

MISSION ABROAD



Mission Abroad

Military experience from international operations

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Mission Abroad – Military experience from international operations

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Index

Foreword • Peter Tillberg	7
1. Introduction	
In a Foreign Land • Peter Tillberg and Lotta Victor Tillberg	11
Bakovici 1993–1994	11
Action	11
Professional military skills	13
Act decisively	14
Use your imagination, be inventive	15
Staying aware	16
Playing a part	18
Learning the lessons	19
2. Risk Taking and Visual Memories	21
Mine games • Jan Almgård	21
Alpha Sierra • Steve Simson	22
In harm's way • Claes Annsberg	24
It's not about the skis • Ronnie Johansson	24
Everything's fine • Mats Hillerström	26
Safety regulations and reality • Johan Liljegren	26
Throwing in a suggestion • Steve Simson	29
Team spirit, for better or worse • Per Beckman	29
Daring to ask or being afraid of the answer • Anders Karlsson	30
Perception and imagination • Gunnar Sjödin	33
A medal has two sides • Jan Almgård	34
3. In the Valley of the Shadow of Death	37
Survived today, but what about tomorrow? • Ronnie Johansson	37
Roadside bomb • Christian Bertilsson	38
Shot by your own side • Stefan Svensson	41
The Soldier and the Bureaucrat • Mats Hillerström	41
Checkpoint black market • Steve Simson	43
Like a Hammerfall • Joakim Svartheden	44

A protective shell • <i>Stefan Svensson</i>	45
Petra and Clark Gable • <i>Anders Karlsson</i>	46
A whistling in the air • <i>Jan Almgård</i>	47
Linus • <i>Kathrine Strandberg</i>	48
We were all afraid • <i>Anders Karlsson</i>	49
4. Tactical picture unclear	53
And today's enemy is... • <i>Stefan Svensson</i>	53
A torn out heart and an itchy finger • <i>Johan Liljegren</i>	54
Necessity is the mother of invention • <i>Mats Hillerström</i>	55
Same same but different • <i>Carl Ronander</i>	56
So many ideas • <i>Claes Annsberg</i>	58
A crown for the king • <i>Anders Karlsson</i>	60
It takes Tango 2 • <i>Jan Almgård</i>	62
5. Separate worlds	65
24 x 7 x 6 – but where? • <i>Ronnie Johansson</i>	65
Clashes • <i>Johan Liljegren</i>	67
Just a signaller • <i>Claes Annsberg</i>	68
Owls and evil spirits • <i>Mats Hillerström</i>	70
Different worlds but the same aim • <i>Johan Nyström</i>	72
A welcome change • <i>Claes Annsberg</i>	73
Commanding a platoon at home and abroad • <i>Johan Liljegren</i>	74
Home, but still away • <i>Johan Liljegren</i>	76
On the verge of routine • <i>Per Beckman</i>	78
Surely we are better than this? • <i>Johan Nyström</i>	79
Local food on the menu • <i>Mats Hillerström</i>	79
Black coffee and black swans • <i>Stewe Simson</i>	81
6. Out of Control – voices from Caglavica 2004	85
7. Those who stayed at home missed it all... • <i>Anders Karlsson</i>	101
8. Beyond Sweden's borders	103
Annex I. The Dialogue Seminar Method – background and manual	111
Annex II. Don Quijote and Dialogue Seminars	117
Annex III. Extracts from the Minutes of a Dialogue Seminar	
Series in 2006	121
Annex IV. Expressions and Abbreviations	127
Individual profiles - Participating soldiers and officers	130
List of illustrations and photographs	132

Foreword

This book presents the personal experiences of Swedish officers and soldiers who have served on missions abroad; giving a firsthand account of how they handled the situations they found themselves faced with. From over forty personal accounts, ranging from the Congo in 1963 to Afghanistan in 2006, you have here an absorbing and honest presentation of what it is like to serve on international missions abroad.

The principal aims of *Mission Abroad* are to encourage reflection and discussion on international operations and to contribute towards the development of a military profession that so often focuses on challenging situations. The book is not intended as an end in itself, but rather as a first step in a continuing exchange of experiences for the Swedish Armed Forces as they face the future. The book adopts a systematic approach in its use of the experiences of those who have served abroad. You will find many concrete examples, a technique for exchanging experience, and a start to the process of interpreting the tales that are told.

It is important to remember that there is a long tradition of service on international operations for Swedish soldiers and officers. As early as 1948 a Swedish Observer Force was sent to the Middle East to watch over and report on the Palestinian conflict. The Suez crisis in 1956 and the subsequent decision of the UN General Assembly to send a peacekeeping force to the area resulted in Sweden, for the first time in modern history, sending armed troops outside her national borders. Since this watershed for Swedish defence policy Sweden has so far sent around 100 000 men and women on 120 international missions to over

60 countries. For a number of years now the aim for the Swedish Armed Forces has been to change from a focus on the Cold War and defence against invasion of the homeland, to creating a more flexible operational force ready to operate mainly abroad in coalition with other countries. As a strand in that process of change Sweden, at the request of the European Union, has taken on responsibility for the organisation of a rapid reaction force, to be known as the Nordic Battle Group, in co-operation with Estonia, Finland and Norway.

From 1 January 2008 the Nordic Battle Group will function as an important instrument of the EU's crisis management capability. For the moment it is not possible to know exactly the type of operations that we might be involved in, where in the world we might deploy or even if we will deploy at all. We may be required to support humanitarian operations, but it is also possible that the force may be required to participate in combat. The Nordic Battle Group might be tasked as an independent force for a limited mission, but could also be part of a larger international coalition tasked with operations of considerable complexity.

Regardless of the type of mission that we will eventually undertake, one thing is certain, and that is that the experiences of Swedish soldiers and officers from past international operations will be vitally important in our professional preparation for Nordic Battle Group Operations or other missions abroad. This book can provide useful knowledge to assist that preparation.

Mission Abroad begins with the chapter, *In a Foreign Land*, in which a number of common themes are introdu-

ced – which constantly recur in the stories told by officers and soldiers – allowing us to adopt a systematic approach to the study of the knowledge to be found in this book. The heart of the book lies in the four chapters that follow; *Taking Risks and Visual Memories, In the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Objective Unknown* and *Different Worlds*, in which Swedish servicemen and women describe in their own words the challenging situations they have experienced on operations abroad. The sixth chapter, *Out of Control – Voices from Caglavica 2004*, consists of extracts from interviews with officers tasked with preventing a riot in Caglavica, Kosovo in the spring of 2004. The seventh chapter *Those Who Stayed at Home Missed It All*, comprises the personal reflections of a soldier who served abroad. Thereafter comes a chapter to provide some background to some of the missions described by soldiers and officers earlier in the book. The book finishes with four annexes: *The Dialogue Seminar Method, Don Quijote and Dialogue Seminars, Extracts from the Minutes of a Series of Dialogue Seminars in 2006 and Expressions and Abbreviations*.

Most of the examples in the book come from a series of dialogue seminars conducted at The National Defence College in 2006 at the request of the Swedish Armed Forces. The dialogue seminar method was developed by and is used as a research tool at the Department of Skill & Technology at The Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm. The method has been used by the Swedish Armed Forces since 2001 for, amongst things, drawing out and developing knowledge in the field of leadership. Its purpose is to provide a forum in which officers can give voice to their personal experiences that contain the fundamental knowledge that so often remains hidden away. Three dialogue seminars have been held so far. Reports on those seminars can be found in *Spelplats – Yrkeskunnandets Praktik och IT* (red. Maria Hammarén & Peter Tillberg, Dialoger 2002) and *Exempel – Yrkeskunnandets Praktik och IT* (red. Joakim Svartheden, Försvarshögskolan 2003).

In the book *Dialoger om yrkeskunnande och teknologi* (red. Peter Tillberg, Dialoger 2003) there are a selection of texts used to provide background and to encourage discussion at the seminars. Further information on the dialogue seminar method is given at Annex 1 to *Mission Abroad* and on the website www.dialoger.se

Producing a book of this type is only possible through the joint efforts and enthusiasm of many people.

I would like to make special mention of and thank the soldiers and officers who have contributed with stories, experiences, interviews, photographs, maps, diaries, letters, newspaper articles, and so much more. Without your contribution we would never even have been able to start this project. It has been a privilege during the dialogue seminars to share your experiences, and I hope that *Mission Abroad* will live up to the high expectations that you all quite rightly have of this book.

Many, many thanks to; Stewe Simson, Anders Karlsson, Jan Almgård, Claes Annsberg, Mats Hillerström, Ronnie Johansson, Johan Liljegren, Stefan Svensson, Johan Nyström, Per Beckman, Inger Stjernqvist, Christian Bertilsson, Kathrine Strandberg, Gunnar Sjödin, Carl Ronander, Marko Tillaeus, Jonas Pärssinen, Hans Håkansson, Niclas Wetterberg, Fredrik Gertsson, Inge Kamstedt, Ebbe Blomgren and Lotta Victor Tillberg.

A special thank you to my co-editors, Joakim Svartheden and Danuta Janina Engstedt, for their perseverance and thoroughly professional approach to *Mission Abroad*. It has been both rewarding and fun working with you.

