

Rough Transcript
CWO Brian Talty, LdSH/SALH (18 July 2016)

Deployment(s): Cyprus 1988-89, Bosnia 1992, Bosnia 1997-98, Afghanistan 2004-05

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Note: Quotations are not 100% verbatim

Timecode	Content
0:25	Cyprus? The Turks and Greeks hadn't got along since the mid-60s. He was there in 88-89. The situation was still not good along the Green Zone. Grieving mothers looking for their children. We'd count items like barrels used along both sides. Did about two weeks of workup training, preceded by a lengthier exercise in Wainwright (Waincon). They had Rural Squadron and City Squadron, larger than normal squadrons. A good tour. Master corporals had the leeway to deal with problems and situations as they arose.
2:25	His attitude pre-deployment? Excited. Everyone was pumped and wanted to do it. "Being overseas is something you joined for. Staying in Canada is fine, but everyone waited to hear when they could go do something real. Larger/regimental tours at the time were Cyprus... Nobody wanted to be left behind."
3:40	Concerns about personal safety? We were concerned, maybe not like we should have been, but compared to nowadays it was a totally different world. Were very careful then, "put in between two people who literally hated one another, with a rifle, no body armour, and given the autonomy to calm them down. We were very good at it."
4:45	Work up training? "It's not for me, the soldier. Predeployment training is for the headquarters and the people who are bolted in. The best training I was ever on was in Wainwright in 1997 prior to Bosnia. Winnipeg flooded, we responded and by the time we returned to Wainwright we didn't need more training. We'd gelled."
6:00	First impressions of Cyprus? Exciting, foreign, hot. Got there in July. That's what we were looking for. Landed on the south side of the island and went up to Nicosia to draw weapons. Well-rehearsed, no surprises. He really enjoyed it.
7:00	Why were Canadians good at it? "We've got it: the perfect balance between citizen and soldier. Not too excitable. Being a Canadian makes you the umpire of the world. We've all played hockey and lost teeth somewhere in a parking lot. That pays dividends. I find Canadian soldiers much smarter than most."
8:00	Job? Troop sergeant in the city, plus officers' mess manager. In regimental headquarters.
8:40	Social calendar? The Officers' Mess in Wolseley Barracks was where

	official entertaining was done, where the CO was. Where they waved the Canadian flag. Receptions, cocktail parties, mess dinners. Invitations went out to other contingents to build relationships. British Sovereign Base Area in Akrotiri and [Dekalia?]. Some riots and uprisings happened there. Some killings that escalated tensions. A busy tour.
10:30	Thoughts as a sergeant at the time? Thought the social events were necessary. In Calgary or Cyprus, there was a need to do that. Ditto for Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Mess, inviting RCMP, other nations. "Everything we did was based on talking people out of doing something ridiculous... You never knew how Greek or Turkish Cypriots would react."
12:00	Memorable day/incident? Some great fun times. Militarily busy during the riots, "when you see people really on their game, firing on all cylinders, with leaders doing that they're supposed to do. You get excited about that. I certainly do." The day a Turkish soldier got shot. Calm reaction to riots. "Made me proud."
13:10	Return to Canada? They were ready to come home. "It was starting to get boring, routine. This guy's doing this again and you just want to slap him." He was on advance party and rear party. Coming home... you're anxious to get home... but after leave, "I missed everybody. Two whole weeks off, a week in garrison, then back to Wainwright for another Waincon."
14:50	"I cherish it. I look back on Cyprus fondly. Compared to the last three tours, it was a great time to be young. Exciting. Living the dream."
15:20	Early 90s? He was in the French armoured regiment, 12 RBC. He was sent to Calgary to teach on the militia concentration (Milcon). Everyone was following MGen Mackenzie and events in Sarajevo at the time. He listened to Strathcona talking about it, then returned to Quebec. Everyone thought it was over, but this changed quickly. They left for Gagetown to do 2-3 weeks of workup training. Painted their vehicles, the Cougars, white for a UN operation. To get 21 working, it tapped out the regiment. Quite hectic get immunizations done, gunnery training. He was disappointing to be going in with a C5 machine gun—disappointing—in a tank trainer, the Cougar—also disappointing. "We were going in with the crappiest machine gun we had. The 76mm gun was good. And a wheeled vehicle was appropriate." It didn't have the same feel of Cyprus. We just knew it would be different. T
18:50	They deployed in November, which was also hectic. Getting cold in Canada, made it hard to work off-road in the muck. Part of an RCR battle group. Normally RBC and RCR don't work together, so there was "a lot of making up relationships." Armoured squadron and engineer squadron were both French, with 2 RCR (English).
20:00	Personal safety concerns this time? "That was the unknown." He went to Cyprus single; this time he's married with one son and another son

