

Jacques Rioux's story

1993-94 - Operation Cavalier with CANBAT 2 Battle Group in Visoko



*Picture of the compound at the CANBAT 2 Battle Group camp in Visoko – transport section is parked along wall at extremity of the camp
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

Authors' note

The principal authors of this text, aside from the individual recounting the story, are John Cochrane, a former member of the unit, and his niece Marina Tinkler, a Concordia University literature student. This record of events was prepared in 2015, many years after they occurred. The authors prepared this record principally using information obtained during interviews with the individuals involved. Where possible, this information was corroborated through interviews with others and a review of pictures and other publicly available information. The record presents the events as the individuals involved remember them several years after they occurred.

Jacques Rioux's story

Corporal Jacques Rioux was deployed to Bosnia from November 3rd, 1993 to May 5th, 1994. In Bosnia he worked as a driver of a 2½-ton truck in the regimental transport section of the *12^e Régiment blindé du Canada (12 RBC)*.

Preparation for the mission

After Jacques volunteered for duty in Bosnia, he was sent to Canadian Forces Base Valcartier in January of 1993 where he was attached to the 12 RBC transport section to start his preparatory training. His training group practiced driving, vehicle maintenance and minor repairs, the towing of broken down vehicles, and the actions to be taken if they had to abandon a vehicle. They also practiced working on convoys, on what to do if the convoy was ambushed, and on how to deal with locals. He still remembers attending a lecture warning the students to avoid undertaking amorous relations with the local women. He was still young and remembers being slightly embarrassed by this type of discussion. At the end of the training period, the transport section participated in a final confirmatory exercise where the course participants were asked to set up a mock camp. During this exercise, some soldiers who had previously served in Bosnia were asked to play the role of the belligerents. To the surprise of Jacques and his colleagues, these belligerents snuck up whenever the convoys were stopped and stole any piece of equipment that was not secured, including some jerry cans of gas that had been strapped to the sides of the vehicles. Once he was in Bosnia, Jacques realized just how realistic this roleplaying was.

Deployment to Bosnia

Jacques was deployed to Bosnia with the other elements of the 12 RBC that were rotating into the field and taking up the role of Canadian Battle Group 2 (CANBAT 2). CANBAT 2 was already established as the 2nd Canadian Battle Group operating in the Balkans. The first battle group (CANBAT 1) was operating in Croatia. Various units would rotate into CANBAT 1 and 2 for periods of approximately six months. On this rotation, CANBAT 2 was a battle group based on the 12 RBC. It included an infantry company from the *Royal 22^e Régiment (R22eR)*, as well as artillery, engineer and various support elements. It served in the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), Bosnia and Herzegovina. All these troops moved to Bosnia on several flights over a period of two weeks in the fall of 1993, replacing a group of soldiers who were already present on the ground.

Jacques and the other members of the transport section boarded a chartered Air Transat flight in Quebec City bound for Zagreb airport in Croatia. During a stop in Paris to refuel, a problem developed with the landing gear resulting in a 2-day layover. Unfortunately, because the delay would only last until the plane was fixed, the troops had to stay in close proximity to the airport and could not enjoy the city. Once they landed in Zagreb they were met by an administrative team who performed their in-clearance. They then boarded a Russian Ilyushin IL-76 Cargo plane for the flight to Sarajevo.

Night convoy to the Canadian camp

Upon arrival that night at the Sarajevo airport, the transport section was immediately put into service. The troops that they were replacing had driven their trucks to the airport and were now waiting to board

the airplane. The departing troops had left their blue helmets and flak jackets and Ziploc bags full of ammunition in each of the vehicles for the new arrivals. Once the drivers were assigned to a vehicle, each of them tried to find a helmet and flak jacket that fit them. Jacques remembers being stressed because he could not find one that fit his large body. The question of weapons also concerned him. The new arrivals had brought their rifles but they had been disassembled and packed in their barrack boxes. For security purposes, the bolts to the weapons had been shipped separately. Even though the soldiers IAS12 had their bags of ammunition, this ammunition could not be used until the weapons were reassembled.

Jacques remembers driving a 2½-ton truck in a convoy back to the battle group's headquarters and base camp near Visoko. This camp was approximately 32 kilometres to the northwest of Sarajevo. He remembers that as they left the airport, the mirror of his vehicle clipped another vehicle. However, in the rush to move out, he did not dare stop and fill out an accident report like he might have done in Canada. The convoy then moved along several smaller roads taking an indirect route to Visoko. This took over two hours. Jacques later found out that a nicer, straighter highway linked the two locations but that it was not used because it had not been cleared of mines and other obstacles. Since he did not know the route, he followed the vehicle ahead of him and hoped he would not get lost. On the way, he experienced another stressful incident. At one point, as the convoy was moving along the small roads, a motorcyclist turned onto the road and positioned himself between Jacques' vehicle and the one that he was following. Jacques could see that the motorcyclist was carrying an AK47 rifle that was strapped to his back. Jacques started to worry that this individual might be about to cause trouble and started to think about what he could do if this individual opened fire or took some other aggressive action. Fortunately, the motorcyclist turned off the road several kilometers later and the convoy carried on to the fortified camp.

At the base camp, they entered the main gate and turned into the parking lot that was to be the transport section's parking lot for the rest of the tour. There a small delegation welcomed them, gave them their baggage, showed them to their living quarters and dismissed them for the night. In all, it had been a stressful night for the newly arrived transport section. In short order, they found out they were expected to perform even if they had not had the time to familiarize themselves with their new location.

CANBAT 2 Base Camp at Visoko

The Canadian Camp at Visoko was to be their main home for the next six months. It was organised around two buildings, one was a large multi-story warehouse referred to as the megaplex. Inside this structure, large tents had been set up on the upper floors to provide segregated sleeping quarters for the different units posted there. Within each of the large tents, the soldiers hung sheets to have a little bit of privacy.