In particular thanks are due to Bengt Axelsson, Anders Emanuelson, Karl Engelbrektson, Ulf Henricsson, Anders Brännström, Mats Ström, Jörgen Hallström, Bo Göransson, Maria Hammarén, Fritz Eriksson, Gunnar Gustafsson Wiss, without whose help this book would never have been completed.

Mission Abroad has been written mainly for those soldiers and officers who are considering, or who have already decided to volunteer for, international operations. It is intended that this book should be used for leadership training in the units and schools of the Armed Forces and at The National Defence College. It may also be of value to other authorities and agencies that work with the Armed Forces.

Peter Tillberg

Trosa, 4 May 2007





Introduction – In a Foreign Land

by Peter Tillberg and Lotta Victor Tillberg

In this book officers and soldiers describe in their own words the challenging situations that they have had to deal with whilst on operations abroad. The aim of this first chapter is to look in more depth at some of the recurring themes that emerge from the accounts by officers and soldiers of their international service. Their stories collectively describe a world where professional know-how is as much about being able to handle routine procedures as it is about dealing with the unexpected. When they write they do not use abstract or hypothetical language to describe theories, rules or regulations. They have written as military professionals, using concrete, detailed examples. Using some of those practical examples as a start point we would now like to look in more detail at various aspects of some professional military skills.

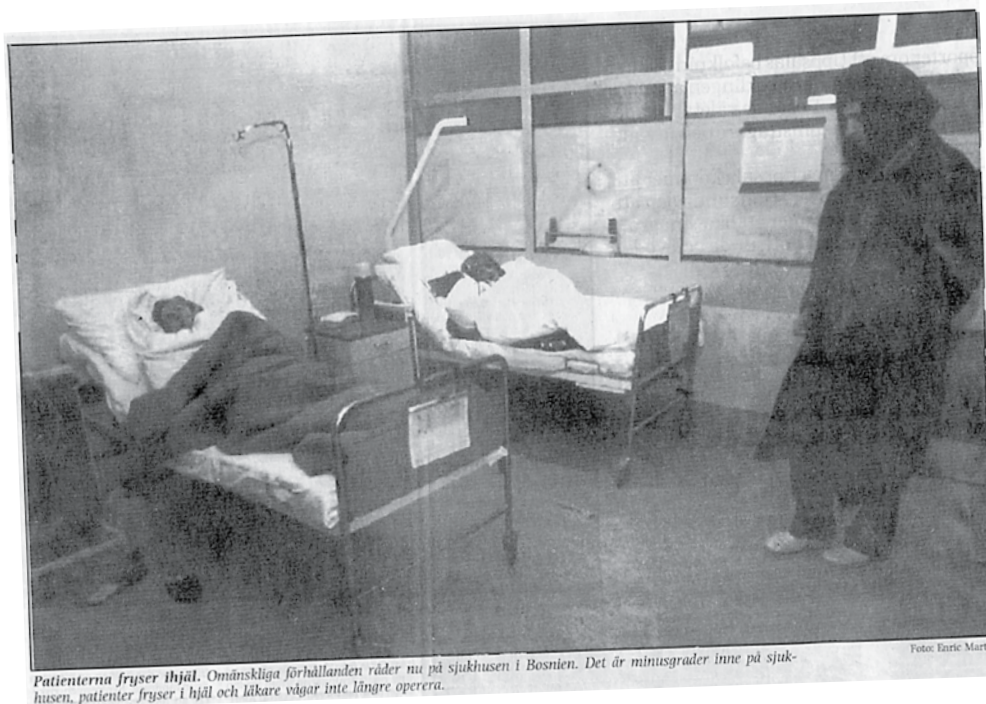
Bakovici 1993–1994

On 25 December 1993 Platoon Alfa Sierra (AS) of NordBat 2 is tasked to guard and protect a mental hospital in Bosnia. The hospital is in the little village of Bakovici, situated on the front line between Muslim and Croatian defensive positions. A community that once was at peace now lies in ruins after hard, protracted fighting. The village is now empty and deserted; all who were able to do so have now fled. On entering the hospital the Swedish soldiers find about 200 patients who have more or less been left to fend for themselves. There is a mixture of young and old mental patients, some are sedated and others in a violent state. The people here are totally incapable of looking after themselves. The few hospital staff remaining is taking care of the wards, but there are also a number of homeless folk wandering about. The atmosphere that meets the soldiers when they open the doors is hard to capture in words. There is neither electricity nor heating and much of the hospital equipment has either

been stolen or smashed to pieces; there are no medicines. There is virtually no access to clean water and it has been a long time since anyone bothered about patient hygiene, washing clothes or cleaning.

Action

Soon after the Swedish platoon has taken over responsibility for guarding the hospital from a Canadian unit, the Croatian forces deployed nearby send in an ultimatum. All Muslim nurses are to leave the hospital by



Patienterna fryser ihjäl. Omänskliga förhållanden råder nu på sjukhusen i Bosnien. Det är minusgrader inne på sjukhusen, patienter fryser i hjäl och läkare vågar inte längre operera.

Foto: Enrie Marti

17.00. If not the Croatian forces will attack and then throw them out. They have obviously seen the Canadians leave and have decided to try and test the ability and resolve of the new guard force.

Soon afterwards the sentry on the gate reports that the Croats have just mined the approach road with anti-tank mines, quite clearly to restrict our mobility and to stop reinforcements getting through.¹

Now things have to happen fast. There is not much time left and Alfa Sierra has to be prepared to fight. The course of events is described by the Platoon Commander, Stewe Simson, and one of the Section Commanders, Anders Karlsson.

Platoon Commander, Stewe Simson:

Ammunition is distributed and I go round with the Section Commanders to designate the section positions and to repeat our standing orders, known as 'Megaphone'. Anders, No: 1 Section Commander asks me if there really will be a fight. 'How do I know, but since the patients and we won't be able to manage without the nurses, what else are we going to do? And we can't hand them over to the Croats. Make sure you're as ready as you can be and then we'll see...' We have at least one Croatian battalion facing us. The clock ticks away and during the course of the afternoon we go through our plan for battle and the possible courses of action open to the opposition. It is quite clear to everybody that we are going to lose if it comes to a major fight.²

Section Commander, Anders Karlsson:

When the orders have eventually sunk in, I feel deflated and think, somewhat resignedly: "So this is how it's going to be, my last battle. What a shitty, unglamorous place for it all to end." But we're doing the right thing, we're defending the hospital. We're the ones with the moral right on our side in this crazy, sick valley. If we fail in our duty now we'll lose all sense of perspective, our foothold, our dignity and our entire mission will have no meaning.³

Stewe and Anders have the same recollection. Stress and fear is suppressed behind all the practical preparation. They sort out fields of fire, angles, protection and tactics. Fire positions are decided. Stewe talks later of "functioning on automatic", we just "followed the routines" and got on with the practical stuff like limits of fire, distances, defence tactics...



Section Commander, Anders Karlsson:

As I go round and check the corridors and positions I remember to tap the back of my magazines against a doorframe. To avoid a stoppage it is important that the rounds sit flush with the back of the magazine, so that they can feed up via the lips of the magazine into the breech the correct way. I also check my grenades, making sure the pins are neither too tight nor too loose, and mentally run through the simple procedures necessary before throwing. I push them down into the pockets of my combat vest, because I don't want them in the way on the shoulder straps as we sometimes carry them. They're going to go off anyway if hit by small arms fire or shrapnel, because the hand grenade detonator is so sensitive, but best not to think about that now. At least I won't lose the grenades if things hot up and I need to crawl around in the chaos which is bound to ensue.⁴

Platoon Commander, Stewe Simson:

Why have I chosen to do this? Why am I risking my own life and the lives of my soldiers in this place? I feel that I don't have much alternative if I want to control this situation and I'm prepared to see what the Croats have on their cards.

It is approaching 17.00 and we have locked in all the patients so that we will be free to open fire if anybody moves in our field of fire. At 16.30 mortar fire begins raining down onto the village of Bakovici. My two sections are in position, the Canadians have taken up post in the radio room, and we are as ready as we are ever going to be. Waiting...⁵

Section Commander, Anders Karlsson:

I wonder what the Captain's thinking. What pressure he must feel now. He contacted the Canadian Battalion and told them our situation, and got the reply, which didn't do much for morale, "Sit tight. Nothing we can do about it at the moment". At 17.00 nothing happened. 18.00 still quiet. A little later the Croats wanted to contact the Captain to continue negotiations. "OK, we'll let the nurses stay, but we want access to the hospital area" "Not a chance" said the Captain, and held his ground.⁶

