MISSION COMMANDER

Swedish Experiences of Command in the Expeditonary Era

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Lotta Victor Tillberg & Peter Tillberg

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Mission Commander – Swedish Experiences of Command in the Expeditionary Era
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Preface

In this book, seven Swedish military commanders have been interviewed about their experiences of challenging situations whilst serving overseas. They have been invited to describe 'a situation in which you feel that your professional skills have been tested to the extreme'. This question is derived from one of the basic assumptions in the book, namely that real professional skills manifest themselves in action and can best be understood using concrete examples. (In contrast to hypothetical scenarios and theories that are not connected to military professional practice.) The aim is to examine how Swedish military commanders 'are tested' whilst serving overseas. This is done by providing concrete examples of situations: How do military commanders at an operational and a military-strategic level describe the missions they have been commissioned to carry out? How do they choose to talk about problems they have been confronted with? And how do they describe what methods they have used and how they have arrived at the decisions they have taken?

The purpose of this book is to describe how imponderable and tricky situations might manifest themselves in international military missions and what kind of knowledge is required to execute them.

My sincere thanks go here to those who have participated in the book and have shared their personal experiences: Hans Ilis-Alm, Anders Brännström, Olof Granander, Ulf Henricsson, Hans Håkansson, Jan-Gunnar Isberg and Mats Ström. I would also like to thank the soldiers and officers who have contributed to the book with pictures from the various missions.

Lotta Victor Tillberg
September 2013

Preface to the English Version

Allan Janik

This volume continues a series of distinctively Swedish studies on the nature of military leadership in international operations initiated in 2007 with the publication of *Mission Abroad* edited by Peter Tillberg, Joakim Svartheden, Danuta Janina Engstedt. The premises of these studies is that the challenge of keeping the peace internationally has become dramatically different since the end of World War II as the nature of armed conflict has radically changed. As long as war was a matter of massed armies confronting each other in pitched battle, peace-keeping was a matter of preventing direct confrontations by interposing neutral troops between the armies of the conflicting nations rather in the way that a referee separates two fighters in a boxing match. Since the end of World War II, almost everything in this picture has become passé. War has gone from being a extension of political conflict by other means, as Clausewitz described industrialized war between nations states, to an extension of cultural conflict on the basis of violence in war amongst the people, as General Sir Rupert Smith has described that difference.

One particularly dramatic aspect of this transformation bears upon leadership. Previously military leadership was hierarchical as befits the structure of large-scale industrial enterprises. However, in situations in which humanitarian missions, peace-keeping and combat can merge imperceptibly before our very eyes the leadership function is shared (to be sure, in quite different ways) by colonels and corporals alike, as General Krulak has emphasized. Leadership has become increasingly a matter of discerning what the crucial elements of a tense situation are and responding to that situation fittingly, be it by assisting civilians in need, by mediating between conflicting parties or by engaging hostile irregulars. Distinguishing between these overtly similar but in fact drastically different situations in a split-second under extreme duress is the order of the day.

Thus the practical knowledge of soldiers has become increasingly recognized as the essential component in leadership. The challenge to military education is to map this knowledge in such a way that the split-second decision is recaptured in such that it can become useful for preparing young officers for efficient duty.

This is where the distinctively Swedish element in this book enters into the picture. Swedish studies of working life have come increasingly to focus upon the epistemology as well as the sociology of professional experience. Over the past thirty five years Swedish researchers such as Ingela Josefson and Bo Göranzon have pioneered research based upon the idea that qualified work has to be understood as based upon the application of formal knowledge in work situations. However, this turns out to be anything but a simple matter subject to a simply technocratic solution. Professional experience, be it in medicine or information technology, is not simply a matter of using pre-existing models or theories to solve clearly defined problems. Rather, it involves forming judgments about the *meaning* of models and formalisms in the myriad of activities involved in grasping the precise nature of an elusive problem at hand and therefore forming a complex prelude to determining how we might go about solving it. Thus a hermeneutic conception of the "application" of knowledge as the interpretation of complex, riddle-like situations has come to displace the widespread superficial idea that "applying" knowledge is something like putting a band aid on a cut. As Major General Anders Brännström makes the point with respect to the knowledge characteristic of military experience succinctly in this volume: "If we are talking about military professionalism and making decisions, then we can compare it to a puzzle with hundreds of different pieces. Only when all the hundreds of pieces have been put together will you be able to say that you know what it looks like. However, as commander you can never wait until you have all the pieces of the puzzle. You have to act on what you have."

The most important source of knowledge for preparing us to use military force reasonably, which is, after all, what peace-keeping is all about, is the experience of officers in interpreting problematic situations who have actually been involved in such inordinately stressful situations. They are the only teachers when it comes to learning what best practice is. Experience as "subjective" knowledge of particular situations is *personal* knowledge as Michael Polanyi put it in the very title of his classical study of "tacit knowing". Given the personal character of experience, the challenge of incorporating into military education involves "objectifying" and "generalizing" it. How are we to make the experience of individual Swedish officers, with the distinctive cultural background that they bring with them when the go abroad on peace-keeping missions, available to other officers who have not had their experience? The answer to that question, incorporated into the methodology of this book, is that such experience is captured in examples, not just any examples but powerfully moving

examples in the form of *stories* capable of conveying *both* the structural *complexities* and the personal *anxieties* of making highly fallible judgments in profoundly uncertain situations. These very special stories are examples incorporating what it is to gain leadership experience that themselves are gripping experiences to listen to rather merely conveying information from one party to another. In short, emotion (so-called catharsis) is an essential element in both gaining and conveying the experience of exercising the judgment of the sort that is typically exercised by military leaders on their missions.

But what about the question of the "objectivity" of such examples? Personal experience can take on an authoritative character when it is articulated on the basis of structured dialogues incorporating systematic critical reflection which confers the character of case studies upon individual experiences. This procedure has been the basis for producing exceptionally rich studies in professional knowledge in Sweden over the last thirty five years – its results speak for themselves in this book. In fact, the stories that officers tell in order to articulate their personal experiences become the subject of critical discussion within a group of experienced officers. The fact that they are critically discussed by both peers and researchers who specialize in the epistemology of professional knowledge confers an authoritative character upon them. Thus the encapsulate a consensus that is far more profound than anything that might be established upon the basis of, say, questionnaires. Of course, the series of authoritative examples remains open-ended as long as Swedish peace-keeping operations continue, so the knowledge that officers' stories about the experiences in the line of duty never have anything like a final "result". Indeed, the results of these studies in the conundrums and dilemmas surrounding military leadership today exist first and foremost for the sake of internal evaluation within the community of Swedish officers and other competent professionals – something that by no means prevents politicians, statesmen and other interested parties from learning from them.

> *"They are the only teachers when it comes to learning what best practice is."*

How This Book Should Be Read

This book contains seven interviews with military commanders about how they have been challenged whilst serving overseas. They talk about experiences ranging from being battalion commander to force commander. The central theme of these interviews has been to produce descriptions of challenging and imponderable situations that are as real as possible.

In the letter sent to the interviewees in advance, the question was worded as follows:

A starting point for the study is the assumption that in every individual's development, challenges occasionally come along that test their professional skills to the extreme. I mean situations where judgement is really put to the test. If you have had such an experience, I would very much like to talk to you about that. The incident does not necessarily have to be an acute situation, or one that is traumatic or remarkable. What I want is to get a description of a situation or a real incident you have been involved in that has been of crucial significance to your subsequent professional life.

The interviews will be published almost in their entirety. By doing so, the reader can follow the entire discussion underpinning the book. The reader can form their own opinion about how the conversation went, the questions posed, and the order in which the information was given. By presenting the sources on which the book is based in this way, the reader can distinguish between the researchers'/authors' message and the viewpoints of the interviewees. It is important to point out that the purpose of the study has not been to evaluate the events and courses of action described. The interviews have been conducted to produce as detailed descriptions of situations and courses of action as possible, focusing, in particular, on problematic circumstances that the interviewees felt they needed to consider.

The book can be read in any order, thus enabling the reader to dip in and out of the chapters based on their interest at the time. You may be interested in how a particular person has described challenges faced whilst serving overseas. If so, you can go directly to that interview. Perhaps you have a special interest in a specific subject, for example a person's ethics and responsibility for their actions in circumstances completely outside their control. If so, you can look for exactly these terms in the table of contents. However, a prerequisite for getting something out of reading in any order is that you begin with the book's introductory chapter; "When Your Judgement is Tested" and "Phases in Developing Professional Skill". Here you will find a basic description of the epistemological perspective on military professional skills that the book aims to introduce. The introductory chapter also highlights the concepts the reader should

know in order to absorb the rest of the book's content. In addition, you will find here a synoptic and comprehensive description of the content. The final chapter draws attention to knowledge development from a methodological perspective. The photographs in the book are authentic and were taken during the missions referred to here. Finally, the book has wide margins. This is to encourage the reader to reflect, allowing them the opportunity to note their thoughts while reading.

