges blue where the water ran underneath, then create a fake bridge upstream from plastic tarps. All techniques developed by the Russians. They were well-trained." His first night, three kilometres south of Pristina, they went into a troop hide. That night, two Serbian tank battalions withdrew past their positions, each with over 50 tanks. "We counted them. Basically their full complement, and that was after three months of bombing in Kosovo. And from news reports at the time the air force had been very optimistic about the effectiveness of their campaign against the ground forces there."</p>
<p>13:50</p>	<p>Were they doing workup training during the air war? Yes, including some TMST on history, language and combat first aid, then on leave. They watched with interest, unsure what the nature of their own deployment would be. As they were boarding planes, they began hearing ceasefire would be signed.</p>
<p>14:45</p>	<p>Thoughts about possible war with Serbs? "I was ready for it. We expected to see a similar campaign as to what unfolded in Persian Gulf War, through air campaign in Bosnia. Thought our likely role would be to secure the border while air campaign ramped up to attrit the Serbian forces. Doctrine put more emphasis on air power. The 2003 Iraq War put more emphasis on simultaneous air-ground manoeuvre. That concept wasn't the thinking in 1999. We didn't expect a forced entry to be a quick thing, if needed."</p>
<p>16:45</p>	<p>No real anxiety? There wasn't time for it. Things were happening so quickly, so much to do. No time to ponder the larger strategy. At same time, they were surrounded by thousands of soldiers and hundreds of armoured vehicles. "The day we entered Kosovo, it reminded me of scenes in that movie A Bridge Too Far, when you see the massive armoured columns rolling. At the same time there were squadrons of heavy lift helicopters taking Paras and Gurkhas to secure the route, and there were literally squadrons of fighter bombers flying over us to provide that top cover. So the amount of military force being applied... you felt you were part of a massive military operation and there was a confidence that came with that as well."</p>

<p>18:05</p>	<p>Physical state of Kosovo? It varied village to village. All the windows were broken or destroyed. "There wasn't an intact window anywhere in the place." The Serbs had 40,000 troops in the province and it took them several weeks to leave. There was some fighting between them and the KLA. "I developed an acute ear for the sounds of shelling. All your sense activate in a combat zone and you use them to protect your troops." They eventually redeployed to a small village near a mine. There was a Serbian tank company four kilometres away. They maintained surveillance on them. "I met with a Serbian tank commander and he looked like something from that movie Apocalypse Now. He was wearing a black US cavalry cowboy hat and a face mask that obscured his face as well. He was hiding his face for a reason. They weren't too happy we were there, but they tolerated it because they knew that had they engaged us, the amount of firepower that would have been applied would have wiped them out." NATO had robust rules of engagement at the time. Good communications, soldiers looked like they knew what they were doing and they had new kit. The air campaign in Serbia proper also helped. Serbs were actually quite disciplined. Incidents involved irregulars. "All it would have taken was a handful of isolated firefights to break out and things could have gotten ugly very quickly. So those first weeks were pretty precarious and we were lucky to come through it as cleanly as we did."</p>
<p>22:00</p>	<p>Following that period, there was the consolidation of security operations in Pristina and around the province. They did route reces, met up with Russians. There were a number of issues with the Russians, especially after the Canadian battle group [1 PPCLI] moved into position adjacent to them later on.</p>
<p>22:55</p>	<p>What kinds of incidents? Russian officers who'd get drunk and go into local villages and cause problems within the Canadian area of operations. They'd get picked up by Canadian patrols. Thefts. One issue on a personal level: He was employed in convoy operations, escorting villagers from their village to the city. Then the French would escort them home after work. After one patrol, he rolled by the Russian camp and another vehicle reported they had a man down. There wasn't an obvious place for fire to come from (open fields), so they increased speed and returned to the Canadian base. It was a 7.62mm rifle round that struck his helmet. The soldier received whiplash and was knocked unconscious. This happened within 2-3 kilometres of the Russian base. They have proficient snipers and it was wide open country. The only forensics confirmed it was a Warsaw Pact round. "I tend to think it came from the Russians."</p>
<p>26:15</p>	<p>Memorable moments? One month after the ceasefire, they entered Pristina and something didn't seem right. Not enough people on the street. The pattern of life was different. They came upon a large crowd in the centre of town, because the local leaders proclaimed 3 July as the</p>