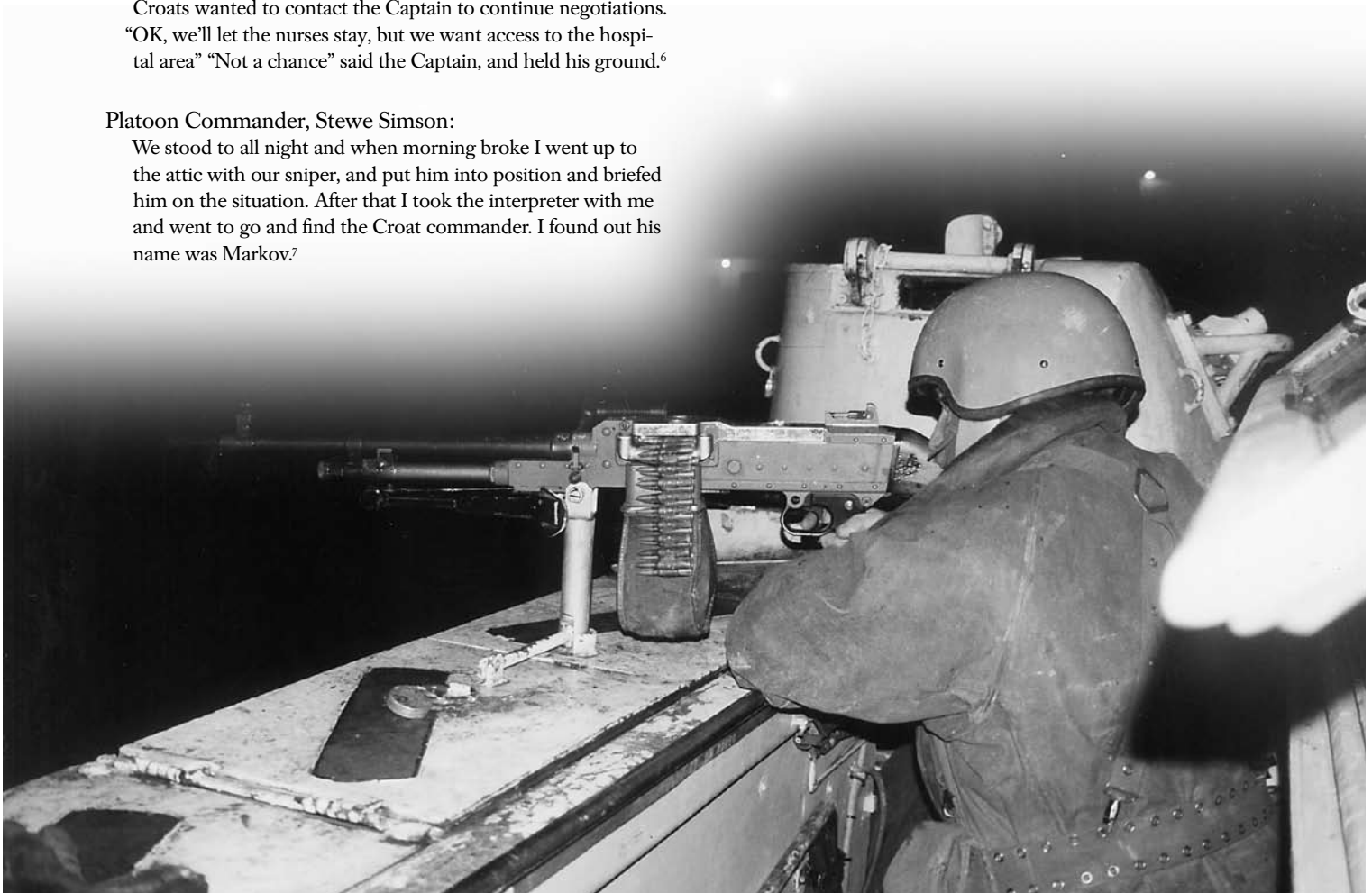
Platoon Commander, Stewe Simson:

We stood to all night and when morning broke I went up to the attic with our sniper, and put him into position and briefed him on the situation. After that I took the interpreter with me and went to go and find the Croat commander. I found out his name was Markov.⁷

The ultimatum was set to test the attitude and competence of the new contingent. The Croats moved in close, saw the Swedes getting ready to fight, and then understood that it was going to cost them dear to carry through with their threat or bluff. In the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina the various UN forces from other nations had all been ordered to react in different ways if shot at. The previous hospital guard force from Canada had been ordered under no circumstances to return fire if they were shot at. The Croats could now see that the Swedes had a different attitude and line of approach, which probably led them to withdraw their threat.

Professional military skill

The drama in Bakovici highlights a number of essential professional military points. These are; *Act decisively, use your imagination, be inventive, stay aware and play out your role*. We will now take a closer look at the factors that led to the successful protection of the hospital in Bakovici.





Act decisively

A clear and recurring theme that emerges from the experiences of soldiers and officers from their service abroad is the need to act decisively. More or less all the time, soldiers and officers will find themselves in situations that will require them to act in a firm and reassuring manner. To show doubt or insecurity will create mistrust and leave you at a disadvantage, and will make achieving your mission difficult. At Bakovici the Platoon Commander, Stewe Simson, decided that if he was going to have a reasonable chance of protecting the patients and hospital staff he couldn't show fear or insecurity.

It is just at this point, at the beginning, that you have the chance to set the tone that will characterise the rest of the action. Any insecurity shown or mistakes made in the opening phase will influence what happens later. Another aspect of dealing firmly with a situation is when things have to happen fast and you have little time to think things through. Patrik, an officer, describes how he and some colleagues were faced with an unexpected situation when off-duty.

A queue of cars has built up, something has happened up ahead. We walk forward to find out what the problem is. And suddenly there are two of us trying to save the life of a woman who has lost both her legs below the knee. At first she looks like a tailor's dummy in a shop window. I remember clearly that my first reaction was wondering why there was a dummy lying in the middle of the road. My colleague gives her artificial respiration while I try to find her pulse and look for any other injuries. I find her pulse for a brief moment, but I'm sure she is dying in our arms, here in the middle of the motorway... After an emergency services doctor has started treating the woman we walk over to the overturned tourist coach... The driver comes stumbling towards us with a bleeding hand. I bandage up his hand which has been cut by the glass from the windscreen... At the same time a woman comes up to me and asks where she should leave a handbag she has found. It then strikes me that the accident site is full of people who want to help but that there are very few who are doing anything useful.⁸

Patrik describes a situation for which no preparation is possible and which gives you very little time to think. He had no time to think about what he and his colleagues were

going to do; they just got straight on with trying to save someone's life. They both had to realise what needed to be done and start taking action immediately. A week after the accident the emergency services phoned up to thank them for their help. They had seen that the four officers had run the operation at the scene of the accident until the emergency services arrived to take over. To see what needs to be done when you have no time to think – and at the same time do what must be done straight away, requires a sort of extrovert concentration.

In the thick of the action a soldier must be able to act automatically, relying on a sort of inner programmed routine. You have to be able to put yourself in a calm frame of mind, instead of seizing up, losing control or getting stressed. Jack Coughlin, an American sniper who served in Iraq, describes how he experiences the time just before going into action:

...just before combat, life slowed down for me. It is as a viewer is fast-forwarding a movie, and then suddenly clicks to slow motion. My eyesight sharpens; I can hear the slightest sound but can tune it out if it is not important. Even my sense of smell is heightened. I believe that a really good sniper not only has muscle memory developed by years of constant practice but also has some special unknown gene in his body chemistry, because I was operating more on instinct than on training.⁹

Coughlin uses the expression “instinct” as a possible explanation as to why in certain circumstances he can act

without appearing to make any conscious choices. Instinct is not just randomly bestowed on certain individuals – but instead results from a combination of experience, reflection and training. From the theoretical perspective instinct is the essence of experience. It is a professional skill that is simply there, and which does not have to be conjured up or thought about or worked on each time.

Use your imagination, be inventive

Another skill that will be important if you are going to be successful in achieving the mission will be using your imagination, being inventive. There will often be a lack of resources and you will have to be inventive to overcome problems, such as providing heating, setting out pickets or arranging transport. But you will also have to deal with incidents on the spur of the moment.

Hello Qvintus Johan this is Adam Qvintus. The section has arrived in the village, we're in two armoured personnel carriers, and we are at a crossroads, which has been blocked off by big stone blocks and pra... I didn't hear anything more after that because radio contact was broken. After a few unsuccessful attempts to establish comms, I pushed my hands up under the headset, which was now beginning to chafe, to try and concentrate on the situation. The village should be deserted according to intelligence reports. I sensed something was wrong and began to feel more and more uneasy. Something reminded me of an earlier, similar incident with another platoon from the company. A series of fragmentary thoughts buzzed around in my head, one thing I did know was that the section was in



trouble. “The frequency, the frequency”, screamed my radio operator in a cracked voice... With a start I came back to reality. I had heard from a colleague the story of snipers who were open to bribery, and who lured their targets forward by placing out children’s prams and toys at roadblocks.¹⁰

Then everything happens fast. The soldiers in the armoured personnel carriers stand directly in the sniper’s line of fire and the Platoon Commander, who is a kilometre away, has to make a quick decision. The Platoon Commander orders the section to distract the sniper and offer him a few gifts. Instead of moving forward to the roadblock to remove the prams – which would have given the sniper a clear line of fire – the soldiers stop halfway and produce a can of spray paint and a banner. They spray the word “Luxuries” on the banner and then make a big show of handing over gifts in the form of Kalles Kaviar and Wasa crisp bread. They then go back to sit in the vehicles and it’s all over in about ten minutes, no-one dead, no-one wounded.

In many of the stories people explained their actions by saying “I just thought of...”. In an instant they remembered another situation they had been involved in or had heard about. There’s no great art in making a decision on the spur of the moment if you only have one alternative. But in the military profession this will very seldom be the case.