The second structure, which was referred to as the Crystal Palace, contained the work areas for the Headquarters, medics, administration, post office, logistic and transport sections. Around these structures were the different vehicle parks for the different sub-units.

The perimeter of the camp was secured by two rows of razor wire and a main gate. The main gate was lit up by spotlights and protected by soldiers armed with machine guns.



Also at the camp were two kitchens and dining areas, a shower tent, a laundry facility and several groups of portable toilets. To facilitate access in the winter, a large tent was erected over the portable toilets. For the laundry, each soldier was issued a mesh bag in which they put their dirty clothing. They would then take it to the QM and pick up the clean clothes several days later.

The camp had its own water supply that was adequate for washing but not good enough to drink. Consequently, the troops used bottled water for drinking and brushing their teeth.

While at the base camp, Jacques heard that local children would often come up to the guard post looking for a hand out. Some would bring weapons or ammunition that they had found to curry favour with the guards. Jacques heard that this was discouraged after one child had brought in a grenade that was missing its pin. It was a dud that had failed to detonate when its original owner had thrown it but there was still a risk that it could explode.

One of the key risks for the troops in Bosnia was the risk associated with mines. The drivers were required to regularly attend mine awareness training sessions. They heard that the opposing sides had laid minefields in many different locations and that many of them were unmarked. They learned how to recognize marked minefields and how to avoid those that were not marked. Generally, the rule that had to be followed was to avoid going into the fields or on the grass or anyplace where the road was not frequently traveled by passing vehicles. They also learned to recognize the different types of mines and how they functioned. This knowledge was provided not so that they could disarm them but so they could avoid getting harmed by them. Some types of mines had pressure plates that detonated the mine when a heavy vehicle passed over them. Other types of mines had a stick protruding upwards from the mine. The mine underneath was detonated when this stick was touched or moved or bent. Fortunately, none of the convoys in which Jacques participated encountered any problems with mines that detonated. This good fortune is probably due to the fact that the drivers stayed on the well beaten tracks and rarely moved off the road to park their vehicles except in the secured camps at the ends or along the convoy routes.

Transport section duties and resupply operations

The transport section provided drivers and vehicles for many types of missions undertaken at the request of the battle group headquarters. It was comprised of approximately 25 drivers and equipped with different vehicles including Iltis jeeps, 5/4-ton pickup trucks, 6-wheeled 2½-ton MLVW cargo trucks, 5-ton fuel trucks and 10-ton HLVW heavy cargo trucks. The section was also responsible to manage the fuel depot at the base camp.



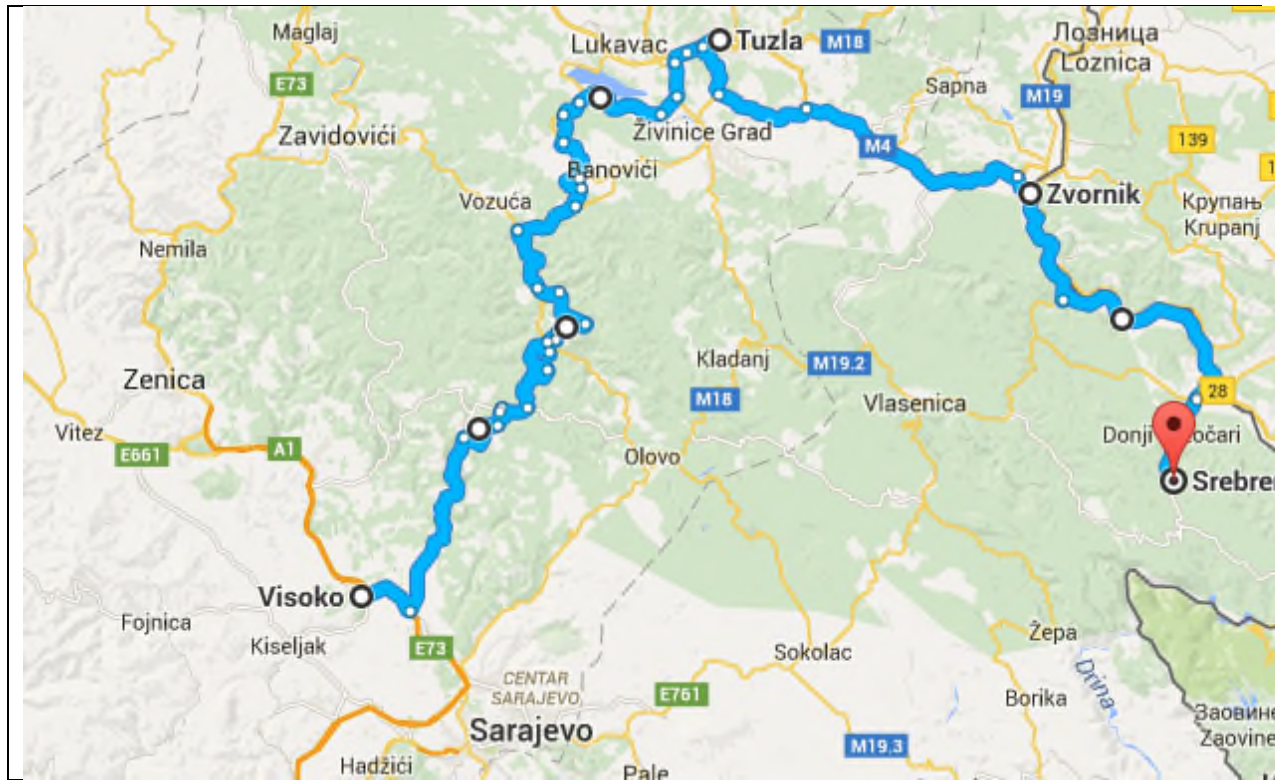
*View of Regimental transport section parking lot at the
CANBAT 2 base camp
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*



*View of fuel depot at the CANBAT 2 base camp
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*

One of the principal tasks for the transport section drivers was to work on convoys that resupplied the forward operating bases. These convoys carried rations, fuel, ammunition, equipment, mail, soldiers departing or returning from leave and numerous other items.