Notes on Interviewees

Seven military commanders, born between 1942 and 1961, have been interviewed for this study. They represent the branches of the army; they are male and have experience of international missions at various levels. The information about the participants' experience of international operations is selectively described and dated December 2010. Hans Ilis-Alm and Olof Granander were interviewed in 2010. The presentation is in alphabetical order.

Anders Brännström (born 1957). Major General. 2000, Commander of the Swedish battalion in Kosovo; 2004, Brigade Commander of the Multinational Brigade Centre, Kosovo. At the time of the interview, Deputy Director of Operations. In September 2012 he was appointed Chief of Staff Swedish Army.

Olof Granander (born 1961). Colonel. 1999–2000, Chief of Staff of the Swedish battalion in Kosovo (KS01); 2004–2008, Chief of Staff of Swedish Armed Forces Land Component Command; 2009, Commander of PRT Mazar-e Sharif and Swedish Contingent Commander (FS 17), Afghanistan; 2010–, Commander of the Norrbotten Regiment.

Ulf Henricsson (born 1942). Brigadier (retired). 1993–1994, Battalion Commander of first Nordic Battalion, UNPROFOR Bosnia; 1999–2001, head of Department for Regional Stabilisation, OSSE, Bosnia-Herzegovina; 2006, Head of Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission.

Hans Håkansson (born 1960). Lieutenant Colonel. Chief of Staff and Deputy Battalion Commander in Kosovo during 2004 (KS09); was also in Kosovo in 2006 on a mission that overlapped the KS13 and KS14 missions (KFOR). At the time of the interview, planning officer for the multinational exercise VIKING 08. Since 2010 Chief of Gotland Training Detachment.

Hans Ilis-Alm (born 1959). Colonel. Between 1998 and 2009 took part in operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Africa. Among other things, Commander of the first Swedish ISAF Force, Commander of the Swedish force in Operation Artemis in 2003, and served at OHQ in Potsdam during EUFOR RD Congo in 2006 and at FHQ in Abeche during EUFOR Chad/RCA. At the time of the interview, Commander of the Operations Staff's Department of Lessons Learned Analysis. Since 2011 Chief Concepts Branch at the European Union External Action Service in Brussels.

Jan-Gunnar Isberg (born 1947). Brigadier General. Battalion commander in Lebanon and Macedonia and adviser in Bulgaria; 1996, IFOR Bosnia Army Corps Staff; 2000, Senior Military Adviser at the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan; 2001–2003, head of the Baltic Cooperation Department at the Swedish Armed Forces Headquarters; 2003–2005, MONUC Deputy Force Commander and Brigade Commander in eastern Congo. At the time of the interview, responsible for the VIKING 08 exercise.

Mats Ström (born 1956). Colonel. 1995, Deputy Chief of Staff, Nordic Mechanized Battalion Group in UNPROFOR, 1997–99, Commander of the Swedish Rapid Reaction Force; 1999–00, Deputy Commander of Swedish Mechanized Battalion Group in KFOR; 2002–03 Chief of the Swedish Liaison Office, CENTCOM, USA; 2004, Deputy Commander of Multinational Brigade Centre KFOR, Kosovo; 2006, Assistant Chief of Staff (ACOS) J3 (Operations), EU Operational Headquarters, Potsdam, Germany. At the time of the interview 2008 Commander of the Logistic Regiment, Skövde. Assistant Chief of Staff Joint Effect Coordination, KFOR HQ 2010–11. Since 2011 Commander of Swedish Armed Forces Logistics Task Group.

The wording 'the interviews are almost published in their entirety' refers to the fact that some digressions from the subject, or typical colloquial expressions, have been removed to improve readability. Any errors in this book are solely the authors responsibility and not the fault of the translator or the informants.

When Your Judgement Is Tested

If I were to summarize how the seven military commanders with experience of international operations describe situations they have encountered, the answers could be encapsulated in a number of statements: you must be prepared to act in unpredictable situations; you must be able to make decisions in uncertain circumstances, and you must be able to do your job in contradictory contexts. The military commander serving overseas must be prepared to operate in and take responsibility for events that he himself is not fully in control of or can influence. At the same time, he is a master of his actions – and a victim of circumstance. In addition, you must be able to rely on your judgement in situations where no solutions are predetermined. Military professional practice in international missions requires the ability to discern; what's true, what's false? What's right? And who is right? It's about being able to predict what might be a mistake – and what the consequences of this might be? What's wrong? Who's wrong? What's reasonable, probable, and realistic? And along with the ability to discern comes judgement. What should be done? What's possible? What are alternative courses of action? What must be achieved? And what is the best or, often, the least worst way of getting there?

Military professional practice in international missions requires the ability to discern; what's true, what's false? What's right? And who's right?

Unpredictable Situations

The very nature of crisis and conflict environments is that they are unpredictable and changeable. What were certain facts yesterday may be out of date and perhaps even misleading information today. The unpredictable appear in concrete examples in many different ways. A recurring realization among the interviewees has been that once they were there in the mission area, the mission they

had officially been assigned to carry out has turned out to have another meaning or practical consequences other than those for which they had prepared. For example, the situational information regarding conditions in the mission area they receive both before arriving there and on the ground may be incomplete or, in some cases, totally incorrect.

When asked what he knew about the Balkans when he accepted the assignment to be the commander of the BA01 (the first Swedish battalion in Bosnia 1993–1994) mission in Bosnia, Ulf Henricsson says that 'we had undergone training in Sweden, but what they said was incorrect. . . . There was no ethnic or religious war going on down there; it was a war conducted by thugs. And there is a great difference if you are going down there believing you are going to serve in a peoples' war or if you encounter a few thugs'.

> *At the same time, he is a master of his actions – and a victim of circumstance.*

The UN's unwritten rules were explained to Jan-Gunnar Isberg, brigade commander in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2003–2005), during his first week in Kinshasa by a UN official. 'At our third meeting, he told me plainly and squarely roughly the following: "The papers making you commander of the Ituri Brigade have now been signed. MONUC HQ won't give a monkey's about you over there in Ituri. You will be entirely responsible for what goes on. If things go pear-shaped, you will have sole responsibility for that also". Furthermore, that same UN official informed Isberg that the Ituri Brigade didn't have access to a level 2 hospital since it was located 600 kilometres away in Kisangani. If UN personnel were to die as a result of the lack of surgical capacity, even this would be Isberg's responsibility.

A consequence of encountering problematic and unpredictable situations is that advance planning proves to be of little use on the ground in the mission area. Hans Ilis-Alm puts it like this: 'If I were to summarize my most important lesson learned from my operational experiences, it is that things never turn out as expected. You can do as much planning as you want to, and you must certainly do this, but reality seldom turns out as you expected'. This does not mean that advance planning does not have any value. The improvisation demanded by the work on the ground is only possible thanks to advance planning, which has indirectly prepared them to meet different scenarios. The fact that they have weighed different alternative actions against each other and gone through the importance of various factors means that they do not come to the mission area empty-handed and unbiased. At best, they have a plan they can deviate from, or that can at least be partially used.

However, the unpredictable also include being confronted with the totally unexpected. The military commander is expected to deal with unforeseen situations where other agencies no longer suffice. During the March riots in Caglavica in 2004, the mission was changed in the blink of an eye.

Three of the interviewees have, in one way or another, mentioned the above

riots. On 17 March 2004, the UN peacekeeping forces in Kosovo suffered a major defeat when, despite the presence of 17,000 KFOR soldiers, they were unable to protect the country's ethnic minorities. The actions of the Swedish KS09 battalion, together with those of the Norwegian companies, among others, outside Caglavica, constituted one exception to the UN failure. Hans Håkansson was the deputy battalion commander on 17 March, when riots broke out outside the village of Caglavica. Up until the outbreak of the riots, the military mission had been to support the local civilian police authorities. These were the ones officially responsible for handling the situation. Håkansson says: 'You start to panic when you realize that you have totally misjudged the situation; completely. You feel like an idiot. And all of a sudden, you realize the situation you are in; the fact that we have thousands […] of angry Albanians on their way to Caglavica, heading towards angry Serbs.' In this situation, it becomes clear to Håkansson that the local police would not be able to handle the situation that had arisen. 'In that situation, they [the police] cease to exist. For my part, they do not exist'. In an instant, Håkansson's mission goes from supporting the local police to taking responsibility for a situation that could quickly lead to genocide. Everything goes very fast and there's no time for reflection or planning.