How do you deal with situations where you don’t know or have no way of knowing what the best thing to do is? From the point of view of professional technique you have to be able to develop an “awareness” for each different situation. You have to be able to notice and interpret the different phenomena and then process all your impressions to produce a course of action that will be right for the situation. Maria Hammarén, a researcher into professional skills, describes the development of professional skills as a constant interplay of comparisons.

When we talk of developing our professional skills, we mean improving through dealing with situations we have not come across before – we have only been in similar situations. And in any one situation comparing the factors that make up that situation: one situation with another, one event with another. The main source of error leading to the mishandling of a situation is probably not that we don’t know what we’re doing. Instead it is that we too hurriedly bundle one thing together with another.¹¹

Losing perspective

In the military profession losing one’s “perspective” can have devastating consequences. In the 1960s in the Congo one of the African tribes, the Balubas, sought refuge from



their enemies near the Swedish UN camp. Over the course of only a few days the refugee camp grew from just a small number of tents to nearly 50,000 refugees looking to the Swedish force for protection. Corporal Martinsson tells of being asked to show two officials, apparently from the Red Cross, around the camp. Martinsson took them in his jeep and drove a few hundred metres into the camp. They stopped the jeep there and got out to get a better view of what was going on. Martinsson noticed unrest over in another part of the camp but “because the Balubas were our friends and had previously not shown any aggression towards the UN I was not unduly worried.”¹² Martinsson continues: “When I turned round to talk to the two civilians, I saw to my surprise that they had disappeared with the jeep.”¹³ Only then did he realise the danger of the situation and began running towards the UN camp. In a house some 200–300 metres away a soldier, Ragnar Johansson, witnessed how a Swedish soldier was chased, caught and then beaten up by about 200 refugees.

I rush straight away into the house to get my submachine gun, at the same time letting my mate Bernt Karlsson from Blötberget know what has happened. When I get back outside I see a crowd of Balubas round Martinsson, who has been now beaten to the ground. I can see how they have made a real mess of him with their spiked clubs. In the meantime Baluba folk are rushing towards us from all directions. I fire a few warning shots and run towards them.¹⁴

Martinsson was saved by Johansson and another colleague who got involved in the chaos, managing between the two of them to get Martinsson out.

You can never be completely sure of any situation, but let us try to understand Martinsson’s “mistake” using situational awareness as a point of focus. He assumed that he knew the camp and its inhabitants well. The Balubas, after all, had sought refuge with the Swedish UN force. Martinsson maybe thought that the two officials he took into the camp were just normal Red Cross employees. Not even when he drove into the camp and saw the unrest at a distance did he consider that what was happening was dangerous for his own safety.

Ragnar Johansson and Bernt Karlsson went in to save Martinsson despite not having time to call for back up. The



The Baluba
“patent baton”.

Corporal Martinsson convalescing.

fact that there were 200 Balubas did not stop them.

Unspoken, but nevertheless clearly demonstrated, the qualities of courage and a sense of responsibility permeate many of the stories told by those who have done service abroad. In a very tangible and practical way the mission is put first. Gunnar Bergendal, a research expert, describes this factor as responsible action.

“In practical terms it is a question of judging it right, including all the risks involved, not looking for a statistical truth or safe mediocrity and avoiding taking responsibility. Plain practical common sense is not a diluted consensus, in which all angles are considered to arrive at a generally accepted understanding of the situation, but a conscious acceptance of responsibility.”¹⁵

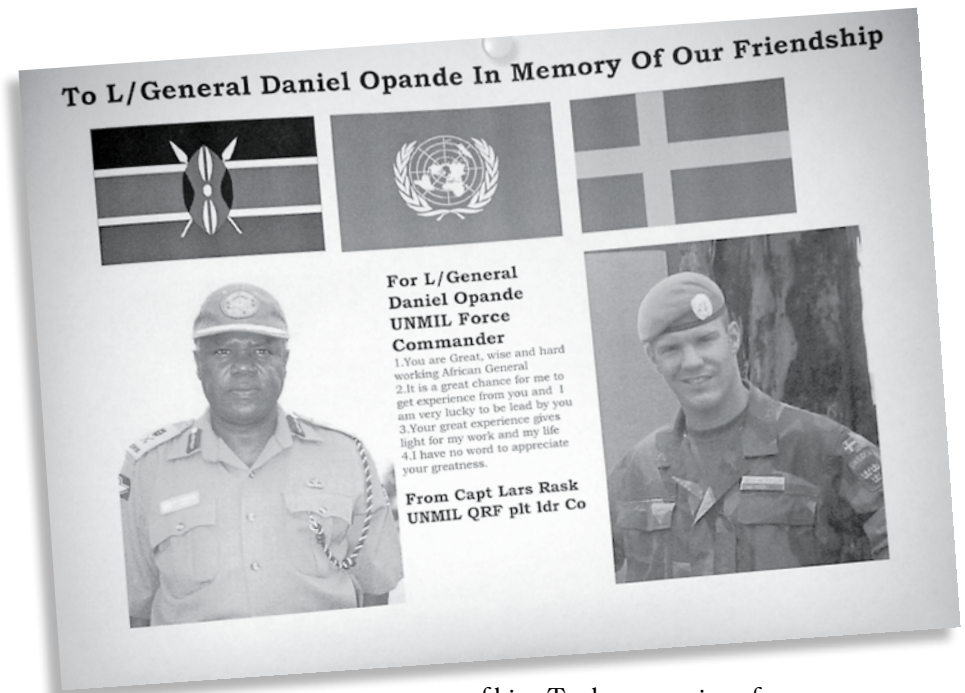
Playing a part

For those volunteering for service abroad a certain amount of acting talent will come in useful. As representatives for a peacekeeping force everyone, regardless of rank, must inspire trust and respect amongst the warring factions and the local population. During the war in former Yugoslavia Swedish units often had to negotiate with the warring factions.

Liaison Officer Gary Bergdahl relates an incident from Macedonia in 1993:

After a while the Headquarters managed to track down the last point at which the vehicle had been seen. We also received information that the fueller had been stopped inside the Serb area. I soon realised that they had got lost. After a few minutes I received orders to get there as soon as possible and start negotiations... All the way there I tried to work out how we were going to resolve the situation. Being young and relatively inexperienced, I felt nervous, but at the same time lifted by the trust the Commanding Officer had placed in me ... When we reached the border we saw the vehicle 100 metres in front of us. A UN Military Observer team arrived in support. I then really felt myself growing into the role. I didn't really need the observers, but I was at least able to borrow a Motorola radio from them. I went forward with my two soldiers. We saw 3-4 Serb soldiers by the vehicle. I decided to go forward the last few metres alone. I told the two soldiers with me to stand off at about 50-75 metres so that they could give me fire support if necessary. I went forward armed with a revolver accompanied by the interpreter. The Serbs consisted of an NCO and three men. The situation was tense. I decided to stick to the principle that "a confident approach will hide any amount of insecurity". I called out in an authoritative voice to the Swedish soldiers to "hold fast" and made it clear to the Serbs that I was in charge. I managed to get back the blue cards and after a while we took the vehicle back over to our side.¹⁶

Gary's example shows how, faced with a situation he had never encountered before or expected to have to deal with, he nevertheless somehow understood what was expected



of him. To show any sign of nervousness in a negotiating situation will leave you at a serious disadvantage. Gary understood that if he was going to have any chance at all of getting his colleagues released he would have to act as if he was completely in control of the situation. His overall awareness of the situation enabled him to bring the incident to a successful conclusion.

Anders Karlsson describes a negotiation in Bakovici with the Croat force surrounding the hospital, a few days after the initial threatening ultimatum:

Kaparn [the boss], another soldier, the Muslim female interpreter, and myself made our way one day to the Croat headquarters, a hundred metres from the hospital. We had ammo'd up and were in full battle order. Sometimes this was necessary and a simple way to gain respect in this ravaged land. The parties were often very interested in our "exotic" weapons, even if they didn't want to openly show it. It was therefore sometimes possible to use the subject to break the ice in a situation... Slivovits was of course a main ingredient in the ceremony that followed – we were all given a slug of this fearful and, quality wise, very variable firewater. Our Canadian colleagues hadn't earned many bonus points, since they hardly ever fraternised with either of the two sides and, being the transatlantic folk they are, had made a really big deal of drinking neat spirit. Perhaps they didn't get that respect that comes from looking mean and armed to the teeth, you're sitting there looking relaxed drinking alcohol with the enemy in his own camp.¹⁷

Anders describes a situation where how you behave and the impression you give is just as important, if not more so, than what is said. The more self-assurance and poise Anders and the others could convey, the more likely it was that their mission would succeed. It was important to keep up the act in front of the other side, despite what they might have thought about what was said or done. The ability to act the part, in this case that of the UN representative is a professional military skill. On international operations in meetings with other parties you must be able to lay your own thoughts and feelings aside. It would not have helped the patients in Bakovici hospital if Anders and his colleagues had allowed themselves to become sentimental or dejected in the face of what appeared to be a hopeless situation.