The most important of these bases was in the town of Srebrenica, approximately 172 kilometers to the west. At this location, a company of the R22eR from the Battle group had been positioned to observe the peace in a town largely populated by Bosniaks, who were surrounded by the Bosnian Serb Army.



Approximate route followed by the 12 RBC transport section convoys between Visoko and Srebrenica – The convoys would head north from Visoko to Vares and then further north to Tuzla where they would spend the night at the NORBAT base. They would then proceed west to Zvornik, and from there, follow the border/river in a south-eastern direction to the UN-declared safe area in the Bosniak enclave of Srebrenica.

The convoys also travelled to deliver goods to a UK camp at Vitez situated approximately one hour north of Visoko and a Danish camp at Kiseljak, approximately one half hour to the south-west.

One of the other tasks that were given to the transport section was to shuttle personnel between the Canadian base camp and the airport in Sarajevo. This task usually involved the transportation of soldiers who were departing on or returning from leave. These convoys often only involved 10 to 12 vehicles including the security escort vehicles. The trip would usually take 2 hours, but the convoy commander was instructed to wait until the airplane had actually taken off before starting the return trip. When the flights were delayed, the drivers had to wait at the airport for periods of up to a day. When the convoys moved through the city to and from the airport, they crossed the road referred to as Sniper Alley. Jacques remembers having a strange feeling whenever he passed the damaged Holiday Inn building.



Other convoys organised by the transport section went to the port city of Split, Croatia. This route, which generally took close to twelve hours, was undertaken principally to transport troops who were going on leave. Split was a beautiful city along the coast and a popular spot for soldiers going on leave. Split was also a logistical hub for the Canadian forces in Bosnia and the principal source for their supplies. The National Support Element located at Split organised convoys from there to resupply CANBAT 2 in Visoko. The 12 RBC transport section was then used to transport smaller quantities of supplies to the outlying units and camps.

Jacques also remembers being asked to transport supplies to two health-care institutions in the area around Visoko where the UN forces from Canada and other countries were providing basic support to the patients after the local staff had been forced to abandon them due to the close proximity of fighting between the Bosniak and Croat forces. One of these institutions was a mental hospital for adults in Bakovici¹ and the other was an orphanage in Fojnica. Jacques remembers carrying fuel and other supplies to these locations so that the military personnel stationed there could operate a kitchen and an electric generator. While unloading his truck at the end of one of those trips he remembers discovering that one of the jerry cans he was transporting had emptied along the route after having been pierced by a bullet. Jacques was never directly involved in providing support within the institutions, but he was asked to perform guard duty over the Canadian equipment at one of them.

A friend perishes in a road accident

In late November 1993, very shortly after his arrival, Jacques remembers meeting Corporal David Galvin, a Sherbrooke Hussar, at the mechanics' bay in the basement of the Megaplex building. Both of them were there to get their respective vehicles serviced for some sort of mechanical problems. David was a gunner in a Cougar vehicle that was part of one of the 12 RBC squadrons. That squadron often provided the security vehicles that escorted the convoys where Jacques acted as a driver. The two of them had a conversation about what they might have to do if their vehicle broke down and had to be abandoned in hostile territory. Both agreed that they would not want the vehicles falling into the hands of a group of belligerents. The next day, Jacques heard that David had been killed in a road accident in Zenica when

the vehicle he was travelling in slipped on an icy road, hit the side of a bridge and flipped over into the riverbed below. Both the crew commander and the gunner had apparently been trapped in the turret which landed face down. Jacques was stunned to hear of the sudden death of a person who had put him so much at ease only the day before. He remembers participating a little while later in the emotional send-off ceremony with 100 or so other soldiers in the garage of the Crystal Palace. He took this incident as a serious warning about the sometimes treacherous conditions on the winding mountainous roads and adapted his driving habits accordingly.

Convoys to Srebrenica

Within two days of their arrival in Visoko, the transport section was assigned to their first convoy to Srebrenica. This convoy followed an indirect northern route along small roads through very beautiful and mountainous terrain. The convoy would move slowly and take up to 2 full days to get to its destination. It would then take a day to unload and reload and take two days to return to the base camp.



Convoy at a halt high in the mountains
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux



Mountainside trail
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux

Along the way, the convoys would stop and spend the night at a secure camp in Tuzla maintained by a Norwegian battlegroup (referred to as NORBAT).

The convoys were quite large. When they left the main camp, they would often include 50 or 60 vehicles including the security vehicles, which were the wheeled armoured vehicles referred to as Cougars. All these vehicles would usually leave the base camp in smaller groups and then line up on the road outside of the camp, before proceeding in a long single line to their destination. The security vehicles normally escorted the convoy to the demarcation line between the Serbian army on one side of the country and the Bosniak and Croat armies on the other. The Serb forces objected to the presence of the armoured vehicles so the soft-skinned vehicles would carry on without security vehicles for the remainder of the mission. The convoy was led by a convoy commander in a jeep and followed at the rear by the 5-ton fuel trucks, the ambulance(s) and the recovery vehicle(s).