	on the way. That was different. Leaving home took on a different context. "Leaving your family behind is also terrible. Heart-wrenching. And the older they got, the harder it was to leave."
21:25	Hard to be father in Croatia? "That was the worst. The big takeaway was how human beings can be to each other. That blew me away. And the children. Lots and lots of dead children. Mutilated children. And children who are carrying AK47s and pistols and they're pointing them at you and you're not sure if they're going to pull the trigger. You're not sure who they belong to. How do they view me? Terrible, terrible times."
22:05	First impressions? You knew there was a war going on. Bullet holes in Zagreb airport. Houses, cities on fire. You knew it wasn't going to be easy. Had to switch cities because their original choice, Banja Luka, was destroyed/on fire. They established their camp at Visoko instead, outside Sarajevo. He was a troop warrant for a recce troop. Seven cars. Doing vigilance patrols, escorting humanitarian aid or fuel for the one helicopter they had in Tuzla. Fuel came in through Split. Some UNHCR or NGO convoys from Germany, Britain, France. Vigilance patrols—they would surge out and based on the intelligence they'd received they would surge into a zone, if only to bear witness. "If we were there, maybe they would stop. Maybe they wouldn't. You'd get yourself right in the middle and see what you could do. We did a lot of that."
25:00	What was that like, between three warring sides? Cyprus had two sides, this had three. "Not even like a checkerboard. A maze." They could all be within a few kilometres of each other. "The dominant church or religious structure that remained standing told you who owned the town." Getting in the middle took some doing initially, didn't really understand what was going on. "Driver advance, get in there. They'd run away initially, but later they were so brazen they didn't care if you were watching or not. And that's hard to swallow, especially for the young guys."
26:25	Memorable incident? A small town on a mountain, Vitez. Nowhere Bosnia. Like a small alpine town. Went through big tunnels to get there. Went in early in the morning, gone from camp for days. Sun's breaking. Beautiful little town. Nothing had happened there. Wow, an oasis. Later that evening they went back through the town and there were bodies on the road, buildings burning. Sense of helplessness. Felt bad. Hard to get himself moving again. "Just felt so fucking hopeless. I don't look fondly on any of those events. More than half a year of my life watching all that. Super proud of my squadron and how we handled that, but it was tough."
28:10	Not the mess manager this time, but responsible as a troop WO? He was 29 at the time. Newly-promoted warrant officer, WSE'd in theatre. And working in his second language. "Being Canadian, I took the challenge to go to the French regiment. I do not regret any of that. One