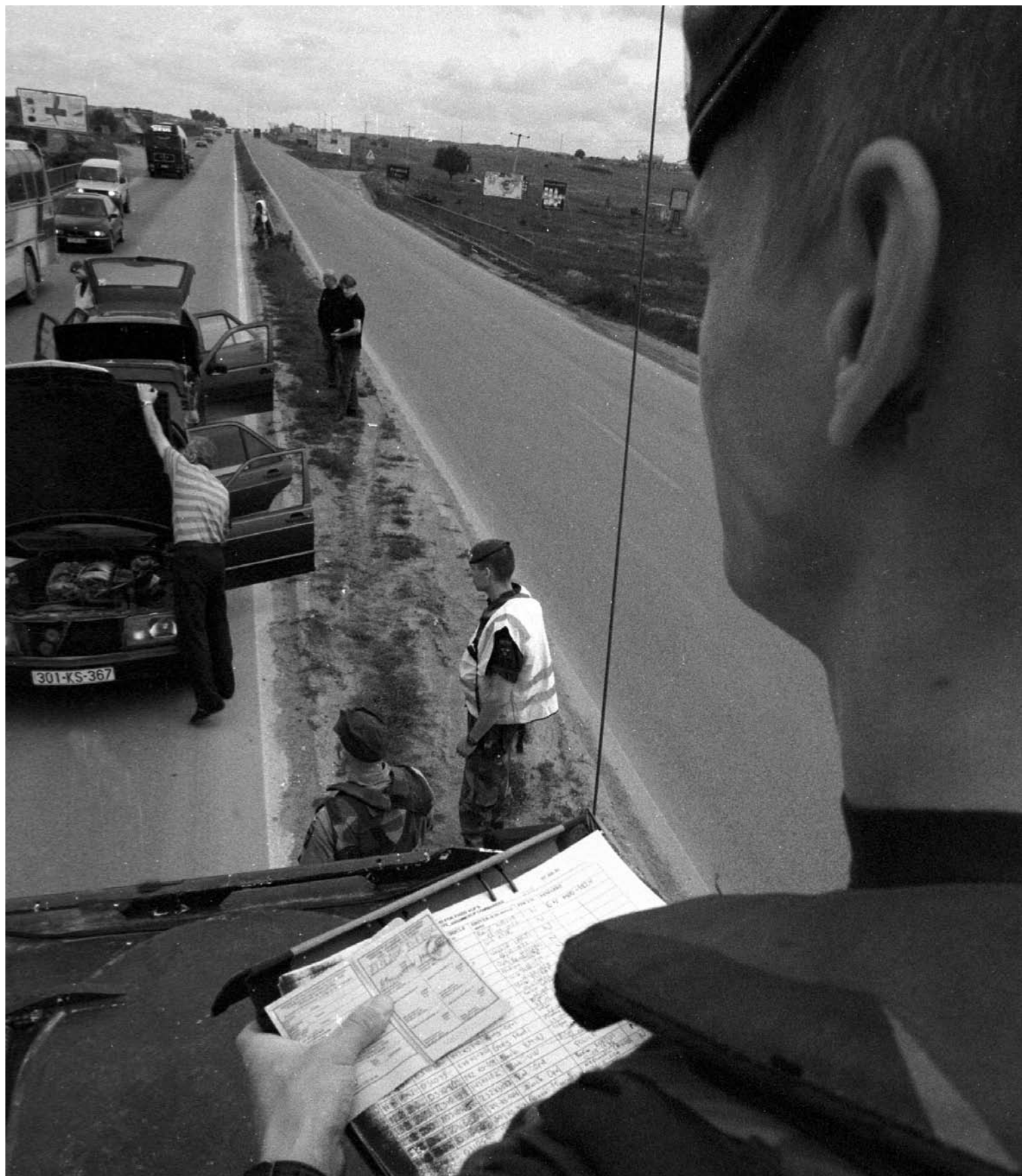
Learning the lessons

The main part of the text that follows has been written by people who have served on international missions. During their service they have experienced situations from which not only they, but also others can draw lessons. They have been in situations where their professional military skills have been tested to the full and where the boundary between right and wrong, what is acceptable and what is not, has not always been obvious. In some cases they achieved things that at first they did not believe possible. In other cases they came across problems where they were least expected. The great value of concrete examples in this examination of international operations is that they are able to carry on where the wisdom from opinion, general assumptions and rules leaves off. Examples of this type are important tools for the continued development of relevant knowledge and practical skills within the Swedish Armed Forces; skills that need to be continuously refined to cope with changing circumstances and conditions.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Karlsson, Lars A (2004) *Alfa Sierra: BA01 – Nordbat 2 i Bosnien-Hercegovina*. Lettland: AK-Ronym.
- 2 Simson, Stewe “Alfa Sierra” i Svartheden, Joakim red. (2003) *Exempel – Yrkeskunnandets Praktik och IT 2002*. Stockholm: Försvarshögskolan.
- 3 Karlsson, Lars A (2004) *Alfa Sierra: BA01 – Nordbat 2 i Bosnien-Hercegovina*. Lettland: AK-Ronym.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Simson, Stewe “Alfa Sierra” i Svartheden, Joakim red. (2003) *Exempel – Yrkeskunnandets Praktik och IT 2002*. Stockholm: Försvarshögskolan.
- 6 Karlsson, Lars A (2004) *Alfa Sierra: BA01 – Nordbat 2 i Bosnien-Hercegovina*. Lettland: AK-Ronym.
- 7 Simson, Stewe “Alfa Sierra” i Svartheden, Joakim red. (2003) *Exempel – Yrkeskunnandets Praktik och IT 2002*. Stockholm: Försvarshögskolan.
- 8 Råberg, Patrik “Folkrätten kränks – Agera!” i Svartheden, Joakim red. (2003) *Exempel – Yrkeskunnandets Praktik och IT 2002*. Stockholm: Försvarshögskolan.
- 9 Coughlin, Jack (2005) *Shooter – The Autobiography of the Top-ranked Marine Sniper*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.
- 10 Svensson, Stefan “Militärt Yrkeskunnande” i Tillberg, Peter & Hammarén Maria red. (2002) *Spelplats – Yrkeskunnandets Praktik och IT*. Stockholm: Dialoger. Stefan Svensson’s example from Bosnia in “Militärt Yrkeskunnande” is fictitious. The example is designed essentially to encourage reflection on military practice, decision making, acting decisively and the ability to make use of earlier experience in new situations.
- 11 Hammarén, Maria “Yrkeskunnande, berättelser och språk” i Tillberg, Peter red. (2002) *Dialoger – om yrkeskunnande och teknologi*. Stockholm: Dialoger.
- 12 Kamstedt, Inge (1980) *FN-soldat i Kongo*. Göteborg: Bokförlaget Dokumentär.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Bergendal, Gunnar (2003) *Ansvarig Handling: uppsatser om yrkeskunnande, vetenskap och bildning*. Stockholm: Dialoger.
- 16 Isberg, Jan-Gunnar m.fl. red. (1999). *Ledarskap i krigsliknande situationer – redigerade bilder ur verkligheten, Makedonien 1993 Nordic Battalion 1*. Ledarskapsinstitutionen I:7 1999, Försvarshögskolan, Stockholm.
- 17 Karlsson, Lars A (2004) *Alfa Sierra: BA01 – Nordbat 2 i Bosnien-Hercegovina*. Lettland: AK-Ronym.





Risk Taking and Visual Memories

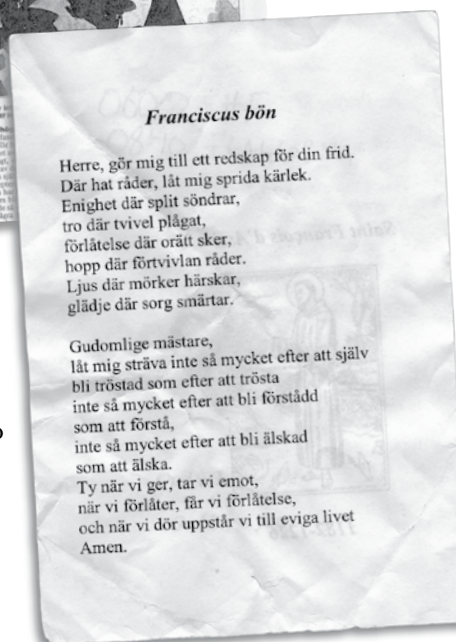
About taking responsibility no matter what,
about making an educated guess,
about someone's got to do it,
and about daring to take the necessary risks.

Mine games

Jan Almgård

The platoon is at last on the move. We have been waiting for several days now for orders to advance into the village of Stupni Do, where a massacre has taken place. The atmosphere in the platoon is tense; everyone looks ready to take on whatever is coming. A few of the soldiers are sitting alone praying.

Just before the village we stop at a railway viaduct. Damn, another checkpoint! Three Bosnian Croat soldiers are guarding the tunnel, which has also been mined. This isn't going to be easy. I get down from the vehicle and go over to talk to the Bosnian Croat soldiers, who, luckily enough speak Russian. They do no intend to let us pass. How are we going to work this one out? Suddenly they start making signs to a hill nearby. Maybe there's a defensive position up there? Yes I'm sure of it! I carry on talking with the soldiers. "How's the war going? Have you got children? Are you from Vares?"