Anders Brännström was brigade commander when the March riots broke out. 'The only thing they were talking about in Kosovo at that time was that the area was calm, as calm as it could be. […] The most dangerous thing we believed we would encounter when we went down there in 2004 was probably the traffic and traffic accidents. Those were the perceptions we had when we went down there'. The unpredictable also include the political conditions. What hidden and open agendas exist? And how are these expressed? Even Mats Ström mentions the events in Caglavica in his interview: '[N]either NATO nor the EU wanted to see what was happening. There were signs, but nobody took them seriously. They had decided that the process of withdrawing from Kosovo was a step in the right direction. . . . [P]rior to the riots when the UN's local civilian organizations sent reports to UN headquarters in New York about what was about to happen, the reports came back to Pristina amended because they had to be politically correct'.

Qualified professional skills are perhaps most clearly demonstrated in imponderable and problematic situations. There's no great skill in doing the right thing if what takes place is anticipated and there is a rehearsed plan for solving the task.

In the examples of challenging situations dealt with in this book, achieving results requires more than just following instructions: a professional approach is required – an outwardly visible and inherent professionalism. The military commander must radiate confidence and decisiveness to those around him and at the same time be able to make correct and adequate assessments of what is

taking place. Imagination, power of initiative, and resourcefulness are necessary forms of knowledge to master or develop. The professional approach also includes being able to hide and deal with personal feelings and perceptions. Decisiveness and courage inspire others and create confidence, whereas showing hesitancy or uncertainty is not a success factor.

Uncertain circumstances

A direct consequence of the unpredictable situations described by the interviewees is that as commander you have to act during uncertain circumstances. The military commander cannot know for certain that the alternative courses of action he chooses will result in desired conditions, but the decision must still be taken. Several of the interviewees describe situations where, as commander, they have had to take decisions and act even though they didn't have a clear picture of the entire situation. In the situations that the interviewees chose to talk about, taking action and being active always come before waiting or standing back. Proactivity as a military approach is described as a necessity for carrying out the missions faced with.

Ulf Henricsson's mission in Bosnia involved continual negotiations with the different parties in the conflict. A recurring feature of these negotiations was what had been said or promised one minute didn't apply the next. Issued passes still weren't enough to get through road blocks despite promises from senior officers. In October 1993, the massacre at Stupni Do took place. For two days, Henricsson negotiated unsuccessfully with Ivica Rajic, the commander of the Bobovac Brigade, to be allowed to enter the village. 'We gave them an ultimatum. "We're going in at 13.00". As usual, they tried to bullshit us; they didn't want to let us in and there was a lot of toing and froing. They had a new excuse when it was 13.00. By then, I had issued an order that we would go in regardless of whether or not we had permission'. Henricsson went with the Swedish platoon that had to get through the road blocks set up by the Bobovac Brigade in order to enter Stupni Do. 'As usual, they stopped us by using mines again. . . . After some discussion, the soldiers at the road block said that only I would be allowed to go into Stupni Do, but not the platoon. . . . I then issued an order to the platoon commander, "When my SISU [armoured personnel carrier] leaves, follow close behind me. Keep the vehicles close together; no more than a metre between them. . . . [I]t shouldn't be possible to get a single mine between the vehicles". We drove straight through. That's how we got into Stupni Do'.

Henricsson describes a situation at a road block in which he had to be involved, deciding what he should do and implementing his decision at the same time. Work instructions don't get you far in circumstances like those described

in this book. Rules and predetermined methods have a limited value as they are static in the sense that they do not include all the circumstances the military commander must actually take into account and consider. In military professional practice, each rule has an exception, and it is important to know when it's right to make a decision at variance with rules and instructions. Here we are talking about professional skills that must include a high degree of risk taking, imagination, and inventiveness. '[Y]ou must be able to make decisions based on unreliable data', says Brännström and continues, 'on very unreliable data. . . . You can't wait until the staff have finished thinking. You must have an idea before then. You must choose the direction'. Already before the picture had become clear about what was happening in Kosovo on 17 March 2004, Brännström 'would get . . . by nagging' a Norwegian battalion from the German KFOR commander. Brännström happens to know that the Norwegian battalion is nearby. The following statement is made in this context: 'If we hadn't had the Norwegian battalion, we wouldn't have been able to protect Caglavica. If I hadn't immediately got on the phone, some other brigade would have got the Norwegian battalion . . .'. Ström pursues a similar argument, 'You won't be quick enough if you wait to act until you've got all the facts'. Ström links the ability to act during uncertain circumstances with proven experience. 'None of this can be found in books. And when a new situation arises that you have not previously experienced, you're able to act because you recognize situations you've been involved in before. Even if the whole picture isn't clear, you will still be able to make a qualified assessment and act based on different recognizable factors'.

> *In military professional practice, each rule has an exception, and it is important to know when it's right to make a decision at variance with rules and instructions.*

A common feature of the situations that the interviewees talk about is the work as an ongoing phase where there is little or no possibility of reflection. (Naturally, there are also the routine tasks in the international environment, but they are not the focus here.) The courses of action they choose to talk about are intense, involving working under extreme pressure. Time for reflection is very limited and long decision processes or extensive deliberations with others are out of the question.

In Contradictory Contexts

Several of the military commanders describe how serving overseas involves their working in contexts where conflicting political, diplomatic, and military missions and goals have to be handled at the same time. Decision making in these kinds of contexts is sometimes described as uncertainty regarding who should actually take the decision. Receiving contradictory information from one's superiors can also be a part of the unpredictable. During his service in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Isberg experiences how, at the time,

the UN changes the mandate during the Bukavu crisis in 2004. Isberg and the Kivu Brigade, the UN force, are there; they see what's happening but are not allowed to act in the manner required to stop the attackers. 'My superior at the MONUC HQ in Kinshasa prevented me from using force when a rebel army bludgeoned its way into Bukavu. This resulted in the vicious sudden deaths of many civilians, a looted city, a discredited international community, and a five-month delay in the peace process'. During these days, Isberg repeatedly argues with his superiors at MONUC HQ in order to regain the mandate to use force when necessary to protect the population. But 'the chief of staff outlined a number of problems having to deal with: the rebel army on its way to Bukavu, we didn't have enough resources, there were constructive negotiations going on, we probably shouldn't antagonize the Rwandans, and so on. He further referred to the civilian staff, who consequently saw political problems with my plans to intervene with force. I asked him what my rules of engagement were and what I should do if we were not allowed to use deadly force. He said he would get back to me. After having consulted with the MONUC leadership, his answer was: "You can always block the road". We did this, but it didn't help'. A few days later, the UN headquarters in New York intervened and reissued the Kivu Brigade with the previous mandate to use deadly force. Isberg then had to deal with a brigade that had lost its confidence since it had had to just stand there, unable to protect the population in Bakavu. 'We were greatly affected by the criticism of us that appeared in the media, and the civilian population was against us. My conduct during the Bukavu crisis was investigated regarding the question of responsibility. As a precautionary measure, I had printed the order I had received from the UN in Kinshasa, so I was exonerated at an early stage . . .'.

To the same extent the interviewees describe the external turn of events as a major influencing factor, they also return to how internal decisions taken within the organization and circumstances affect the completion of the mission. Quite often, the military organization, with its regulations, decisions, and cooperation with other countries in the peacekeeping mission, is described in terms of obstacles and resistance that must be dealt with and overcome. Being a clever player who mixes with representatives from other countries down there in the mission area seems to be a crucial skill for anyone wishing to achieve success and affect the turn of events in the international environment.

The Art of Making Judgements

Military professional skills include the ability to handle unpredictable situations like those shown here. At best, an unpredictable situation can be used to one's advantage – as when Håkansson, by a twist of fate (?), happens to be assisted by

a special forces unit. However, in the interviews, it is evident that an unpredictable situation can just as well be to one's disadvantage. Isberg suddenly loses his Chapter VII mandate, thus restricting the completion of his mission. During the March riots in Caglavica, the same Håkansson is without a command and control function and doesn't even have pen or paper with him. The complications of reality in terms of encountering the unforeseen are not things that can be postponed or ignored; they must be taken into account. In a real-life situation, an unpredictable circumstance is an influencing factor that is just as important as the other tools (mandate, resources, capacity, material, etc.) a military commander has to use. The situations that the interviewees have recounted consist of a number of instantaneous decisions of which most have direct consequences for the completion of the mission.

