

Rough Transcript
MCpl (Ret'd) Ralph Scholz, 41 Svc Bn/41 Sig Regt (29 July 2016)

Deployment(s): Cyprus, Cambodia, Bosnia, Afghanistan

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Note: Quotations are not 100% verbatim

Timecode	Content
0:15	He volunteered for Cyprus after transferring from the artillery to RCEME. Plane leaves tomorrow at eight o'clock! He'd already been to West Germany several times. It was an adventure. Last-minute opportunity. "Hoo-ah, let's go." He was with 38 Technical Squadron at the time, which became 15 Svc Bn Maintenance Company. He had no work up training. He served with 8th Canadian Hussars in Cyprus.
1:55	His family was very surprised. He was living with his mother at the time, "just a kid". She was a little worried, but his father had been in the military. He was expecting something similar to his experiences in Germany. But this was a six-month peacekeeping tour. "There were a few surprises." He was seeking adventure. He'd joined the military for travel time, to see the world. He knew he'd get sufficient time off to see parts of the world he'd never see otherwise. To see what the world's really like.
3:45	It was quite rare at that time for reservists to serve in Cyprus. There were only three on the island at that time: a medic, a trooper, and him. "Stepping off the plane was like walking into a blast furnace." He left Canada in April. They flew in a Buffalo to Cyprus itself. It took several weeks to get used to the heat.
4:55	First impressions: rocky, deserty kind of thing. Didn't know what to expect. Narrow, primitive roads. Old vehicles. Culture shock. Didn't see vineyards. Thought he was entering a desert. But it became more normal. They stayed in former Finnish garrison outside Nicosia. Accommodations were far better than he expected for the time. Expected tents! These were stone buildings with metal roofs and individual rooms--unusual for the time. Garage was like a giant carport. Weather always warm and hot. Turned out quite nice. Definitely one of his better tours.
6:55	The Regular Force attitude towards Reserve was somewhat negative. "Always had to be at your best at all times. To Reg Force soldier at the time, the Reserves were basically a waste of money. And in a way it was true because Reserve training at the time wasn't anywhere near what it is today. I was deployed on extremely short notice. As a corporal at the time, he'd had two weeks of training in Borden at best. Reg Force expected a fully-trained corporal--two years'

	training! We just didn't have it. But we did our best and managed to pull it off."
8:30	Typical day? Get up, breakfast (quite good), like 9-5 job. Sometimes did vehicle recovery with a one-ton truck. Saw the countryside. Did first/second line work, replacing engines, transmissions. Wheeled vehicles only, not armour. Another unit--PPCLI?--did the armour repairs. (Ferrets and M113 APCs). He thinks this was last place they were using Ferrets.
10:15	Memories? When he was on holidays, he was in good with the CO's driver and a medic. The former had special permission to go to north (Turkish) part of the island. Normally not allowed. So they saw the Kyrenia Pass with an old fortification from medieval times. He'd signed up for this kind of thing. Saw Kyrenia itself, where Turks came ashore in 1974 invasion. The castle was the highlight.
12:00	Tension? Definitely a lot of tension between Greeks and Turks. Most people were not allowed across the UN [Green] line. Literally two countries divided by no man's land with Greeks in south, Turks in the north. Canadians patrolled the middle.
12:45	Had a lot of civilians on the base--barbers, cleaners. Great people. Technically he wasn't allowed to cross to the north. He found people there about the same. Just different kinds of troops. Being caught in the middle, there were some places he simply couldn't go, which he'd never encountered before. A whole strip across the country. Unique. Went to Limassol and had to go through Turkish checkpoint. He was half-asleep when a young Turk pointed his rifle at his head. He was probably just 16. "He looked more scared than I was. I closed my eyes and went back to sleep." It was a normal run for him. Everything went fine.
15:30	How satisfying? Absolutely great. Highlight: 100-man honour guard when they received their medals, including Greek and Turkish generals at the event. Other nationalities too. It was fantastic. Highlight of the whole thing.
16:30	Homecoming? It changed his perspective on how things worked in the military. This was when he decided to make a full career of it and he switched to Regular Force. "I jumped in with both boots and took everything I could from it. I didn't want to be a part-timer any more. That was the turning point for me."
17:45	Reg Force deployments? Cambodia 1992. Government was non-existent at that time. Vietnam had been running it for a decade. But couldn't continue and pulled out. UN went in to put Cambodia on its feet. UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia. He was in 92nd Transport Company in 2-1/2 ton trucks outside Pnomh Penh. Definitely a culture shock to be in country that had no government infrastructure, absolute chaos, no road rules. After dark, it turned into a ghost town. People afraid of Khmer Rouge or bandits.