	of the best times of my life with those guys. They're all looking at you, you're the old guy. 'Warrant, fix this.' I grew up fast. Certainly felt I changed. My ex-wife said I was completely different when I came home. More abrupt, decision-oriented. No longer fuzzy. We're going this way, no questions, that's what we're doing. And that's a skill I learned there. There was no second-guessing. You make a decision, then make it the best decision. Everyone survived in my troop, so I must have done something right."
30:30	Other issues coming home? "That's hard. I don't think any of us really handled it well and I don't think Canada was ready. We didn't laud our soldiers back then. Not as well received. They didn't like us like they do now. Came home under the cover of darkness. Your wife met you. Reception centre, disperse, go home. The rapidity with which we got back was phenomenal. I didn't really sleep, was really tired, so when I went to bed I was still there. Came back in May, then posted to Wainwright as an instructor. So, no friends who'd been there or who understood what I'd done. This was 1993, post-Somalia disbandment of the Airborne [Airborne was disbanded in 1995]. So where did the disgruntled Airborne sergeants go, but Wainwright. No jobs for them in battalions. Coming home from that tour was the worst. I was separated from everybody who meant anything to me and I couldn't talk to anybody out West. It wasn't until the western units started to rotate through that they began to figure out what I was talking about. I drank too much. It's what you do, is how I think we thought we were fixing the problem. Get drunk. It used to work, sort of, but not really the way to do anything. That was tough. Yeah. But what saved me, I think, was my children. Two little boys. Then my daughter was born. Another dynamic. You need both as a dad, to balance things out, make you realize what's important. Coming back from Bosnia that first time was really tough. It wasn't good."
34:30	Was this tour responsible for your subsequent divorce? It was the start. "Initially, 'you've changed.' Some of the core things don't change. You'll always remember rocket and mortar attacks, caught in an artillery barrage. Leading a food convoy people are trying to blow up. Super exciting, but it wears on you. We had no comms with home. My squadron had an excellent signals sergeant. He knew we would need the ham radio network: 'I love you, OVER.' And they would flick the switch so it would flow through. Gerry established his network of ham operators and set up a bare wire antenna, and he'd spend his whole night making it possible for guys to call their wives. An amazing guy. Only one satphone—the battle group commander's."
37:00	Anything more? "That was when I grew up. That period of time. The realization of how fallible I am. How strong and resilient you can be when you want to be. I saw those guys you thought would never make it, and they rose to the top. And the guys you thought were at the top

	and weren't, that was a big realization."
38:00	French/English comparison? "There's no difference. Not whatsoever. Great guys. I have nothing bad to say about any of them. Tons of time for them."
38:40	Third tour is Bosnia again, the NATO tour: This was in 1997-98. They were having an election that year. Present for the ballot collection. Had done something similar in Cyprus. Knew he wasn't going back to Visoko. He was the battle group Transport Warrant Officer [phone rings]
39:45	Getting guys over there, flight manifests, dealing with the air force. Resupplying camps, the shitter truck, ration delivery. All transport. Had a troop of 35 guys split between two camps, Zgon and Coralici. Transport Officer was the "mayor" of Zgon. Talty was in Coralici.
41:10	Impressions this time? Lots of the same burnt-out Bosnian buildings. Rooves are gone. Either empty or a renovation site. "If I went back, I'd have gone as a dentist or home renovation guy." Brickwork, tile rooves, asphalt shingles for the first time in Europe. "Saw a change in the people too. They were sick and tired of it and wanted to be left alone. No eye contact. Very good at seeing you but not seeing you. You were just part of the scenery."
42:50	Memorable times? Just really busy all the time, especially around the election. Snow in the mountains made it more challenging on the roads. "It's the soldiers that made the difference."
43:40	You get excited to go, almost like a different country. First time, everything's new and they're at war. Second time, it's post-war, with people shopping, there was hope.
44:25	Were Canada's efforts making a difference? Yes. "If it was going to be done properly, we were doing it. If they just wanted a military presence, others did it. Generally it was us or the Brits."
45:10	Returning home this time? Glad to be home with three children. He'd missed them the most.
45:30	Had communications improved? Had a phone call a week, 15 minutes, put your name on a list. He was usually back in camp at night to make calls. Limited himself to one a week. Wanted to leave time for younger soldiers.
46:15	Afghanistan 2004-2005. He was squadron sergeant major of Strathconas' recce squadron in Canada. His squadron was attached to Kabul multinational brigade, a NATO mission. Very multicultural. Canadians, include 5 Brigade units, were in their own camp, Camp Julian. Their role was to provide surveillance during the election, the first one, in which Karzai was first elected.
48:00	Security situation? Pretty tense. Taliban were everywhere. Feeling each other out phase, prior to the slugfest down south. Sparring, feeling each other out. His squadron surged out of the city. You could feel and see what was happening. Kept bad guys off balance. At least it