Suddenly the radio comes to life. It's the Commanding Officer. He tells us to be careful when lifting the mines out of the way. What the hell is he talking about – are we going to start clearing the mines now?!

Sometimes he doesn't seem quite with it. We tell him that we are stopped at the southern approach to the village by the viaduct.

About 30 minutes later the CO's jeep approaches the viaduct from the other direction. He stops on the far side of the minefield and walks through the tunnel to our position. He

asks me "What do you think you're doing?" I explain that I've got a minefield in front of me and that there's probably a defensive position up on the nearby hill. He looks at me calmly and says that we had better go and have a look at this. The two of us walk to the left of the tunnel and up the railway embankment.

The CO tells me that we are going to advance. I look at him seriously and I tell him that there is probably a defensive position up on the hill over there. He



looks at me, still calm, and says that I can use my 20mm cannon if necessary. I am completely dumbfounded. Am I going to start shooting now?!

– If you need to, use the gun, says the CO.

I run quickly back to my three vehicles. My soldiers have been watching our reconnaissance carefully from the vehicles. What am I going to say to them now? I can't contain myself but shout out to the troop that we are going to attack over the embankment. The CO hears this and says calmly to me that we are not going to *attack* over the viaduct, but *advance*. I calm down and give quick orders to the vehicle commanders.

We completely surprise the Bosnian Croats by going round their minefield. My soldiers sound pretty happy in the vehicles as we move slowly but surely on past the viaduct up towards the village. No-one fires on us from the defensive position up on the hill. Maybe there wasn't a position up there after all.

Alpha Sierra

Stewe Simson

The ultimatum came from the Croat soldiers at the guard post.

All Muslim nurses are to leave the hospital by 17:00; otherwise they will attack us and then throw them out. I tell the platoon and start straight away to prepare for battle. Ammunition is distributed and I go round with the Section Commanders to designate the section positions and to repeat our standing orders, known as Megaphone. Anders, No: 1 Section Commander asks me if there really will be a fight.

– How do I know, but since the patients and we won't be able to manage without the nurses, what else are we going to do? And we can't hand them over to the Croats. Make sure you're as ready as you can be and then we'll see...

I found out his name was Markov. This guy Markov and I came to the conclusion that neither of us were happy with the current situation and we then agreed to resolve things in a more reasonable manner.

In harm's way

Claes Annsberg

On one occasion on the BAor tour in Bosnia a colleague and I were detailed to provide communications for a platoon tasked to escort a resupply convoy to and from Tuzla. We were to meet the convoy at Kladanj and travel with it from there. The escort group, which, apart from our Toyota Landcruiser, consisted of Sisu trucks for convoy protection, halted when we got near to the heights around Kladanj. The heights appeared to be under artillery fire and it was too dangerous to drive up there to meet the convoy.

After a few minutes the escort group commander ordered me to set up communications on the heights so that we could establish contact with headquarters. I asked which vehicle we should use and was told one of our own, i.e. a Toyota. When I drew attention to the artillery fire, I got the reply that it might be too dangerous to go up there, but that we had to establish communications. I could see that we were only going to get in an argument over whether or not we could have a Sisu for protection, so I just drove up onto the heights and set up communications.

Up on the top it was misty and we couldn't see further than 30 metres. We heard both artillery and machine-gun fire. When we had set things up the firing started to get closer and we also heard voices on the mountainside.

As we stood up there it occurred to us that we would be the ones to know when the convoy had passed. However, we couldn't see the road for the mist and would therefore have to split up in order to be able to report when the convoy had passed, and then close down the communications site on the heights as soon as possible after that. As soon as we heard the sound of vehicles my colleague went 75 metres down the hill to the road to be able to report when all vehicles had passed, while I stayed up on the heights to maintain communications and guard the vehicle.

– Was the job of escorting the convoy achieved, or should the armoured vehicles have been where it was most dangerous for the convoy?

– How was the decision reached that we should go up onto the heights, while the others stayed down below in the armoured vehicles?

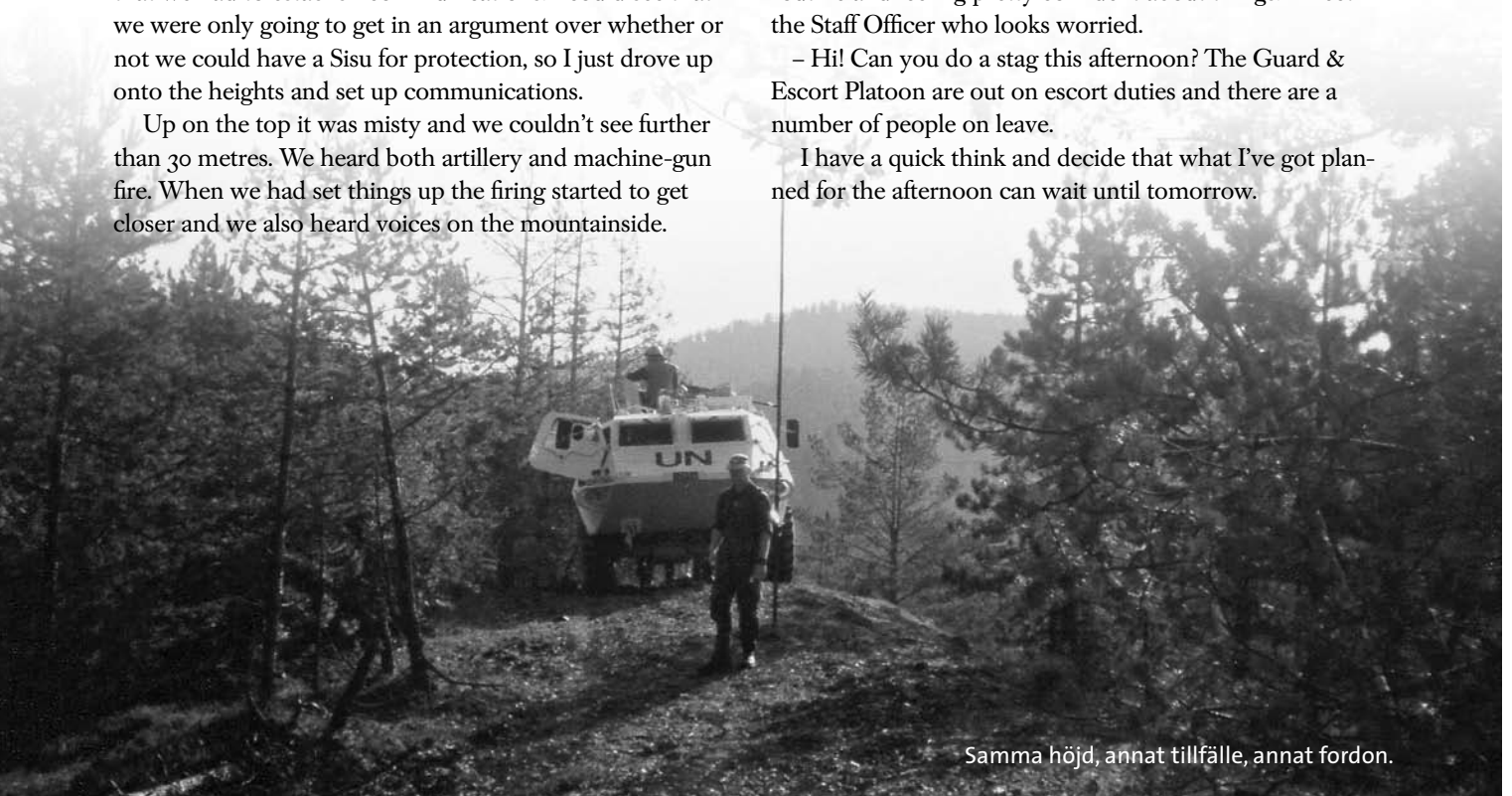
It's not about the skis

Ronnie Johansson

The sun is burning down on the back of my neck as I make my way from the main store over to our equipment container. I've been out here for a while now; I'm getting into the routine and feeling pretty confident about things. I meet the Staff Officer who looks worried.

– Hi! Can you do a stag this afternoon? The Guard & Escort Platoon are out on escort duties and there are a number of people on leave.

I have a quick think and decide that what I've got planned for the afternoon can wait until tomorrow.



Samma höjd, annat tillfälle, annat fordon.



– No problem, no job too small, or too big. I'll just tell my boss.

The Staff Officer brightens up. It's obviously not that easy to get people for tasks.

I liaise with the Guard & Escort Commander and find out that I'm on stag 14.00–23.00. Not what I had planned for the evening, but you must earn your pay, mustn't you? Soon I'm on stag at the main gate looking out over the cemetery. The sun is going down. Begin to wonder how I ended up here in the sentry tower behind a machine-gun. I was sent to Afghanistan to deal with communications emergencies.

Nothing special is happening. A few cars pass by on the road outside, some children run past. I communicate every now and then with the other sentry post. He asks in a challenging voice why I haven't got a model D AK5 like some others.

– I quote Ingmar Stenmark, a famous, world champion Swedish skier, who, when asked what was special about his skis, said, "It's not about the skis..."