The convoy crews would generally get their orders the day before they departed. At the orders group they would learn the order of march and receive instructions for the loading of the vehicles. Jacques usually drove call sign 81H which was a 2½-ton truck equipped with a cage on the back that could be locked. This cage was used to transport more precious cargos, such as night vision goggles. After the orders group, the drivers would present themselves and their trucks to the different loading points. The drivers were also assigned a co-driver, who normally had another duty at the base. Jacques' co-driver was often the X-ray technician or a cook from the base camp. The co-driver was an extra pair of eyes on the road and was responsible to make sure that the driver did not fall asleep. This was an important duty since the driving periods for the convoy often lasted between 12 and 15 hours per day.

Before the convoys departed the drivers would report to the mess hall for breakfast and pick up a bag lunch and bottled water for the road. The first thing they did with the lunch was to divide it into two parts – one part which they would eat themselves and the other part that they would give out to refugees that they would encounter along the route or at the final destination. They also usually made sure they had a carton of cigarettes that could be handed out. Money had no value in the war zone, but cigarettes did.

The cabs of the vehicles were equipped with different means of communications. There was a radio set or a walkie-talkie for communications between vehicles. Some vehicles also had an extra radio set that could be used to call for air support if it was needed. A sergeant who was qualified to call in airstrikes usually travelled with each convoy.

On the second day of the convoys to and from Srebrenica, the drivers were usually issued boxes of German rations. Each box was designed to last a full day. The boxes contained a variety of items including the main dishes which were wrapped in foil containers that needed to be heated in a pot of hot water, using a small camp stove carried in each of the trucks. Since there were not many rest stops, the drivers often cooked and ate their rations while they were waiting for clearance at the checkpoints. The German boxes had only four different menus unlike the Canadian rations which had up to ten different menus. They did however have some delicious dark chocolate bars. Jacques remembers sorting the items in each box. He always tried to put aside certain items to give to refugees. Even the salt and sugar packages were coveted by the refugees, who largely relied on the barter system to survive.

Jacques vividly remembers giving some of his rations to a small boy who had approached him during one of the convoy stops. He distinctly remembers the boy because he was wearing a blue jacket with a white fur fringe around the collar. He was shocked later when the convoy passed the same area on the return trip when he saw the same jacket lying in a ditch with no trace of the boy. He immediately wondered if the young boy had been a victim of ethnic cleansing. This thought immediately came to mind because evidence of ethnic cleansing was visible everywhere along the convoy route. It was not uncommon to see houses that had been ransacked, with much of their contents thrown out the windows onto the ground below.

While travelling outside the base camp, the drivers were required to wear their blue helmets as well as their flak vests. As well as providing protection, these vests also served as magazine carriers. Two full magazines were carried on each side of the vest and a fifth one was kept in the soldier's rifle. For further

protection, the driver of each vehicle was given a six-foot long Kevlar blanket, which was to be laid on the bench in the cab, and two 2 by 3 foot Kevlar shields that were to be placed just inside the cab doors once the crew was in the vehicle.

Each of the soldiers kept what they referred to as a bug out kit, which was basically a sleeping bag carrier with all the items to be taken when they left on convoy, including notably a sleeping bag, air mattress, extra clothes, and a shaving kit. This was one of the items kept in the cab of the vehicle. Also, Jacques brought his Sony radio with a number of tape cassettes so that he could listen to music as they travelled through the hills. In his kit, he also carried a Nintendo GameBoy-type console, powered by 2 man-pack radio batteries which he wired together. One set of batteries lasted the complete tour. He was also sure to stock up on snacks such as chips, snicker bars, bottles of water and other treats. If he did not eat them himself, these snacks were always appreciated by a refugee or some other person.

The troops occasionally transported by the convoys developed the habit of bringing their camp cots and sleeping bags so that they could relax in the back of the vehicles. Also, because there were not very many rest stops during each twelve or so hour run, many of the drivers ran a plastic tube down through a hole in the floor allowing them to relieve themselves while on the run.

Along this route, the convoys were required to pass through various checkpoints and cross the lines of the opposing parties. They would often endure long waits while the convoy commander negotiated passage with the different levels of authority. Sometimes, even if the higher authority had approved the move, the personnel at the checkpoints claimed the papers were forged and refused passage, possibly just to harass the Canadian soldiers or to pressure them into handing over some gifts. Jacques had heard that at least one local commander had requested unsuccessfully that the Canadians provide him with a jeep. The belligerents manning the checkpoints would often want to inspect the vehicles claiming that the Canadians might be trying to smuggle weapons, munitions or refugees. Often, during these stops, the local belligerents would harass the Canadians by putting mines or other explosive devices under the tires or just outside the cab doors of the Canadian vehicles. The Canadians generally tried to move through the checkpoints early in the morning, because later in the day, some of the people at these checkpoints would start drinking and become more belligerent as time went on.



*Mines and obstacles at belligerent checkpoint
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*

*Mines and obstacles at belligerent checkpoint
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*

Occasionally, partisans on one side or the other of the conflict would fire their weapons at the passing vehicles. Jacques was told that they had generally learned not to fire at the armoured vehicles who were well equipped to fire back. They seemed to prefer shooting at the soft-skinned vehicles that passed in the convoys. Rarely did the drivers in the convoy see these people, but they found the evidence of their shooting when they reached their destinations. It was not uncommon to find bullet holes in the body of the vehicle, or in its cargo. On one occasion, Jacques saw a bullet hit the box-shaped air filter that protruded from the hood of his vehicle. On another occasion, when he got to his destination, he found several bullet holes in the cargo that he was transporting. Generally, these attacks did not stop the convoy or cause bodily harm. One exception to this occurred when a big truck driven by another Royal Canadian Hussar - Martin Gazaille - was disabled by mortar rounds that exploded very close to his vehicle. The shrapnel from the blast hit the truck and made it unserviceable. At that point, the vehicle was abandoned on the spot and recovered only several days later. When it was finally brought into the base camp, it was inspected and numerous pieces of shrapnel were found embedded in the skin of the vehicle and numerous bullet holes were found in the body of the truck and the gas tanks that it was carrying. To this day, Jacques has kept one of those pieces of shrapnel and several of the bullets that he recovered from the wreck as souvenirs.