	Liberation of Kosovo Day. It took them several hours to make their way through the happy crowds, holding up babies to be kissed. A memorable, historic moment.
28:00	During the tour they did every kind of recce task imaginable. Area, route, everything in the book. They saw massive progress over time. A month into the tour, the murder rate dropped to two per day in Kosovo, lower than Washington DC. His attitude grew more cynical as Albanians returned home and started to take reprisals against the Serbian minority. Their role switched to protecting the Serb civilians. "In Canada, history doesn't have the same meaning. A good thing. It allows us to move forward... It made me appreciate being Canadian, our respect for the rule of law, how we approach history. At the same time, I have hope. If the French and Germans can patch things up, then probably anyone can. But there's a lot of work required."
30:15	In terms of lessons learned, what was critical was robust rules of engagement, good training, hands not tied. Able to do the right thing. Convoy escorts were never attacked by KLA, but French were. "We were on our game at all times. On a halt, soldiers were alert with their weapons at the ready. Anyone considering engaging us knew we were not a soft target. I think it's critical for future operations that we put a high value on training and robust rules engagement because that will enable us to protect civilians and our soldiers."
31:30	Transition home? They were replaced by recce squadron from the Royal Canadian Dragoons, a two-week handover. Travelled through Macedonia to Greece and straight home. Did administration in Edmonton, just prior to Y2K, so their leave was restricted until after New Year's. He had six weeks of leave. A pretty smooth transition. They were fortunate to have had a very good tour. Had seen some conflict and felt they had done good work. Did not suffer casualties or encounter incidents that cause operational stress for others. The force package put into Kosovo was substantial: 50,000 NATO troops in a mountainous country 120 x 80 kilometres in size. "Basically a section of troops on every street corner and it allowed us to quickly exert control, put a lid on violence and stabilize it very quickly. It's in contrast to Afghanistan where you had a Canadian battle group of 1500 that had to deal with an area the size of Alberta. Boots on the ground are important and you need enough to change things quickly and for the better."
34:40	"That experience taught me a lot about leadership and gave me the confidence for what came later. To have that operational experience provided a strong foundation for the rest of my career. And when we're doing training, I feel like I can speak with authority to the troops about what needs to happen and why, going all the way back to when I was a troop leader in Kosovo."
35:20	His role in Afghanistan? It evolved. Originally with Task Force Aegis

	<p>HQ, G3 ISTAR-2, which means intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, reconnaissance. Basically coordination of the various sensors into the operational combat plan. The “2” meant he was second in command. He then became G3 ISTAR when his boss became the executive assistant to the brigade commander. He held this role through the predeployment training and for the first month in-theatre. It was a good predeployment cycle. He remembers the big exercise in Wainwright, thinking, “This is getting a bit ridiculous, the amount of incidents. There’s no way it will happen this way in theatre. And I can tell you they trained us that hard because some of the dark days in theatre were at least as difficult as what they threw at us on exercise. Three or more critical incidents happened simultaneously. That was actually common, well it happened frequently. The fact we trained so hard in Wainwright helped us deal with those situations. I just want to flag that.”</p>
<p>37:55</p>	<p>His first month in theatre he was still with the brigade headquarters, but one challenge was that it didn’t have that many integral sensors. Most were part of battle group or belonged to the Americans. Coordination meant working with a US air force officer. At the same time, the BG had a problem with its own staff capacity. So there was a reorganization of staff, that sent him to the BG to flesh out its ISTAR cell including Sperwer drones, Coyotes, recce troops. To ensure troops on the ground had access to other sensors to support their operations. His section did that for the remainder of its tour. He remained the S3 ISTAR until early May 2006. Then there was another reorg. The S3 Plans was made battle adjutant to the CO [LCol Hope], and Hunt was moved into S3 Plans. He planned two dozen operations, from a platoon airmobile raid up to battle group attacks involving all arms. “Professionally, it was a rewarding experience, but it was a tough tour. We lost 16 killed, dozens wounded. There was a lot of hard-fought battles. I took my duties extremely seriously. The BG HQ worked very well together.” He was responsible for things happening 48 hours out. He’d work from S3 and CO’s direction, if he could get some of his valuable time. “It was an intense time. The BG transitioned from low level counterinsurgency to full-out combat operations, the precursor to Op MEDUSA. Professionally-rewarding, pretty tough personally, being part of that battle group and seeing some of those losses happen. And tough on the home front. I was married by this time and when I deployed my oldest daughter was 11 months old, and 18 months when I redeployed. Missed her first birthday, other milestones. Watching what was happening around us, it’s easy to think about home. A couple times I was on the phone with my wife during a rocket attack when the sirens are blaring and that creates a stress of its own.”</p>
<p>42:40</p>	<p>“I had it easy being in BG HQ at KAF, compared to troops who were out in the field on operations for weeks at a time. We took the</p>