I begin thinking about what could happen, what's the threat? I soon decide that a suicide bomber in car is the biggest threat. I remember a film taken by a surveillance camera showing a soldier on a main gate in Iraq. A black Toyota Corolla stops 200 metres from the soldier, rolls gently towards the gate and then disintegrates in a violent explosion which kills several soldiers.

What brought that thought into my head...just now?

Half an hour later a black Toyota Corolla drives into view, quite a coincidence, most cars in Afghanistan are

either white or yellow. It stops 200 metres away, now the coincidence is not so funny. I check with my binoculars but can't see anything suspicious. I line up the machine-gun, thoughts are whirring round in my head. I can't shoot up a car just because it's black and has stopped 200 metres away. But what if it's a suicide bomber...

Slowly the car starts to roll towards me. It's 50 metres away. If I shoot him now and I'm wrong, there will be all hell to pay, a signaller who gets itchy on the trigger. If I don't shoot and it is a suicide bomber then I'll die as the signaller who misjudged the situation, but that wouldn't matter too much, I have no wife and children.

The car rolls on by and nothing happens. I feel a bit silly standing there behind the machine-gun, thinking idly about life.

Soon my stag finishes and I end up on the camp security patrol. We move around inside the camp to make sure that there are no unauthorised people in the area. We pass by the canteen where there's a real party going on, and carry on down to the cinema, which is full. Strange the Staff Officer had trouble getting hold of people; there are certainly plenty around.

Two days later Military Observation Team Juliet is going to hold a number of meetings in Shebergan and need a team of soldiers for protection on site.

I don't know why the Ops Officer asked me, but I thought about which was the more important operational

MOT Juliet.





task, carrying on installing communications equipment, or making sure MOT Juliet could hold their meetings. Twelve hours later I'm in a Toyota with my trusty rifle on my lap and thinking about Stenmark.

Everything's fine

Mats Hillerström

Being on time, thoroughness, tidiness and a passion for care of equipment were qualities that did not immediately

spring to mind when I first came to Angola. But for mine and explosives disposal they are essential for the safe and successful conduct of operations.

That said something now had to be done to change the mentality of our mine clearers. Previous experience had shown that lectures, nagging, threats of dismissal etc, were not going to solve the problem. We had to devise an approach that would encourage tidiness, order and structure. The mine clearers had to be proud of their work and the operation as a whole, not just to ensure that we cleared mines but also to engender a sense of professionalism through-



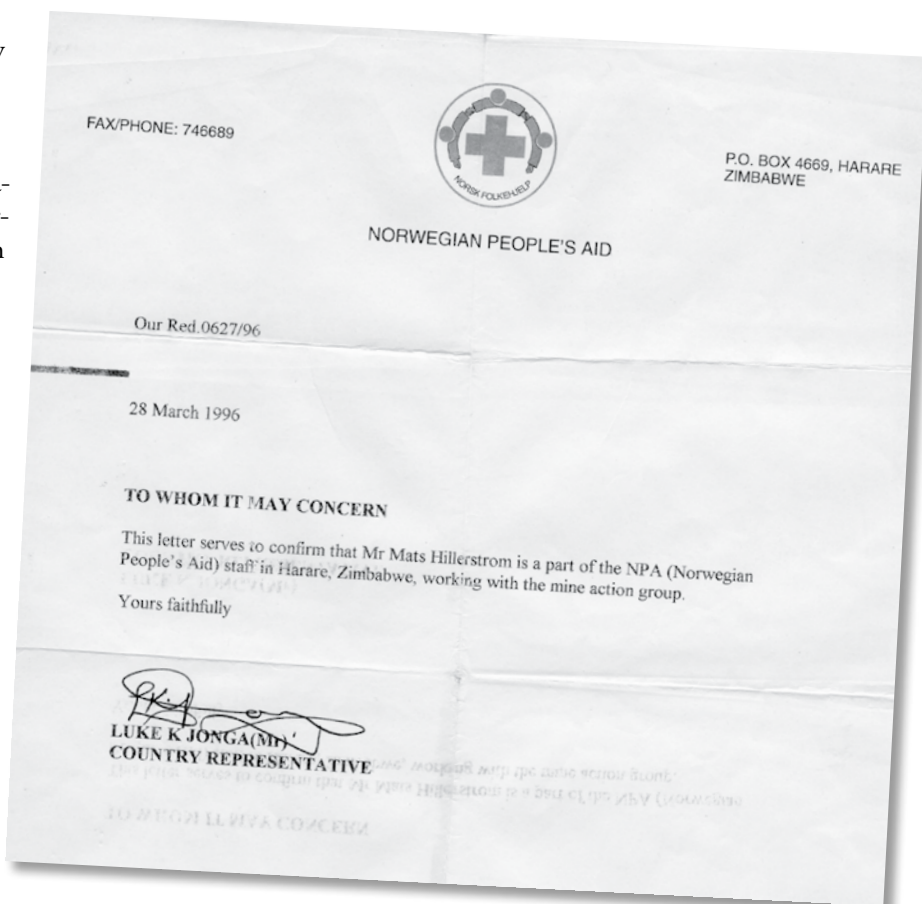
hout the organisation. Adopting a friendly but firm approach, we introduced a uniform and insisted on thoroughness in the marking out and checking of mine areas.

However, the cornerstone of the operation was our system of fines. As the Supervisor I was able to fine a mine clearer with either a large fine (2 days' pay) or a small fine (1 day's pay). Late on morning parade = small fine, not turning up for work = large fine. They could also be fined for failing to wear safety goggles, a poor and lazy attitude and bad care of equipment. A serious breach of safety entailed immediate dismissal.

You might think that this system of fines was harsh and would create low morale at work, but this was not the case. In fact all the money collected through fines went back to the mine clearers to finance the platoon party on the last Friday of every month. The party was very popular, just about the most important event of the month. On the day of the party you could feel a special atmosphere in the air. It was *masoma* Friday. Drums rumbled in the rest area and on vehicle roofs and everyone was in high spirits. We finished work

a little earlier and the Supervisor travelled on the truck with everyone to the "restaurant" where the party then began.

The fines system was a reality because offenders felt the effect in their wallets, but the concept had a positive undertone. When we asked the mine clearers if they wanted to do away with the system, the answer was a clear no. We managed to change the mentality, create a team spirit and engender pride in the organisation, so that our team became one of the best in the NPA. We even had problems with the police and military, which were suspicious of the loyalty shown by everyone towards the team.





Safety regulations and reality

Johan Liljegren

We were tasked for a long-range patrol to a national park in southern Liberia. The roads and bridges on the route were in very poor condition and we therefore had to leave all heavy vehicles back in camp. We decided to use tracked vehicles and Geländewagen for the patrol.

The problem then arose that we had no means of carrying either fuel or water in bulk.

After applying the sum total of our brainpower to the problem, and being forced to put the Safety Instructions manual to one side, we constructed a “fueller” loaded with plastic containers bought in town. We broke the rules, but it was what had to be done if we were going to achieve our mission.

You might wonder if it should be necessary to break safety regulations to carry out an operational task.

There are a number of situations today where you feel forced to go against safety regulations. Should this have to be the case?



Naturally there are a lot of rules and regulations during initial training, but we must be able to adapt and change them to take account of the intelligence of our soldiers. Otherwise we will have soldiers who are unable to operate safely and effectively on operations. We must rely on our officers to make that judgement and allow them to set exercises at the level of their expertise in order to achieve the best results from training. There must be an easier way to approve the “field solution” when on operations.

I do not want to be fined or get the sack for doing my job.

Throwing in a suggestion

Stewe Simson

– The bloody Canucks are driving like idiots in town! No wonder the locals are throwing stones at them.

My second-in-command was really angry.

– Well, go on foot then, I suggest. If they want to throw stones at their own folk, then let them.

For their own safety we transport Bosnian nurses between Drin and Fojnica. The front line is not far away when you get close to Drin and occasionally Fojnica comes under rocket attack, which creates chaos. The solution seems simple to me. Drive a part of the way towards Fojnica, and then offload the nurses and soldiers, who then walk behind the trucks the rest of the way into town. We then leave it to the nurses to sort out the problem in town.



The second-in-command catches on to the idea. Unfortunately the Canadians don't, and their solution to the problem is to drive even faster. I encounter considerable problems with the Canadian command, who give me a direct order not to use Canadian personnel. Operational Control no longer applies.

I get my guys to patrol on foot to the outskirts of Fojnica and then let the nurses walk the last bit on their own. It works straight away, and the nurses make sure that the locals in town do not throw stones at Swedish soldiers. The complete solution is achieved when our vehicles drive slowly, but also stop so that our soldiers can jump out and catch up with any kids that throw stones.

The Canadian Liaison Officer is very surprised that this solution works.

Why? I ask, not being able to see why it shouldn't have worked.

Team spirit, for better or worse

Per Beckman

- *The workshop works 9–16, but my vehicle's broken down now!*
- *Those skiving engineers just sit in the canteen all day and complain!*
- *In Headquarters Company you can drink as much beer as you like!*
- *Look at the creases on that staff officer's uniform!*
- *I think Headquarters have got carried away again!*



My experience is that today's military commanders are quite able to handle the situations that they will encounter on international operations, not least in the case of *worst case scenarios*. The commanders who serve abroad are capable, experienced and charismatic and are well able to create good team spirit in their platoons or companies.