Picture of Martin Gazaille and his truck after it was eventually recovered – Note the bullet holes in the passenger door and the gas tanks on the rear of the vehicle.

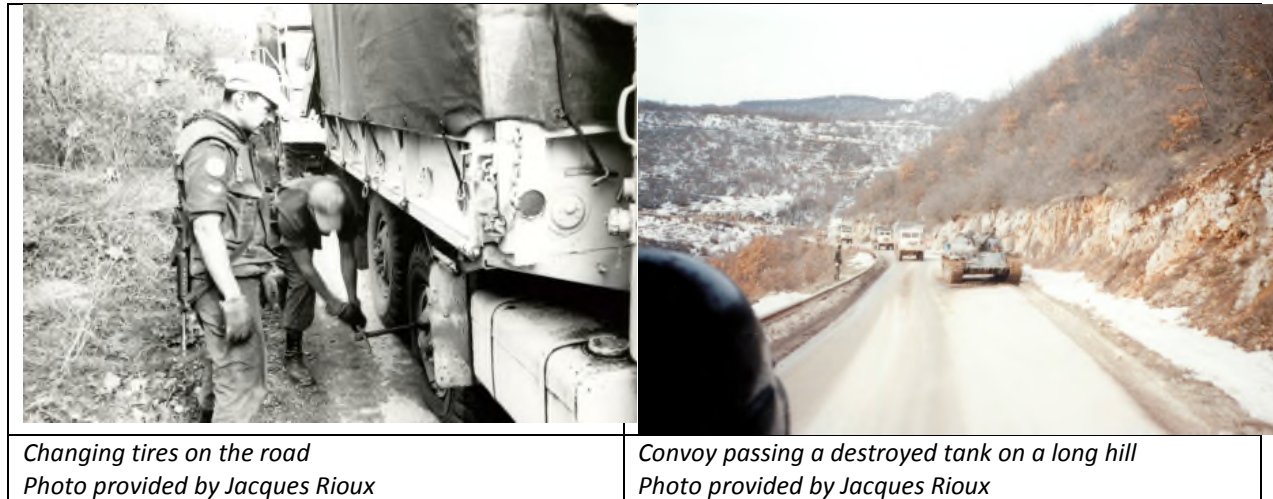
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux

The Canadian soldiers had received very restrictive rules of engagement that only allowed them to fire back if they could see the person who was firing at them. Jacques remembers one incident where someone started firing mortars close to a group of trucks that were stopped by the side of the road. The mortar rounds were exploding so close that Jacques remembers feeling the blast on his clothes and hearing the shrapnel hit the other sides of the vehicles. During that incident a group of British soldiers who were travelling with the convoy called for a show of force. Shortly thereafter, a British harrier jet flew over and buzzed the offending party putting a stop to the firing.

Jacques remembers another incident when the convoy had just stopped for an overnight rest at the NORBAT camp in Tuzla. He was walking around the camp after the convoy had been parked when someone started firing a weapon towards the camp from a distant wood line. Jacques took cover in an area protected by a wall of sandbags at the perimeter of the camp. One of the guards responsible for the security of the camp started firing back. The guard explained that he was firing over the head of the individual to try and get him to stop. The guard then invited Jacques to also fire his weapon. He explained that if more than one person was firing, it would be a more effective show of force. Jacques complied with the request and fired with the guard over the belligerent's head until the latter stopped firing. When all went quiet, the Norwegian soldier thanked Jacques and rolled his eyes and said one word – "Slivovitz".

During one of these convoy missions to Srebrenica, Jacques remembers seeing a very beautiful young lady driving a horse and buggy. She had long auburn hair and she wore a tweed jacket decorated with a broach. For weeks afterwards, he thought of her and the contrast that existed between her beauty and the destruction that surrounded her. Jacques was also often struck by the picturesque country side. It was very mountainous and the roads often wound through the hills and valleys. The large trucks lumbered up the steep hills and switchbacks and then sped down the other side trying to build momentum to climb the other side. In the winter, these hills could be very dangerous. During snowy weather, the convoy would often need to stop on the road so that the drivers could put chains on the tires of the vehicles.

During the convoys, the most frequent mechanical problem was flat tires. If the flat affected one of multiple rear tires, the drivers generally tried to drive on it to the next logical stopping point. If it was more serious, they had to request or report a halt. Flats happened frequently enough that the teams of drivers developed enough speed to be able to change the large truck tires within approximately 10 minutes. Jacques particularly remembers one incident where the tire-changing drivers lost control of a large tire which rolled off the side off the road and down the mountainside across several switchbacks and through an area marked as a minefield. None of the mines blew but the tire was never recovered.



On the road to Srebrenica, the convoys often stopped or slowed down at a town that the drivers referred to as Canada village. Jacques could not remember the real name of the village or the origins of the affinity between the drivers and the local population. As they passed through this village some of the residents, mostly children, would stand by the road and wave small Canadian flags. The drivers would often stop and share the contents of their ration boxes with some of the people there. In return, the mothers of the families knitted sets of small woollen baby booties and sent them to the generous Canadian soldiers. The drivers used these booties to decorate the cabs of their large military vehicles.



Life in Srebrenica

At the end of the long convoy route was the town of Srebrenica. This was a principally Bosniak Muslim community that was located in the extreme eastern region of Bosnia. It was surrounded on all sides by hostile Serbian forces. The UN had declared it a safe zone and had posted a company of infantrymen from the R22eR there to observe the peace. The convoys arrived from NORBAT along a river that flowed

down from the north-west. They usually spent a day unloading and reloading and resting before undertaking the two-day return trip first to NORBAT and then to Visoko.