The officers who have taken part in this study of military professional skills in an international context provide a picture of a profession which, in real-life situations, requires that you can act and make decisions during a course of events where there is little or no time for reflection and afterthought. They have described situations in which, as a decision maker, you must be able to rely on 'your gut feeling' and your own judgement. They have talked about complex circumstances and unfavourable conditions that cannot be encapsulated in predetermined instructions or rules. Each situation they have talked about must be assessed and interpreted based on the particular circumstances and conditions that prevailed in that very instance. To be a commander in such situations, the interviewees say that you must 'stay one step ahead' and be 'proactive'. They talk about the importance of having early in a phase their own idea about developments: '[Y]ou can't wait for the staff'. A recurring theme in the interviews is daring to act in uncertain situations.

It is the nature of war and the conditions in conflict environments that the value of advance information about the situation on the ground is limited. To cope with this, it is presupposed that the military commander should be proficient in the art of making judgements. What has been said before a mission does not always apply and the conditions change so quickly that information that is valuable one day may be totally inaccurate the following day. It is not enough to know what should be done or how it should be done: you must also have the courage to do it in a way that shows responsibility for the situation.

Courage, risk taking, and responsible action constitute an ever-present subtext in the interviewees' stories.

"*It is not enough to know what should be done or how it should be done: you must also have the courage to do it in a way that shows responsibility for the situation.*"

Phases in Developing Professional Skill

Professional skill is knowledge expressed in action. It is not something that comes with a specific position or post, but is developed through experience in practice. Different kinds of knowledge interact in professional skill, not only theoretical but also practical and experience-based knowledge. The path to well-developed professional skill is via experience, theory, and practice (not necessarily in this order). Theoretical knowledge is brought to life and given meaning through practising a specific profession. Skilled professionalism is recognizable in how you use your judgement and this is a skill developed by learning to see and understand the differences in the professional practice of which you are a part. The following model of skill acquisition, based on the work of Hubert and Simon Dreyfus (1986), shows how to identify skills by focusing on rule following in different degrees of practical complexity. This model is described here in an abridged form:

> *Theoretical knowledge is brought to life and given meaning through practising a specific profession.*

Novice stage: The novice has no personal experience of the professional situations in which one is expected to be able to perform. The tasks for a novice must be simple and unambiguous because the novice lacks experience and thus has a limited understanding of the context.

Advanced beginner stage: The advanced beginner learns by imitating what others more skilled do in different contexts. Thus, experience is gradually built up. The advanced beginner can follow simple instructions and, to a limited extent, act independently, but cannot differentiate between the important and the less important.

Competence stage: The competent have acquired experience and knowledge so that they can act independently and deal with various situations. Their work gets better and better and the competent can – via instructions – learn new

skills, similar to those previously learned with the help of others. The competent can relatively easily follow rules.

Proficiency stage: The proficient have learnt to make their own assessments as to when it is opportune or not to act in a certain way. Based on experience and a bank of acquired knowledge, the proficient can choose between different courses of action and differentiate between what falls under a rule and what must be an exception to a rule.

Expert stage: The expert differs from the proficient in that his/her action is more direct. The expert assesses the situation and acts almost simultaneously. Whilst the proficient consider and choose between alternative courses of action, the expert sees himself/herself as a part of a situation and acts on the basis of what is required in the situation. Rules and instructions are of secondary importance. The expert's assessments and actions are based on experience and reflection on acquired knowledge. For a more developed discussion on this model see "Why Computers May Never think Like People" (1986), *Impure Reason: An introduction to Practical Philosophy* (2000) and/or *The Philosophy of Expertice* (2006).

It is important to point out that the subdivisions of knowledge are only theoretical tools; in practice, they are simultaneous and dependent on each other. It should also be noted that knowledge classification has not been used here to distinguish whether or not someone is skilled. Using the model in this way is wrong. In this context, the Dreyfus model is used to clarify what kind of situations a military commander is expected to deal with in an international context. The same person can be a novice one minute and proficient the next, depending on the situation and context.

The first three stages in the Dreyfus model of skill acquisition – novice, advanced beginner, and competent – concern dealing with anticipated tasks and following rules. The emphasis on what is learnt is practical knowledge (of mastering a technique) and theoretical knowledge (theories, instructions, and facts). The nature of the tasks is that they can be described in instructions and often have a clear beginning and end. At these (unavoidable) stages, the basis for knowledge of familiarity is laid, which is more active and prominent at the proficient and expert stages.

The interviewees here have talked about situations they encountered whilst serving overseas. These situations have been characterized by difficult assessments, unpredictability, and adverse conditions and require proficient or expert professionalism. Here it is important to master several tasks and deal with a situation in all its variability and complexity. Being competent, which, epistemologically, can be said to be following the rules, does not constitute sufficient knowledge to deal with the situations the interviewees have talked about. What it is about is expressed as follows by the philosopher Tore Nordenstam:

'The example of bridge shows us that it is not enough to be familiar with the rules of a given activity to be able to understand what it is about. A person who knows the rules of this card game but does not know that bridge is a *game*, with all that implies, has missed something important' (Nordenstam 2009, s. 32). In the courses of events that the interviewees have talked about, it is necessary to be able to read subtexts and to improvise based on inadequate information. You must have a grasp of culture, values, and the logic that this entails. And even if you don't understand 'the game' at the beginning, you must take it upon yourself to learn it, so that the decisions you make have the intended effect. Creativity, courage, and imagination have shown themselves here to be active ingredients in the professionalism, thus making the interviewees feel they had been able to deal with the situations that arose.

"*And even if you don't understand 'the game' at the beginning, you must take it upon yourself to learn it, so that the decisions you make have the intended effect.*"

The Different Forms of Knowledge

Professional skill consists of different kinds of knowledge, not only practical and experience based but also theoretical. The first three stages in the Dreyfus model of skill acquisition – novice, advanced beginner, and competent – concern dealing with anticipated tasks and following explicit rules. The emphasis on what is learnt is practical knowledge (mastering a technique) and theoretical knowledge (theories, instructions, and facts). The nature of the tasks is that they can be described in instructions and often have a clear beginning and end.

At these stages, the basis for the knowledge of familiarity is laid, which is more active and prominent at the proficient and expert stages. If you have acquired professional skill at these stages, you can deal with unexpected incidents and create the desired results even under adverse conditions. Practical knowledge consists of a set of moves or physical techniques. Practical knowledge is also about being able to use the materials you are dependent on, for example being able to correctly carry out the procedures required to look after your equipment. In the description, knowledge that does not come under these two forms of knowledge, i.e. knowledge that is specific and unique to the situation, is knowledge of familiarity. It cannot be expressed in exact terms, but is learnt through direct contact with 'prototypical' examples. Here, a prototypical example means that you have faced a situation or a challenge that has affected you, i.e. has severely tested you. When Ulf Henricsson talks about how important it is to get stuck in the terrain – how he personally has experienced what it is like to be stuck in a stationary vehicle – this is the kind of prototypical example that creates knowledge of familiarity. Knowing every piece of technical information about combat vehicle 90 (theoretical knowledge) is not enough, nor is having trained your ability to operate the vehicle (practical knowledge).

You must know how it operates in different types of terrain; you must personally have experienced what it is like to get stuck.

Being exposed to a number of prototypical examples develops familiarity and proficiency. When you have achieved the proficient stage, phenomena can be interpreted in an unclear situation. You can read between the lines and understand the situation's subtext and what it requires of you. It is knowledge of familiarity that enables you to act and conduct yourself with confidence, despite not having been in the same situation before. Having previously experienced similar situations allows you to act in a manner appropriate for the situation.

> Skill is dynamic – when we speak of developing skills, we are speaking of refining behaviour that is generated in response to situations we have not encountered before – we have only encountered situations that are comparable. And in this situation we only have recourse to comparison: comparing one situation with another, one course of events with another. The greatest source of mistakes that leads to misdirected actions is probably not that we have lost our bearings. It is rather that we are overeager to bundle one thing together with another. 'Exactly', we say about a description we hear. 'I've had exactly that experience'. The word 'exactly' announces the existence of clichés that express a simplified, and thus fairly prosaic, reality (Hammarén 2006, s. 206–207).