But I have often experienced that an atmosphere of rivalry builds up between platoons and companies. Even more common is a lack of understanding between the Company and Battalion Headquarters, let alone between the force abroad and the support element back home in Sweden.

How can it be that so many soldiers look down on Battalion Headquarters, but often like the Battalion Commander, if he is sufficiently charismatic? Has he built up a cult of personality around himself?

How can you create a strong team spirit and still avoid a negative sense of rivalry between the various elements of the unit? Who are the members of the team?

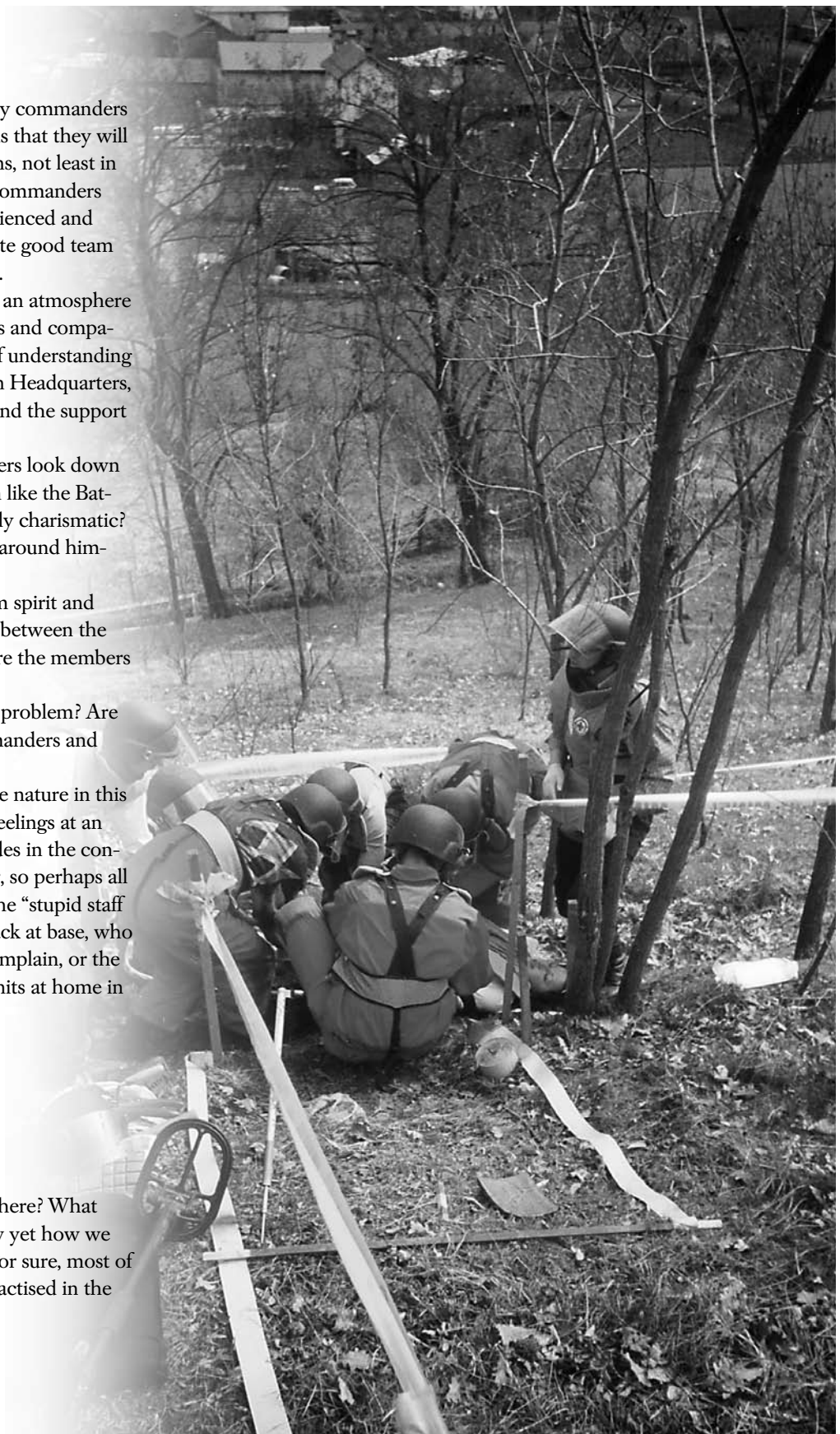
Is job rotation the solution to the problem? Are visits and follow-up on site by commanders and others in authority the answer?

Or is there something of a positive nature in this rivalry? They talk of directing your feelings at an "external enemy". We can't choose sides in the conflict we have been tasked to monitor, so perhaps all we can do is hold a grudge against the "stupid staff officers", or the "blanket stackers" back at base, who just sit around in the canteen and complain, or the less "brave" companies or support units at home in Sweden?

Daring to ask or being afraid of the answer

Anders Karlsson

The journalists asked, "Why are you here? What do you want to achieve?" Who knew yet how we should answer all those questions? For sure, most of us were not keen philosophers or practised in the



art of producing politically correct replies in interview. We were, for our age, a fairly representative group of young men, as yet not that unfavourably disposed towards the military hierarchy, because, they do, after all, direct operations of this nature. We wanted to be part of it because it was exciting and a big challenge, and there was a unique air of patriotism and nationalism about the whole thing. For some it was also an easy way to break with the old lifestyle, even if no-one actually expressed it in exactly those words. Also the fact that a number were unemployed or thought this was a good alternative because of the employment situation at home, did not surface much, but nevertheless that was the case. What else was there to say? We didn't want to give the impression to the world that we were a bunch of adventure-loving opportunists and, perhaps a few naïve idealists, who had set off intent on saving the world, or in this case Yugoslavia. Instead there were mumblings of wanting to do something or of trying to help, clichés which were soon pumped out into the media. And because we also didn't know what to expect, we didn't need to be especially brave either. They had bigger problems recruiting for the next battalion, because by then everyone knew the chaotic situation that would be waiting for them down here. I just saw the opportunities, and couldn't believe that we wouldn't be able to influence things or make "reality"

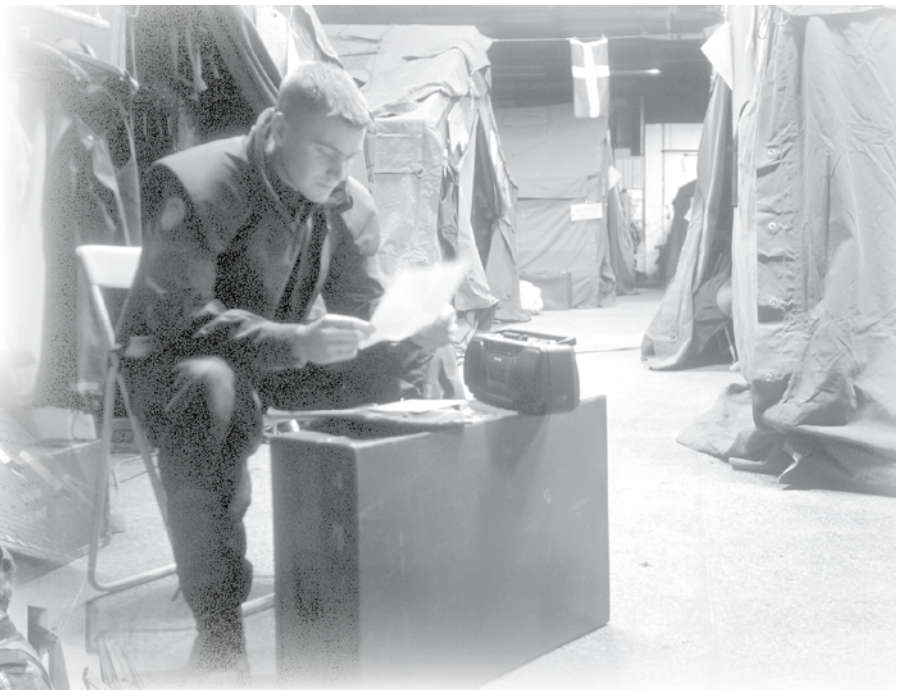


A well wrapped up Staffan Heimersson interviews a Company Commander from BA01.



better. That we, as the first Swedish troops since the Congo crisis, were heading for a current war zone was, for the moment, just exciting...

Were we hoping to be shot at just a little bit, so that we would have a good story to tell when we got home? Was it hard to volunteer and then set off? Not really, many of us were a little naïve and inexperienced, we had not



been involved in fighting or conflict before and were therefore, in the circumstances, a little wide-eyed. Was that how we wanted it; were we quite ready to go? Did the organisation and we ourselves dare to ask all the questions or were we afraid of the answers? Our performance and the end result would probably have been even better if we had felt more sure of things before setting off for Bosnia.

In today's reality it is your own, or perhaps more important, other's lives that are at stake. You are being naïve if you believe otherwise. This is reality with real consequences, and you can't just break off this exercise once it has started. We then come to the question of how dedicated we actually are and what goals the unit or we ourselves hope to achieve. These are things we all really should know and which we owe to each other. We need to know who is going to support us