On one occasion in December of 1993, the Serb Army surrounding the community decided to cut off all passage to and from Srebrenica for a period of close to three weeks. When the passage was cut off, Jacques and the rest of the convoy had just arrived at Srebrenica. Rather than host a large group of idle drivers and give them time to get into trouble, the local company commander put the drivers to work as camp guards. This freed up his own troops to better deal with any potential trouble or other tasks.

During each of their visits to the camp at Srebrenica, the drivers established an informal system of passing their extra rations and other items such as gloves, pens and paper to the kids who hung around the camp gate. Each driver took it upon himself to favour a particular kid, who indeed was representing a local family. At that time, the local economy had virtually disappeared and the families had no or only meager sources of income. Not only did they have no income but the stores had no goods to sell. While this was a condition that prevailed throughout the country, it was even more extreme at Srebrenica because the Serb army was determined to choke off any movement of supplies. The UN refugee agency tried to deliver food and blankets to the town but this was not always possible. To heat their homes, the residents had stripped bare all the forests from the hills immediately surrounding the village. To feed themselves, the residents had ripped up their lawns and planted gardens. The local government had broken down and was no longer maintaining the roads, ensuring the water supply, providing electricity or collecting garbage. The items provided by the Canadian soldiers, no matter how meager, could possibly be used to barter for something more useful.



*Convoy parking area at Srebrenica
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*



*Atief Mohammed and Jacques near the gate of the
camp at Srebrenica
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

Jacques set up a support system with a Muslim teenager whose name was Atief Mohammed. This young man and his quiet younger brother would present themselves at the gate whenever the convoys entered town. Jacques never failed to have items that he could pass on to the young man and his family. Jacques understood the importance of these gifts one morning when he was assigned to guard the main gate to the camp. Atief's mother sent him a small loaf of fresh bread that she had just baked herself.

Atief brought it to him while he was manning the camp gate on that brisk wintery morning. Not only was it delicious but it was a huge sacrifice for a family who probably had very little food to feed themselves. This symbolic gesture made Jacques realize even more the importance of his small gestures to these people.



*Pictures showing how the military base was positioned right in the town of Srebrenica
Note how the hills have been stripped of all vegetation
Photos provided by Jacques Rioux*

More aggression near the end of the tour

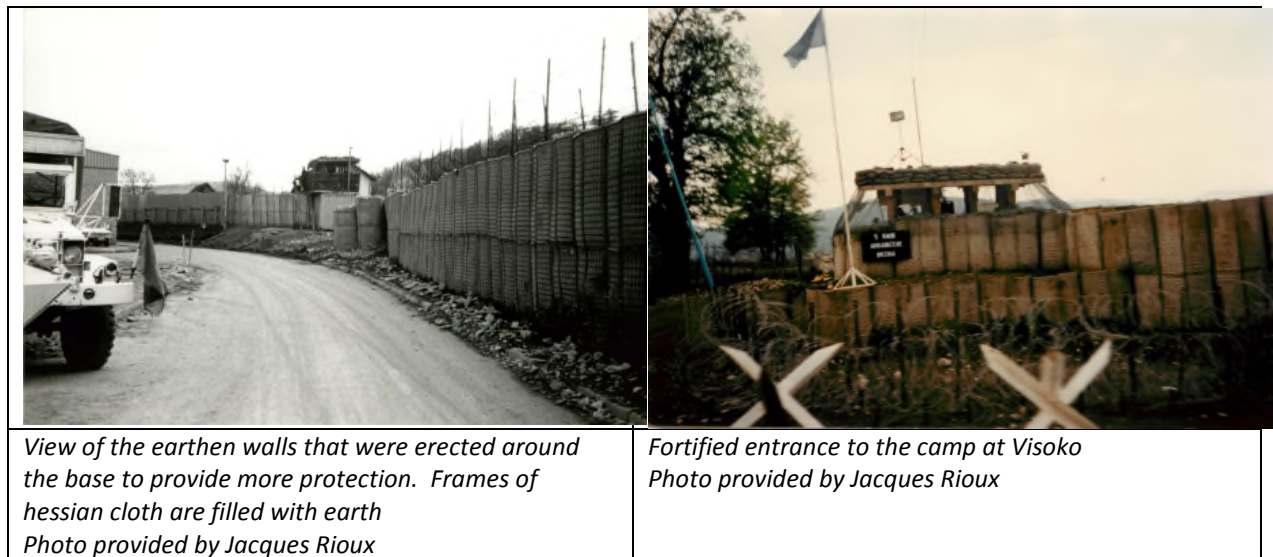
At the beginning of the tour, the battle lines separating Serbs, Muslims and Croats had generally been established. The fighting had lulled and engagements were limited. Occasionally, soldiers from one faction would take pot shots to harass one of the other factions. In or around March 1994, the negotiations for a more permanent settlement started. This resulted in an increase of activity when each faction tried to jockey for a better position before the final lines were drawn. During this period, the drivers of the transport section were asked to transport personnel who were trying to verify cease fire lines.

In the days leading up to the negotiations, Jacques heard about some incidents that arose from the posturing.

On one occasion, a convoy got trapped at the Danish base when the Croat forces blocked the road. The drivers returned to the Canadian Base camp by helicopter and worked on other tasks until the road was reopened. On another occasion, one of the check points established by the battle group in the area around Visoko was surrounded and cut off by elements of the Croat forces. Jacques heard that the CANBAT 2 commander had deployed troops from the camp in a show of force to get the Croats to back off.