Knowledge of familiarity is knowledge that is recognizable in responsible action. When you have reached the proficient or expert stage in the Dreyfus model of skill acquisition, you see yourself as an obvious part of the situation, i.e. it concerns you personally. The advanced beginner does not see themself as part of the situation in the same way. When the advanced beginner encounters resistance, they alienate themself from the situation and use the rules as an excuse for not taking action. Instead, the proficient person sees the rules as a possibility, not hesitating to cross boundaries to find solutions, which can often mean the contravention of rules.

The Path to Military Professionalism

Based on the interviewees' description of an actual situation, one where they have felt they have been tested, a central theme of the interviews has been to further describe what type of knowledge is required to complete the mission. In the stressful and unpredictable situations they have recounted, the interviewed commanders state that they have benefited greatly from their military training in Sweden. Foremost, they stress that they have been afforded the opportunity

to train extensively. They also state that they have felt that their military training was good preparation for their overseas missions.

Mats Ström describes his first mission in Bosnia as a major upheaval: 'When we came down there, the war started again after a ceasefire period. For eight months, we were under constant fire. . . . I had two important things confirmed for me when I was down there. The first thing was that the education and training I had acquired, starting in 1974, were right. The second insight I obtained was that I cut the mustard; that I could cope with the pressure'.

Hans Håkansson describes himself (in his own words) as a 'camp rat' who happens to end up as a commander in the middle of the battle during the March riots. Not for one minute does he doubt that he will successfully carry out the mission: 'I had benefited from having been exposed to so many stressful situations, so I had confidence. . . . When I was there in the village receiving the one disastrous report after the other; that Kosovo is on fire, more crowds on their way, helicopters reporting that people are pouring out of Pristina and joining the demonstrators, company commanders reporting that the demonstrators are becoming increasingly violent, they are starting to get injured soldiers . . . then I started getting a funny feeling. It felt as if I was taking part in an exercise. You take so much crap during exercises where leadership trainers have designed problems for you and it almost felt as if there was an exercise leader standing there who was dumping new problems on you. "Oh, he managed that; then let's add another thing". . . . The command and leadership training I have received was really good'. When asked what kind of training Håkansson was referring to, he answered, 'Practical experience. What I benefited from when I was there were all the practical training activities that I have been fortunate enough to take part in, for example after having been a platoon commander, a company commander, and a battalion commander of troops at the large exercises down in Skåne [a province in southern Sweden]. Practical experience – this is something you can't learn from reading. It gave me confidence when I was there in Caglavica'.

Anders Brännström, Hans Håkansson's brigade commander during the March riots, also talks about the importance of feeling confident in his training and experience. When asked what enabled him to act on a gut feeling under chaotic circumstances, such as during the March riots, Brännström answers: 'I think it's about confidence. You are confident in your professional knowledge, in your experience, and you are confident in the system in which you operate; you have been allowed to make mistakes'.

Even Jan-Gunnar Isberg refers to his experience of training in Sweden as a reason for his being able to complete his assignment as brigade commander in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo). As commander of the Boden Engineer Corps (Ing 3) and the then Haparanda Border Regiment in the

1990s, the wintertime exercises in Haparanda were good preparation for the mission in the DR Congo. 'Over a three-year period, this border regiment conducted unit exercises and afterwards basic unit exercises. The regiment comprised more than 6,000 men and our largest unit exercise was carried out in 1994 with more than 2,000 men. This is where I was able to rehearse everything I had been doing gradually during my entire military life. . . . Consequently, it took me twenty-four years as an officer, with four years of studying, and most of the remaining years as a platoon leader, a company commander, and a battalion commander at home and abroad to become a brigade commander. I felt confident in my role. It had to be the result of education and long periods of training'.

Henricsson became known in the Swedish media as 'the colonel who kicked mines out of the way in the Balkans'. Henricsson believes that this image was exaggerated, but acknowledges that, with the conditions as they were in Bosnia, it was the only way to get through the road blocks: 'We would never have got anywhere if I had used the usual Swedish politeness'. When asked if he thought that his physically moving the mines was an unnecessary risk for a Swedish battalion commander, Henricsson cites his training as an engineer soldier and a sapper officer: 'I knew what was on the road. . . . If I hadn't known what I was doing, I wouldn't have done it. I had complete control of the situation. Being a colonel, you might wonder if I should know anything about mines at my level. "Yes, I should", I say. You should know about mines. I should know about things I am doing. It is crucial to be a role model for others in a situation like this. People do as you do, not what you tell them to do. This incident at the road block was crucial for the pressure on those around me'.

People do as you do, not what you tell them to do. This incident at the road block was crucial for the pressure on those around me.

It is worth noting that when the interviewees refer to the benefit of past practical training, they are alluding to large, full-scale exercises. By large, they mean lots of soldiers, lots of equipment, large geographic areas, and lots of days for unit exercises, in other words highly complex exercises. In the interviews, they describe in different ways that it is in these contexts, they have encountered problematic and unpredictable phases. They also maintain that they had benefited greatly from having commanded troops at all military levels as this creates an understanding of the military profession at all levels.

How Previous Experience Plays a Role

The professional practice you have previously had whilst serving overseas is important. When asked what it was that made them deal with the situations they have described in the way they did, the interviewees refer to previous experience of having served overseas. Brännström used his experience of having been a battalion commander under Brigadier Richard Shirreff, the brigade

commander, in the same part of the world in 2000 as the March riots in Caglavica in 2004: 'I had two things to focus on during this day. The first was to support Håkansson with everything I could get my hands on. . . . The second thing was to make sure that we would be prepared when the crowd became tired. . . . [T]hen we will regain the initiative'. Brännström had learnt from Shirreff that '[a] demonstration of strength is not just being strong in one area. It is daring to be weak in another one'. Shirreff's modus operandi was to always dynamically utilize the geographic deployment of a number of units. Brännström says: 'He [Shirreff] was really good at manoeuvring. Always taking what was most important into consideration. When I took charge of the Swedish battalion on 8 April 2000, there had been riots in Gracanica. . . . [T]here was a really hostile atmosphere in the area just when I took command. I was going to deal with this during my first O Group there at 08.00 hours. Sitting there were my own company commanders, two British company commanders, and a Canadian. I had the full support of the brigade commander. He asked, "Anders, is there anything more you want? I will support you with what you need". However, the reverse was also true. One time he had a very successful operation in the Canadian sector. They found large weapons caches and ammunition. On that occasion, he took so many of my men – platoons and companies – that ultimately we had to dispatch the battalion staff's assistant personnel officer, armed with a gun, to escort children to school. At that time, it was most important to have the resources somewhere else. I asked him if I could have some of the men back, but he looked at me as if to say, "Are you not professional, Brännström?" . . . If I hadn't had this experience, I would probably not have made the decisions regarding Caglavica that I did'.

Isberg returns to the subject of how the commander must always set a good example. When asked if he were to give advice to a younger colleague who was to do the same job, Isberg gives, among other things, the following answer: 'Personnel services must always come first. Get to know your officers and not just your senior officers'. Previous experience of having served overseas has shaped Isberg's understanding. 'During one of my first overseas deployments, I had a commander who didn't have time for the infantry companies. Instead, he allied himself with his staff and the headquarters company and the supply company and he failed miserably. They had a quieter life and a cushy number, deployed by the shore of the Mediterranean. He didn't dictate any policy. Military capability and the levels of order, clarity, and confidence declined. I could not accept this way of working. I went there with my military ideals that I stuck to. I had my codes of conduct, and in my company, we still continued to train and exercise. That is where I learned that the commander must always set a good example'.

Ström compares experiences from, for instance, Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo

in 1999 and recounts how relational processes have a bearing on the effectiveness of the organization. Not having enough to do or encountering an external resistance that prevents you from achieving the mission objectives places a strain on the internal work: '[T]he organization functions just like an ice hockey team. The personnel become uncertain of themselves and lose confidence. . . . [T]hen they start picking on each other and, in the end, they start picking on the leader. . . . You must manage the team. You must get them to face the external threats. . . . We Swedes want to be effective and if we don't have anything to do, we start to find things that we feel should be improved or done differently. That's when you start focusing on your own welfare and unnecessary chatter starts. As commander, you have to be able to spot this in plenty of time'. When Ström is asked if this was something he had learnt back in Sweden, he answers: 'No, I've learned this on the ground. These situations where you're waiting for things to happen don't occur here in Sweden in the same way. National service involves lots of training and when the soldiers have completed this, they are demobbed. And when they came for a refresher exercise, we had a plan for how this would be carried out; then they went home. After having served overseas, probably one of the biggest lessons I've learned is how to handle the inner leadership'.