	Absolute culture shock: heat, animals. There was a museum dedicated to Khmer Rouge atrocities where they had torture chambers. Forgets the actual name. "A very sobering experience." There were the "killing fields" the movie was based on. A sobering experience. There was a stupa, a seven-level building filled with skulls of murdered people.
21:30	They lived in an abandoned trucking company, pretty ratty at first. Main goal was to make it habitable. They were the first Canadian troops there, no one else to set it up. Spiders everywhere. Mosquito nets over beds. Some put lizards inside their bedding to keep the bugs down. A lineman had to crawl into holes and crevices to emplace his wires. "I pitied the poor man." Garage was a tin roof.
23:00	It really wasn't that stressful. His CO was fantastic, doing everything he could to make life bearable. He wasn't afraid to get down and dirty, pushing a broom. That made a difference. "We had respect for that guy, and he respected us. It didn't matter if you were Reg or Reserve." He made sure they had time off to de-stress. To maintain good relations with locals. "We actually made a difference. In six months, it went from a ghost town at night to a vibrant, lively city. People weren't afraid to come out. You could see the change in a matter of months. That gave us a good feeling."
25:00	Memorable days/events? Seeing Angkor Wat, the main temple in northern Cambodia. CO arranged for several days to see it in two groups. Thousand-year old stone temple, floating on a raft of vegetation a thousand years ago. Absolutely stunning. Wow. History like you'd never see in a classroom.
26:15	Highlights for him are cultural, not normal workday events. To see ancient history of other cultures. He studied Angkor Wat before going. Read about Khmer kings, Angkor Tom too. To see it in reality was an education you'd never get in school.
27:45	He went to Bosnia--VK [Velika Kladusa]--with 3rd Canadian Support Group. The mission was to set up, take down and administer the changeover of different deployed groups. "We were the in-between guys administering the handovers." He went to Bosnia five times, anywhere from two weeks to a month each time. It amounted to quite a bit of time overall. He drove around the country as part of his job. By himself, using a map and relying on road signs. "Oh my God, am I going to make it?" He did make it okay, however. He got lucky. This was 2004-2007... after 9/11. We were also dealing with Afghanistan.
30:35	How many times to Afghanistan? He was there three times: Op APOLLO, Op ATHENA, and Op ARCHER. APOLLO was the first one, shortly after the four guys were killed. When they were returned to Canada, he was one of those sent in to shut the mission down. There for four months. Supposed to be just one month. But there was a lot

	of political finagling about where people were to go. Commander must have pulled his hair out. Got the job done. Got the kit back and cleaned up. Basically shut down Op APOLLO.
32:15	Impressions? Dry desert. How the people could make a living and build a city is beyond belief. Historically-speaking, at one time it was a garden spot of the world. Now it's an absolute desert. Sand like talcum powder. "Try to imagine: Go home, crank up your oven to 300 degrees and have someone throw talcum powder in your face. That's what Afghanistan is like." That people can live there, boggles the mind.
33:30	Technically, most dangerous place he went. For people who went off-base, outside the wire, they had to be full body armour, weapons. No other mission he'd been on was like that or needed that. Afghanistan, you needed that. They could come at you any time. IEDs were a constant threat. Americans were taking the brunt of it. Toward the end, Canadians were getting hit harder. Most dangerous mission he'd been on, but he didn't really have a reason to go off-base, so he was fortunate. Those who did, were in the thick of it.
35:15	End of career jitters? He never had second thoughts. He was ready to go back, right up until he reached his compulsory retirement age. If he'd got an extension to that date, he still would have been willing to go overseas.
36:15	Memorable day? One day in Bosnia, actually, when they were returning home. The plane they were on was the one that contained the four bodies of the soldiers killed in Afghanistan [2002]. "We basically escorted the bodies back to Canada. And that was a bit of a sobering experience. It wasn't directly Afghanistan, but it was related... the caskets were in the front. From Germany to Edmonton we came back with them."
37:30	Arrival in Edmonton? His group stayed on the plane, didn't interact. That would have been "a little gauche" because they weren't in the Afghanistan crowd. There was a bit of a ceremony, the first time he'd seen anything like a ramp ceremony. "That kind of thing does affect you."
38:30	Ramp ceremonies? The first he went to was during Op ARCHER, his second time in Afghanistan. A couple of Americans had been killed and were being repatriated. Most of the base lined the route as caskets paraded by. A very sombre occasion.
39:30	Effect of experiences? They made him more appreciative of history in general. You see things from a perspective tourists never can. The real deal. As a conflict evolves. Not like on the news, but with your own eyes. In Cambodia, Afghanistan. Little things, like the opening of Tim Hortons at KAF, and even Afghans loved the place. You appreciate different cultures and how people think.

40:50	One thing that got to him was the inukshuk built on Op APOLLO for the four soldiers killed. On Op ARCHER, he noticed it was missing. The base had changed. He asked what happened to it. Got blank looks. Apparently there was an accident and it was shoved in a back corner. By the end of his stint, it was repaired and back in place. Now it had its own cairn and he's heard it was eventually repatriated to Canada. You can have an effect, make changes. It's memories.
42:45	Miss it? "I absolutely miss it. Thought I'd retire and turn into a couch potato. But I'm busier now than ever. Miss it? Absolutely. Would go back in a second. Need to find other things to keep me busy."
43:30	Final thoughts? The military has changed so much since he joined up. Back in the 70s when he joined up, the Vietnam War was still going on. Soldiering was simpler. Nowadays it's more complicated. You need the peacekeeper and the warrior. You need both. In DESERT STORM you need warriors, but not in Cambodia. Need soldiers to teach people how to build a new country, not make noise and break things. Modern world is too complicated to have just one type of soldier.
45:15	How has Canadian soldier evolved? "Definitely a different guy these days. The old guard... don't belong in the military any more. Our mindsets are so last century, I don't think we could cut it any more. The job has gotten more complex, the threats have changed. Now it's terrorism. Can't tell enemy from friend. They dress in civilian dress. Don't know who's who till they put a gun to your head... Now you need a better-trained, smarter soldier, better-equipped and with more support. The world's changed and the military has to change with it."
47:15	How do Canadians compare to other countries' soldiers? "The Canadian soldier, one on one, is one of the best in the world. No question. Americans have more toys than anybody, but for the actual man in uniform we've got the best. The Australians too. Canadian is one of the best. It's our experience, the way we're trained, our general attitude towards the world. Not so nationalistic as some other countries. Canada doesn't do that. We have a lot more respect for other nations, even in the Third World. We have more respect for them than other countries do. In the modern world, it makes a difference."