A third incident occurred when a convoy was travelling between the NORBAT camp and Srebrenica. Security vehicles from NORBAT were escorting the convoy. At one of the checkpoints, the Serbs blocked the convoy's progress and apparently became aggressive. Jacques remembers seeing the NORBAT security teams get out of their vehicles and deploy their anti-tank Carl Gustafs so as to be ready to respond, if they were attacked. Eventually, the belligerents at the checkpoint calmed down and allowed the convoy to pass.

In response to the increased level of aggression, additional protection was added to the camp perimeter by filling hessian cloth frames with earth to build a thick wall.



Camp life

Camp life at Visoko was reasonably good. After the initial shakeout, the soldiers stationed there generally worked six days a week and had only light tasks on the seventh. The camp was equipped with a good kitchen, a mess and a TV room. The camp had a reputation for having good food, a good mess and good accommodations. Consequently, it was often visited by soldiers from other UN contingents. The soldiers who were not on duty were entitled to consume two beers per day. A favourite pastime for them was to hang out and sing songs while one or more soldiers played guitar. This was often done by candlelight when the camp was low on fuel and tried to limit its consumption by turning off some of the generators that provided the camp's electricity. Another pastime was watching hockey games in the TV room. Jacques remembers one night when some Swedish soldiers were visiting the camp, they all sat

down and watched the Swedish-Canadian hockey match from Lillehammer 94 Winter Olympic Games. That night the Swedish team won the gold medal and the Canadian team had to settle for silver.



*Drivers relaxing at the mess after hours
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

*Christmas dinner at the base camp
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

The unit spent Christmas at the camp. A large dinner was attended by some senior officers visiting from Canada. Gifts were received from home and from various military support organisations mostly from western Canada. One of the Hussars noticed that he had received nothing from the unit back home and wrote a letter to the commanding officer expressing his surprise at the absence of any communications or tokens of appreciation. Jacques' mother kept in touch. She often sent packages and mail. On occasion, she would send a clipping from a Canadian newspaper that provided vague details about injured soldiers asking him whether or not it was he or if he was involved. Jacques very much appreciated the letters and goods he received and he always tried to answer in a way that would keep his mother from worrying.

Jacques remembers feeling very vulnerable at camp one morning while visiting the portable toilets located outside the Crystal Palace. He was sitting there calmly reading some interesting material that he had received from home when a belligerent started firing at the camp from the surrounding countryside. What a time to get caught with his pants down, he thought. He quickly put down his reading and moved to a more secure location while the camp guards responded to the threat.

Unfortunate accident

On April 9th, 1994, Jacques had a very unfortunate accident when completing one of his transport tasks. It occurred while he was driving on what was referred to as the "Civi Run". This was a truck that drove through the area surrounding the Canadian camp in Visoko to pick up or drop off local civilians who were employed at the camp serving as cooks, laundry workers or cleaners. As he approached a curve, he slowed down because he saw children playing on the side of the street. Just as he arrived at the curve, a young man barrelled around the corner on a moped from the opposite direction. The young man saw the truck at the last moment, tried to avoid it and lost control. His moped fell on its side and slid under the truck but the young man hit the front bumper of the truck standing up. Even though the truck was travelling at a slow speed, the momentum and the force of the impact were great enough to inflict

serious injuries to the young man's body. Jacques and his co-driver immediately jumped out of the truck, sent an accompanying truck for help, and proceeded to apply first aid to the young man. The victim was quickly evacuated to the hospital at the Canadian base camp and then to a larger hospital at Sarajevo University. He was suffering from a broken hip, a broken collar bone, a fractured skull, a ruptured spleen and multiple other injuries. During the night he passed away. After spending some time with the accident investigators and the Padre, Jacques returned to his accommodation still very much in shock because of the accident. He could not think of anything he could have done to avoid it, other than not be at that location. By the time he arrived, the kitchen was closed so he had missed his supper. However, some of the other drivers in the transport section had saved him some hotdogs and they tried to boost his morale by sitting down with him while he ate them. Jacques was eventually informed that this young man was the son of a Brigade commander in the Bosniak forces and that there was a rumour that the commander was looking for revenge. This rumour was treated as a reasonably credible threat given the history of the region. As a precautionary move, Jacques was not assigned to any tasks that involved movement off the base for the following five days.

Vacation and leave

During his two-week leave period, Jacques opted to visit his parents, who at that time were living in Hawaii. It was a long voyage but the reunion with the family and the weather were very nice. Jacques remembers receiving a number of questioning looks, first when he announced his intended destination to the clerk making the travel arrangements and second when he arrived in Hawaii in a Canadian Army Fatigues wearing a blue United Nations beret.

In March of 1994, Jacques participated in an organised recreational visit to Rome with numerous other soldiers. The trip started aboard a military transport plane that flew from Sarajevo to the Italian port city of Ancona on the western coast of Italy. Jacques remembers that it was a very unusual flight. Since the cargo airplane did not have any passenger seats, the departing soldiers were asked to sit in a line on the floor beside the cargo containers. The airplane crew then stretched a long strap over the laps of the sitting soldiers and secured it to a hook at the other end of the floor. The plane then performed what could be referred to as a combat take off, gunning the engines and entering into a very steep climb. Once in the air, the pilots discharged a number of flares as a preventative measure to act as diversions in case any heat-seeking missiles were fired at the plane. Seeing the flashes, Jacques started wondering if they were being shot at. Since no one had forewarned the passengers of these procedures, they found it quite stressful. At Ancona, the soldiers boarded a bus that carried them to Rome. Once in Rome they visited the Vatican in uniform, attended a special mass and actually had a private audience with the Pope. This trip had been organised in this way because the Pope had apparently expressed an interest in meeting some of the "blue hatted" soldiers working on the UN mission in Bosnia. While on the bus on the way to the Vatican, Lieutenant-Colonel Moore, the commanding officer of the 12 RBC, made an announcement that the Canadian contingent in the UN safe area around Srebrenica would soon be replaced by one from another country.