'It must be second nature'

Several of the interviewees say they have benefited from what they call 'drills', 'trade knowledge', or knowledge that is 'second nature'. The descriptions concerned the importance of being very familiar with the equipment at your disposal so that you can operate the weapons systems or vehicles yourself. Other examples deal with sensory knowledge, such as recognizing sounds or being able to read your counterpart's thoughts when negotiating. Ström and a conscript officer had been fired upon when they were doing physical training outside the camp: 'When we came past a residential area, they started shooting at us with Kalashnikovs. The fact that they were shooting in this area was by no means unusual. But the fact that they were shooting directly at us was something new. I clearly heard the bullets as they flew past. I called out to the conscript to "take cover", but he didn't react. He didn't assess the situation as I did. In the end, I had to pull him down into cover. And then we had to sneak out of there behind a hedge. I reacted to what I heard based on how I was trained. I recognized the firing of live rounds from close range. "Tzing", that's a distinct sound. My training paid off. However, this conscript officer wasn't trained in the same way; he didn't understand how exposed he was. . . . Education, training, and drills are good things – in situations like this, it must be second nature'.

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'It must be second nature…'

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When Ström is asked what he means by drills, he says: 'That you recognize sounds, for example. It doesn't only have to come from exercises in Sweden. As there was a lot of shooting around the camp, I learned to recognize the sound of their different weapons; when it was dangerous and when it wasn't. Often they fired their weapons in the air as we drove by. Or they fired directly into the barrier wall around the camp. You learned to distinguish if the firing was close or at a distance. You learned to hear the difference between Kalashnikovs and other weapons they used down there. That bullet that whistled past too close, I recognized that from exercises here in Sweden; I've been subjected to that before. Close is dangerous; I know that'.

For Henricsson, a crucial factor for successfully completing the mission in Bosnia was his ability to read and assess the terrain. Henricsson describes what is accessible and what type of vehicle can be used as knowledge derived from many years of practice and personal experience: 'You must have got stuck; you must have tried it yourself. I have learned a lot here at home from working in the forest and driving a tractor. Then you learn where you can get through and where you can't. . . . Before we went to Bosnia, I had been involved in developing combat vehicle 90 and I can say that with that we had tested everything regarding accessibility. If there was one thing I could really do, I knew "where I could get through". . . . I knew where we could drive with armoured tracked vehicles and where we could drive with an SISU. If you know this, it can be easier to make decisions and make demands on the commanders'.

In their explanations, the military commanders return to their professionalism having been based on practical activities. When asked what they have benefited from in their different missions, they put the practical experience of 'having taken part themselves' ahead of more-theoretical activities. None of them refer to any specific military college or course as being a decisive factor, no more than the fact that, generally speaking, they believe that the regular mix of studies and a practical profession is a good thing.

When asked what they have benefited from in their different missions, they put the practical experience of 'having taken part themselves' ahead of more-theoretical activities.

What Did You Benefit From?

What makes these officers deal, more or less successfully, with the situations they have ended up in? In 2004, Håkansson and Brännström went down to Kosovo, where everything was supposed to be calm. Their task was to reduce the military presence, but suddenly they find themselves as the commanders in charge in a course of events subsequently referred to as 'a medieval battle' and 'potential bloodbath'. Henricsson and his battalion BA01 (the first Swedish battalion in Bosnia) are deployed to what is described as an ethnic and religious conflict area; however, once there he feels he is in the middle of 'a war

conducted by thugs'. Even if the interviewees were not intimately familiar with the environment and culture they ended up in, they were well acquainted with the military practice and mindset, so that even under stressful circumstances, they could deal with the situation.

During his mission in the DR Congo, Isberg benefited from his experience of military exercises in the north of Sweden. He describes the importance of being familiar with the phenomenon of friction: 'Air and ground transports always involve friction with long delays due to bad weather. In addition to this, there are navigational errors and problems with the availability of indirect fire and air support. Lots of things can go wrong. The communications systems were a limiting factor in both Norrbotten and East Africa. The list can go on and on. Only experience enables you to be prepared and to eliminate as many disruptions as possible in advance'.

All the study participants had had to answer the following question: when you were standing there, when everything you've told me about was happening, what in your background, training, education, and experience was of use to you? To a man, they stressed the value of having throughout their careers alternated studying with practical experience. They also underscore the importance of there having been a close link between the military practice the units worked with and operated within and the theorizing encountered during their studies. Professional practice has given the theories meaning and the questions spawned by their practical experience have been dealt with in the classroom. One interpretation of this is that by regularly studying, you can practise and train explicit knowledge, i.e. knowledge that is clearly stated, explained, or verbal. In the recurring 'practical experience', the following forms of knowledge have been incorporated: implicit, non-verbal, or silent. Together, they have shaped the professional skill that allowed the interviewees to feel confident in practising their profession whilst serving overseas. This is despite the conditions they operated in being anything but safe. The basis for the improvisation, which several of the interviewees have expressed, is necessary in the real-life situations and has its origins in this web of theory and practice. Improvisation is not, as many believe, a form of free creation based on a hunch, any hunch. Rather, improvisation is epistemologically the opposite: it is a course of action only practicable and possible for anyone with extensive knowledge and experience of a specific professional practice.

> *But what happens if the gap between theory and practice is too great?*

But what happens if the gap between theory and practice is too great?

Several of the interviewees express scepticism of the increasing level of academisation they perceive is happening at the expense of practical training. Hans Håkansson puts it as follows: 'I'm afraid that they are throwing the baby out with the bathwater. What was so great about my training was that I did a year of general training and then had two or three years of practical experience,

whereupon I returned for one more year of general training. I think that this has been a great mix of acquiring theory and subsequently practising, during which I acquired experience before returning for the next training course'.

The Importance of Long and Complex Exercises

In a Swedish research report *At Home We Train, Away We're Tested: Being a Battalion Commander in an International Context* (my translation), one of the interviewed battalion commanders puts his finger on what kind of experience and training serving overseas requires. The interviewee explains what he had benefited from: 'The finale was a twenty-seven-day-long final exercise within the framework of [Exercise] SAMMARIN, which this year took place along the Norrland Coast (in the north of Sweden). . . . Previous exercises did not produce the same results as this relatively long exercise did. Actually, it was only during the long exercise that I became aware of the importance of many of the support functions. For example, on short exercises you can cut corners a bit with personnel service and you couldn't do this on a twenty-seven-day exercise because then things happen to people. . . . And the importance of the supply service; we had already understood this, but now we had confirmation that this is fundamental in order for a battalion to operate properly. The supply service, personnel service, intelligence service, all the support functions that we sometimes indulge in during shorter exercises, that we kind of look down on' (My translation from Blomgren, Johansson 2005, s. 17–18). The quotation pinpoints a central issue regarding the development of military skills. Shorter exercises do not provide the same training in the complicated context that the international environment entails. The unpredictable and unexpected elements only appear in the comprehensive and complex contexts, where a large number of input values, factors, and circumstances have been piled up on top of each other in some form of situational awareness. They have not learned 'the craft' required on short courses or during individual exercises. Military professionalism – the ability to master problematic situations under adverse conditions – is a skill that has been enhanced and developed over time and in a specific professional context. How previous experience is used and applied is an essential element. This is because familiarity with operating in a multifaceted and complicated environment is developed by an active use of prior experience.

Knowledge of familiarity means that due to your familiarity with a specific practice, situation, or environment, you will be equipped to deal with the unique or unexpected. In these situations, knowledge of familiarity is crucial when the unexpected occurs. In real-life situations, possessing the skills and being able to use the technology are not enough, nor is knowing the rules and

regulations and (in theory) the mandate under which you are operating. This kind of professionalism is dependent on a form of analogical thinking, a mental ability to establish connections between memories and experience of earlier events. This analogical thinking is what you have to rely on in challenging situations when decisions must be made quickly. Ström chooses to call it proven experience: 'For me, proven experience is having been exposed to a lot of different situations. None of this can be found in books. And when a new situation arises that you have not previously experienced, you're able to act because you recognize situations you've been involved in before'.


KFOR

‘Giving up was never on the cards’

Interview with Hans Håkansson

The March riots in Kosovo in 2004

‘On 17 March 2004, riots flare up at a number of places in Kosovo. The riots come unexpectedly for KFOR’s personnel, presenting everyone with challenges for which they were poorly prepared. The Swedish KS09 battalion is drawn into the fighting, together with military and civilian personnel from many other nations. The confrontation is very chaotic with military personnel, police, Kosovo Albanians, and Serbs compressed into a small area. The fighting includes fatal shots, Molotov cocktails, acts of arson, beatings with iron pipes and axes, torched buildings and animals, etc. The acute phase lasts for approximately twenty-five hours.