	responsibility of planning operations very seriously because we had the time to think, knew we were better-rested, and weren't under the stress they were under. We were obligated to do everything we could to put the plans in place to help them be successful at the front. That's how I viewed things and that's what I imparted on the staff."
43:15	Did he have to simplify plans to make them easier for tired soldiers to execute? No. Canadian soldiers are trained well and hard. They're used to being tired and having lack of sleep. Used to using battle drills and standard operating procedures. As they're experienced and used to working together, there's less thinking required. They didn't tone down the plans, but simplicity is a principle of war, of planning. If it made more sense to keep it simple to ensure success, they would do that.
45:20	Lessons learned about safe distances? At the Plans level, they still worked off general direction... he didn't feel constrained by them. There were some issues that arose. The 3 July battle in Pashmul raised some issues, between commanders and artillery coordinators. He wasn't directly involved, however, and doesn't want to comment. It's been captured in after action reports.
46:40	Memorable day? The 3 July battle of Pashmul. "We had planned an operation in that vicinity but the deliberate operation was more limited in scope. Several days prior, the CO got some intelligence there was a high value Taliban target in the area, so it shifted from being a deliberate operation to more of a hasty attack. In the course of this, a large battle broke out as they were trying to get to the White School in Pashmul, where they believed the HVT was. It was a well-prepared defensive position and Recce Platoon came in danger of being cut off. Charlie Company pushed forward to help extract them, as Bravo Company came in from the north. The CO was forward, directing the battle, doing all he could to get Recce out and restore the situation. Logistics became an issue and the convoy that had been sent forward to bring supplies and extract damaged LAVs, it was attacked by a suicide bomber. One of the crew commanders, Lt Thorlakson, engaged the suicide bomber with a C6 and triggered the detonation. But it was in the middle of a village market and 22 civilians were killed. It was an absolutely horrendous battle. There were 12 wounded and four killed that day in the Canadian BG. And that was the week before our handover with the RCR BG. My understanding is that when they launched Op MEDUSA, it was essentially the same attack. And that one also went badly. That was tough to hear as well."
49:45	His role in planning the Pashmul attack? The operation that had been planned was three kilometres to the northeast, designed to clear a belt south of the main highway to the river. It was designed to have a useful operational effect to secure the highway and prevent attacks on logistics convoys. But they were concerned about getting stuck in

	<p>villages. Situation changed with the new intelligence about the enemy leaders. “The CO made a call and that hard-fought battle resulted. That night, the BG was very shakey in morale, because there’d been significant casualties. And I’ll credit LCol Ian Hope for restoring it. He went around and he talked to each of the sub-units. He talked to BG HQ, and he said, ‘If you’re looking for someone to blame, blame me. These were my calls. I take full responsibility for everything that happened that day. And it was probably one of the best examples of personal leadership I’ve seen. And that generated a lot of respect for Colonel Hope from me after that, and I saw the battle group’s morale almost wavering before that, and he restored resolve by taking that personal responsibility.”</p>
52:00	<p>What was it like in the HQ that day, listening to the execution? “It was hectic, controlled chaos. So much happening, as we tried to get a handle on it and support the troops. But I was very impressed that every cell was doing what they could do to support those troops to get them the resources they needed. Coordinating medevac, engineer resources, everyone was working as a team to help turn that battle around.”</p>
53:00	<p>“That battle reinforced, what had already been a recommendation: We need tanks on the battlefield. The mobility and firepower... that battle that lasted all day, would have been over in an hour and in our favour if there had been tanks.”</p>
53:40	<p>Transition this time? “It was more difficult for sure. Your family has had to adjust to not having you there. It takes some time to get back in with the family, to align routines and roles. It took us months, to be quite honest. There were a bunch of things that happened after the tour in terms of my postings and career choices that led me to leave the Regular Force and join the Reserves. I wanted to pass on my experience and participate in the army, but I needed to make sure that my family was placed higher in that priority list. My wife was a teacher in Edmonton. Had we been posted, there would have been a direct financial hit. There are lots of family issues that the Regular Army needs to look at and figure out how to better balance what a modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century family is, compared to what was the norm a couple decades ago.”</p>
	<p><b>Additional details?</b></p>