*Leaving Sarajevo airport for Italy
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*



*Jacques meets the Pope on visit of UN troops to
the Vatican
Photo provided by Jacques Rioux*

Return to Canada

At the end of his tour, Jacques and the other transport drivers flew back to Canada. Jacques remembers taking the bus back from the Quebec City airport to Valcartier before moving back to Montreal. The thing that he remarked the most during the trip was that none of the houses had been damaged by war. His mind was so used to seeing damaged houses that he seemed to have difficulty adapting back to a normal situation. Another difficulty Jacques had in adapting was related to the risk with mines. While in Bosnia he had trained himself never to stray off the well-used road as means of avoiding minefields. He then had to condition himself to walk on the grass at home without feeling threatened.

Subsequent to his tour

Over a year after Jacques had returned to Canada, he heard about the massacre at Srebrenica² through the media. The massacre occurred in 1995, as peace negotiations were moving towards a formal division of the country into two parts. Each side was interested in controlling contiguous areas that contained only people from their respective ethnic groups. The Serbs were not interested in having a Bosniak enclave deep within their portion of Bosnia. At that time, a large force of Bosnian Serbs had surrounded the enclave of Srebrenica and was preparing an attack. At the request of the Bosniak Forces, who were prepared to relinquish Srebrenica, the UN peacekeepers on site negotiated with the Serbs to have the 30,000 or so civilian residents evacuated by bus to Tuzla. When this occurred, despite promises of safety made by the Serbian general in charge, most of the 1,700 or so men who boarded the busses were separated from the women and children and killed along the way. Because they were either combatants or because they did not trust the Serbs, many other Bosniak men chose not to board the busses but to travel by foot cross-country. Many of them were hunted down and killed in the woods along the way. In all it is believed that over 8,000 people were killed, mostly men and boys. When Jacques heard this news, he became deeply concerned about the welfare of the teenager and the family that he had tried to help. He had no way of confirming whether one or more of them were included in the victims of the

massacre. He also developed an internal fury that led him to write two letters to the newspaper recounting his experience at Srebrenica and expressing his feelings. Seeing his letters, a friend of his decided to write a novel³ around the incident and some of Jacques' personal experiences. After doing extensive research for her book, that friend reported to Jacques that she did not see Atief's name among the deceased so there may be hope that he and his family survived. To this day, Jacques does not know whether Atief or his family survived or not.

Life thereafter

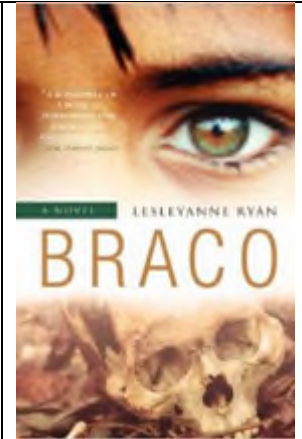
At the time that Jacques was interviewed for the purposes of preparing this document, he was working in the sales department of a leading provider of IT products, services, and solutions to government agencies, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities. He also worked as a volunteer first-responder in the cities of Cote St-Luc and Ile Perrot.

Foot notes

¹ At the end of the tour, a board of inquiry investigated the misbehaviour of certain Canadian soldiers at the Bakovici Hospital including misuse of alcohol, abuse of patients, and sexual misconduct. It found that there had indeed been unprofessional conduct on the part of certain individuals and that appropriate disciplinary action had not been taken at the time. The board of inquiry also found that the majority of the soldiers at the location had acted appropriately and provided an invaluable service to the patients.

²Source Wikipedia: The Srebrenica massacre was the genocidal killing, in July 1995, of more than 8,000 Bosniaks, mainly men and boys, in and around the town of Srebrenica during the Bosnian War. The killing was perpetrated by units of the Army of Republika Srpska under the command of General Ratko Mladić. The Secretary-General of the United Nations described the mass murder as the worst crime on European soil since the Second World War. A paramilitary unit from Serbia known as the Scorpion, officially part of the Serbian Interior Ministry until 1991, participated in the massacre, along with several hundred Ukrainian and Russian volunteers. In April 1993, the United Nations declared the besieged enclave of Srebrenica in the Drina Valley of northeastern Bosnia a "safe area" under UN protection. However, in July 1995, the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), represented on the ground by a 400-strong contingent of Dutch peacekeepers, Dutchbat, did not prevent the town's capture by the VRS and the subsequent massacre. Serbia and Montenegro were cleared of direct responsibility for or complicity in the massacre, but were found responsible for not doing enough to prevent the massacre and not prosecuting those responsible, in breach of the Genocide Convention. The Preliminary List of People Missing or Killed in Srebrenica compiled by the Bosnian Federal Commission of Missing Persons contains 8,373 names. As of July 2012, 6,838 genocide victims had been identified through DNA analysis of body parts recovered from mass graves. As of July 2013, 6,066 victims had been buried at the memorial Centre of Potočari.

³Source Amazon.com - WINNER OF THE 2011 Fresh Fish Award for Emerging Writers, Lesleyanne Ryan's debut novel, *Braco*, takes place over the five days following the fall of Srebrenica in 1995. The narrative follows the perspectives of Bosnian civilians, UN Peacekeepers, Serbian and Bosnian soldiers, as well as a Canadian photojournalist. A retired veteran and former Bosnian Peacekeeper, Ryan vividly captures the visceral tension and horror of Bosnian refugees fleeing Srebrenica, the ensuing massacre of Bosnian men, and the inability of the Dutch peacekeepers to protect them. The award judges acclaimed the debut novel as a "compelling, captivating, and fast-paced novel, from its vivid and intriguing prologue set in Srebrenica to an ending that fits, if not satisfies."



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