The Swedish troops are greatly outnumbered by the crowd. The battalion forms a riot control line just north of the Serbian village of Caglavica, where it will stand with shields raised and try to stop the thousands of Albanians who have arrived from the north from Pristina. Later, this operation would be highly praised and was one of the few KFOR operations on this day that succeeded in preventing the confrontation between Serbs and Albanians from developing into a bloodbath’.

From Ebbe Blomgren’s report *Caglavica 17 mars 2004* [Caglavica on 17 March 2004]

Background: The March riots in Kosovo resulted in 19 fatalities and 900 wounded. It is considered one of the greatest defeats suffered by UN peacekeeping forces since Srebrenica. More than 700 houses were torched, 30 or so churches were destroyed, and 4,500 people from the ethnic minorities were forced to flee. In less than twenty-four hours, four-and-a-half years’ peacekeeping efforts came to nothing.

The interview with Hans Håkansson was conducted on 20 November 2008 by Lotta Victor Tillberg at the barracks of the Life Guard regiment (K1).

I'm interested in hearing about an incident that has had a decisive influence on your professional life?

The incident that took place in Caglavica is probably the day in my life that has had the greatest significance. Not many days pass without me thinking about what took place at that time. I have never experienced anything like it before. If I had been exposed to such a situation earlier, I would probably have experienced it differently.

What do you mean by that?

It was probably the way it happened; it was such an incredible surprise. We weren't at all prepared for this. I had to change roles very quickly as Karl Engelbrektson (the battalion commander) was going home on planned leave. I was there serving as chief of staff; actually, I was a camp rat. I did all the boring things that had to be done in the camp: the day-to-day stuff, contacts with Sweden, receiving visitors, and doing the reporting and the finances. I spent very little time outside the camp. On Sundays, I tried to see what was happening outside by tagging along with a patrol in order to experience something different and to have some contact with the soldiers. However, my job there was to run the camp with all that entailed; should things be rebuilt, are new cables needed, should we hire another cleaning staff. The battalion commander Engelbrektson was the one who led the work outside the camp. He spent most of his time out with the commanders and soldiers. I had to take care of both these parts when he went home. His leave was already decided and planned before we went down there.

This situation was brewing on Monday; the battalion commander went home on Thursday. I didn't pay it that much attention; I carried on with my normal work.

The temperature increased slightly on Tuesday with the rumours of children being chased into a river and having drowned nearby. However, we never grasped that it could lead to these consequences. We were lulled into a false sense of security. We had been down there for almost three months when this took place. Things were calm and stable from the time we arrived there. Things were smouldering a little under the surface, but nobody made a big deal of it. Our main mission was to do away with ourselves.

However, on Wednesday, I felt guilty about the role I had assumed after Engelbrektson had gone home. I felt that I had to get out and show myself; I couldn't just sit here behind my desk. I had to get some idea of what was happening; I needed to talk with company commanders and the police. It was the

local police who would deal with the situation. So my plans for this day were to be out and about in the area during the morning and then to go back to camp to eat lunch. After this, I was invited to visit the Irish troops to celebrate St Patrick's Day. The very fact that as acting battalion commander I was planning on leaving the battalion to attend a social function says something about our mindset. We had no idea of what was about to happen.

This started during the morning. It came as a complete surprise.

When I read Ebbe Blomgren's report, I think about the cooperation with the guys on the riot line. Did you already know them?

I knew the company commanders very well, very well. They had been at P18 (Gotland Regiment) all of their time, and as battalion commander, I had led them on exercises and had been their exercise leader – I knew them very well. I really believe that this knowledge of people that enables you to know how people will react was a determining factor.

Was it mere coincidence that you knew them?

No, it wasn't. The battalion commander Engelbrektson put together a team that he knew; it was no coincidence. I knew a lot more about the personnel at P18 than he did; he had only been there for a year when he put this team together, so he bandied ideas a lot with me. 'I've this guy in mind; what do you think about him?' These company commanders are two really good guys. There are actually three, for there was a third guy who was left defending the camp; this shouldn't be trivialized in this context. His was not an easy job.

I'm wondering about this discussion about knowledge of people; on what grounds should people be recruited for serving overseas?

That's a really interesting question. There is a risk of cronyism if you know each other. There is a risk that you don't have the guts to be hard, that you don't dare formulate sufficiently clear demands because it is your friend. On the other hand, if you know each other and your roles are nevertheless clearly defined, then this can be a tremendous advantage. For a couple of years during the 1990s, I was head of this command and control training centre (CCTC) in Skövde, where battalion staff were trained, CCTC Battalion. We ran weekly courses. Battalion staff came in on Monday and we had them for a week and then they went home on Friday. You could clearly see when they were an assembled team of foreign legionnaires. For example, you could see that when a battalion commander gave an order or information to a subordinate, they didn't understand what he meant because they didn't speak the same language. They don't have the same way of expressing themselves. They don't understand when he says that now things are serious because they can't tell by his voice. It's the

> *"I felt that I had to get out and show myself; I couldn't just sit here behind my desk. I had to get some idea of what was happening; I needed to talk with company commanders and the police."*

> *It's the same when I'm listening to a subordinate; I can hear it in his voice that now he feels pressured, now things are serious.*

same when I'm listening to a subordinate; I can hear it in his voice that now he feels pressured, now things are serious. He may not say the word, but I hear it in his voice. I think that is very important.

Nevertheless, there is, of course, a risk in knowing each other. I thought that I noticed tendencies for this when I was down there in 2006. I had a small independent role but I thought I saw that we didn't have the nerve to be tough because we knew each other. We were too pally.

Knowledge of people seems to be a sensitive issue. But if I understand you correctly, you are saying that particularly in the case of Caglavica, your knowledge of people was a critical factor for success.

Yes, I wouldn't have wanted to replace these guys. These guys are so skilled and good that they have no problem with role playing. And it works with a commander like Engelbrektson who is crystal clear. He would never accept anything else; he is utterly fearless in all situations. He will pick up the receiver and call the supreme commander [of the Swedish Armed Forces] if necessary. . . .

You're now starting to realize that there won't be any St Patrick's Day celebrations?

Just when I had been out there talking to the police on the ground, and when I was about to go home, we hear on the radio about a demonstration in Pristina. This was not unusual as there were essentially demonstrations for or against something every day. But then we hear that a group of Albanian demonstrators have started walking southwards. And that a group of Serbs have got it into their heads to block their way. Initially, we didn't understand the significance of this. And an important piece of information that previous battalions were well acquainted with was that it was extremely dangerous to allow the Serbs to block off this particular road. However, we did not know this. Because when battalions are replaced every six months down there, you have to start from scratch. There is no institutional memory. If we had had that knowledge, we would certainly have been much harder on the police. We would probably have said to them, 'Do what you want to, but get the Serbs off the road so that it can be opened'.

What were your preparations before you rotated down there? What kind of information had you received about the situation there?

I thought the preparations were really poor. We were not provided with any information about the country or its history; on the other hand, our heads were crammed with gender equality, anti sexual harassment training (which was good); we also had a lot on electrical safety, the working environment, how to manage finances – a lot of things like that. But we never had a decent course on the country. I had expected that people from the [Swedish] Ministry for

Foreign Affairs would have come and that we would be properly briefed about the background of the conflict. And especially what Sweden wanted to accomplish down there? What was Sweden's agenda? We tried to solve this ourselves; we bought books to read up on things on our own. We also knew a few people who had been down there and invited them to give briefings; there were people in our team. Generally speaking, the preparations were very poor.

The police decided to stop the demonstrators and we had a QRF (Quick Reaction Force) that would reinforce them. We are now two kilometres from Pristina. Initially, our guys are standing about twenty metres behind the police. They are wearing their protective equipment and looking like Robocops. In that situation, the soldiers on the ground probably felt that it was a good thing that something was happening.

I felt that I was there as an observer or moral support. I had no role at all in this. After all, it was the company commander who was cooperating with the police. What I did was to put the rest of the battalion on alert as a precautionary measure. It was more a matter of routine; actually, I had no idea that it would be necessary. The camp had to contact the Finnish–Irish battalion based in a camp thirty minutes away – actually, they should have been in a state of readiness at our camp, but their commander, who was also on leave, had decided that they should remain in their camp. . . .