	could go on. A busy, awesome time.
49:15	First impressions? Being SM of a recce squadron is the best job in the world, the greatest job. Everyone's independent, 166 guys in squadron with a platoon from 2 PPCLI embedded, as well as signallers from the French army in order to link with the French up north of the city. Had a platoon of Slovenian special forces attached to the squadron, lots of electronic pieces—"all the assets you could want. Everyone was firing on all cylinders. Amazing. I could see myself in them, responding to various situations. Seeing guys come into their own, I was never happier. An excellent tour."
51:15	Most memorable day? Don't know. There's a lot I can remember. "I'm sure parts sucked, but I can't remember. Some really scary, hearts in your throat stuff. But not one thing I took away, other than the general feeling of satisfaction and pride. Can still remember all the young guy's faces. 'Sergeant major, what do I do?'"
52:45	Reserve augmentation on these tours? In Cyprus, there were quite a few. Two full troops of reservists, one in each squadron at the start. But that didn't work because they weren't all from one unit. So they broke up and redistributed everyone throughout the squadron. Then it worked much better. Not that they weren't liked, but that troop just didn't work. Once they were morphed, it worked fine. First Bosnia tour, they had one reservist master corporal. None in second tour and none in Afghanistan. Reservists didn't come in until subsequent tours.
54:45	Lessons or trends that stand out for you overall? "As much as everyone hated living in Wainwright for three months, we were really good at looking after ourselves: selecting hides, feeding ourselves, looking after our equipment, look after ourselves. We did it all by hand and did it all together. Post-Afghanistan, nobody seems to know how to live in the field or do their job and we seem to just fall into this FOB mentality where if the FOB's not set up, no one knows how to do it. We don't know how to administer ourselves any more at a lower level. I just realized the immersion heaters we used in those days don't exist any more for some safety reason. They were so versatile: you could set one up and everyone could have a hot wash in the middle of the night. A morale factor. You could get things happening by doing simple things. Get some soup. Now we seem to wait for someone to do something for us. We spend far too much time wishing we were American instead of just being Canadians, which is what we used to be. When we were Canadian we just did our own thing and looked after ourselves like we could do it as a small army. Pretending we're bigger than we really are... that's not the answer either. So the takeaway: We used to look after ourselves. Know your men. Promote their welfare. Doesn't come with one interview. You need to know them in order to employ them properly. Doesn't happen in a few months, getting ticks in boxes. We used to be good at this. I think we're getting back to it now. After

	Afghanistan, we forgot everything we learned before. Did that happen after the Second World War? When the warfighting mission ended, what did we do with that core of professionals back in the late 1940s to keep it professional. A few of those lessons we could probably apply now.
59:25	How are you dealing with Afghan vets' expectations? "There's that feeling that I've done my part and that's all I needed to be here for. You can't stop that. We're all adrenaline junkies. What's the next fix, thrill? There's only so many jump courses, mountain training. They want that feeling, but we're not in a war now. Why did you join in the first place? Just to go to Afghanistan... then you should leave. But who was that guy? What were you thinking you wanted? Need to do this in the smoking area, on coffee breaks etc. Not in an office. Be open. But don't lie to them. Canadians are good at figuring that out."
1:01:45	Any decompression after Afghanistan? "No. Four tours, no decompression. That's probably why I am the way I am, right? Probably could have used it, but never did it so I don't know."
1:02:10	Would several days in Cyprus have made a difference after your first Bosnia tour? Might have. "Just cause it was so crappy. We were all very tight any way and didn't want to go anywhere without each other. That probably would have been a good thing to do. You flew home and went back into the regiment for some half-days before you were let go. A psychiatrist spoke to us from a stage. 'Does anyone have any problems? No? Well if you do, here's my card.' No one said anything, but there were guys in that squadron who killed themselves, so obviously not everyone was OK. And the sergeant major who was the big dad, we didn't want to disappoint him with weakness. But you knew very well there were guys drinking that night, trying to deal with what was going on in their heads. We weren't ready. Canada wasn't ready. We're better at it now."
1:04:40	Final thoughts? "All four tours were over Christmas. I can tell you exactly what I did then, whereas Christmases at home all blend together. But those years, it's clear to me, were the best time of my life. Yeah."
	Additional details?