Then quite suddenly, the Albanians storm the police line. They start throwing stones and running through and around the line. We jump into our vehicles that are being pelted with stones and we have to get away from there because we are being surrounded. You start to panic when you realize that you have totally misjudged the situation; completely. You feel like an idiot. Why did we not have a contingency for this? Talk about being caught with your pants down. And then you feel like, oh my God, what can we do about this? And all of a sudden, you realize the situation you are in; the fact that we have thousands (which they may not have been, but perhaps 500) angry Albanians on their way to Caglavica, heading towards angry Serbs. This can really only go pear-shaped. There was a feeling of sheer panic.

What happens then? What do the police in charge do?

In that situation, they cease to exist. For my part, they do not exist; in any case, not just then. I order our team and Marko to go down to Caglavica as soon as possible. They have to drive through the crowds to get there before them. En route they meet the Finnish–Irish reinforcements. The acting commander has been brilliant because he has dispatched two companies, one Finnish and one Irish, that had been made available to me. So we meet them en route and get them to turn around. They accompany Marko's team down to the village, where they take up some kind of position across the road. Niklas also dispatches his

team; I don't know if I issue an order or if he simply does this, but his company also meets up with Marko's team in the village.

I'm sitting in an ordinary *soft-skinned geländerwagen* [cross-country vehicle] and we have to flee from the crowd; I'm scared to death of getting stuck, because then I wouldn't be able to do anything. We drive like maniacs through the crowd and they are hitting the car. In panic, we drive over a traffic island. But the road to the village where Marko and his team are is full of people, so we can't get past there. By chance, I had heard just the day before about a back way into the village. So we take that road to Gracanica and then drive across the fields so that we enter Caglavica from behind at an angle. We drove into the middle of the village and parked. Personally, I was pretty scared then, after having almost been trapped in the crowd.

Then what happened in the village?

In the village, the Serbs had turned out to a man because they understood that they were about to be attacked. They were prepared to defend their village. They were in a line behind our soldiers, armed with axes, motorcycle chains, hayforks, cudgels, and iron pipes, prepared to fight the Albanians. And in the meantime, thousands of Albanians from Pristina poured in. At that moment, I sensed the Albanians were mostly standing around yelling, throwing a few stones, etc. Meanwhile, more and more people are coming. And then those special police units: riot police from Jordan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Ukraine also arrived. There may have also been Indians, but I'm not sure of that. They positioned themselves in the front of the line in order to help. There were maybe 200–300 policemen.

When reading Ebbe Blomgren's report on Caglavica, there are lots of different groups present on the ground: special police, observers, all sorts. That sounds like a pretty difficult environment to familiarize oneself with?

It was chaotic. We had Marko's and Niklas's companies, and then we had a Finnish and an Irish company. And then I had a joint Czech–Slovakian company stationed in Gracanica that was under my command and which I also had contact with.

And all of these were expecting orders from you?

Of course. The Czechs and the Slovaks were not trained or equipped for riots. And they also had a national caveat stipulating that they must not be used in riots.

Did you know about their limitations when you were standing there?

I think they told me about this on the Monday they reported to me. So they were given the task of patrolling the area.

There's a road junction just behind the riot line. One road goes into Caglavica, the other one continues to the monastery in Gracanica. And we had read about the immense political significance of the monastery.

But if the preparations made before you went down there were so inadequate, why had you picked up the importance of the monastery?

We heard it from those who had been down there before us and we had also read about it, in the book *War and Revenge*, for example; a really good book. Everyone going down there should read it. I know that when I was there, that monastery was important.

Does anyone else there tell you about the monastery?

No. I contact that poor Czech company commander and give him orders to defend the monastery and to fire live rounds if need be. Use deadly force. He had to repeat the order a number of times because his English was awful, so I wasn't certain at all if he understood. But he had to repeat it until I was satisfied. In hindsight, I realize that this was wrong. Because actually I should not have put him in such a situation. Because if the monastery was attacked, he would have to choose between either opening fire or seeing the monastery being torched. In a manner of speaking, he really has no other choice. It was also a violation of the rules of engagement that we had. The rules of engagement stipulated that we could use force of arms to protect human life, but not to protect property. So that order was a breach of their national caveat and it was a violation of the rules of engagement.

"
He had to repeat the order a number of times because his English was awful, so I wasn't certain at all if he understood .
"

What happened to it then?

Nothing happened because the monastery was not attacked. I was really nervous about that and I was in contact with the Czechs the entire time.

What was happening where you were?

According to my understanding, the level of violence increases. The Albanians become more and more violent. They attack the soldiers with cudgels and iron pipes and Molotov cocktails. The soldiers and the police are kind of mixed together there. And then there are also a lot of individual policemen who arrive and want to help, which is a huge problem. Special Police Units have commanders who at least are trying to keep their forces together, but these individual police officers have merely taken their equipment with them and come out to help. However, they were there in an individual capacity and were not under any command. They caused a lot of trouble as their actions were sometimes counterproductive to what we were doing. Some of them just flipped out and started firing into the crowd; we even have pictures of this.

> *The violence is increasing all the time. I am working with the chief of police, a French gendarmerie lieutenant colonel, and here we have a total culture clash.*

The violence is increasing all the time. I am working with the chief of police, a French *gendarmerie* lieutenant colonel, and here we have a total culture clash. As a military man, I want to manoeuvre; I want to protect my flanks and create a reserve to take care of any attack from the rear, etc. He is thinking more rigidly in a line, which it actually became. Nevertheless, we, in fact, worked quite well together during that time. And I was also in contact with the staff at camp and tried to get as many reinforcements as was possible. And I was also in contact with brigade commander Anders Brännström.

Were you in contact? Did you have radio contact?

I only had radio contact with some people. I had radio contact with Marko and Niklas, but they could only talk sometimes. And they mostly talked with their own team. I could talk with the Czech (in Gracanica), but I couldn't talk with the commanders of the Finnish–Irish company. I had to contact them personally. I used a mobile to talk to Anders Brännström. And I used the radio to talk to those who were in the camp. It was like that for a good while, and when I'm there, I begin to understand that everything is getting worse and worse. I got reports from the brigade that a large crowd was heading towards us from the neighbouring village. Alarming reports were coming in all the time and we began to understand that the chaotic situation was not limited to just here but was happening all over Kosovo. We also had a unit trapped in Pristina that was part of what was going on. Then we received support from American helicopters which, after a bit of shilly-shallying, we were able to talk to.

What do you mean? Were there technical problems with communication?

No, I can tell you the story even if time is getting on. It is amazing sometimes what is hidden away in a Swedish uniform. I had a staff assistant accompanying me called Johan Malmgren. In everyday life, he is a peace and conflict researcher at Lund. He was actually our language police, helping us with reports; he corrected correspondence and was really good at that. On this very morning, he asked me if he could accompany me as he was tired of just sitting around the camp. He wanted to see something different. So he was in the car with me, together with a PIO (public information officer) who had also accompanied us when this situation developed. When the issue with the helicopters cropped up, I was ordered by the brigade staff to call them on a given frequency with a specific American call sign Badger 51 or something similar. And I tried that using my call sign that I had received from the brigade, but that didn't work at all. The Americans on the radio told me to just go to hell. The Americans in the air thought that I was on the wrong frequency and that I was interfering with them and didn't want to have anything to do with me. Finally, they told me to fuck off and then I stopped trying to communicate with them. I scrapped this

idea because I had other things to do. That's when Johan stepped up to the plate. He'd heard the whole thing and asked if he could do the talking with the helicopters. 'Of course, but they don't want to talk to us', I said, carrying on with something else. Then I hear Johan calling the Americans. 'Badger, this is Viking, hear you loud and clear, shooting on the ground . . . wind speed . . . roger that . . .'. The Americans responded to his call. I heard them talking an aviation language with each other. They couldn't have been more accommodating to Johan. After a short while, Johan asked me, 'What do you want them to do?' 'What do you mean, do?' I wondered. 'They don't want to talk to us'. 'Bugger that now', Johan said. 'What do you want them to do?' 'Carry out aerial reconnaissance in the direction of Pristina', I said, 'and report how many people are on their way here'. After this, we received a lot of information from the Americans in the helicopters. This was important, because when dusk eventually came and it started to get dark, it wouldn't be possible to see the crowd; you wouldn't know where they were going or what they were doing.

How was Johan able to talk to them?

I'm coming to that. When it got dark, Johan pulled out a strobe – a flashing infrared light – that he placed on the roof of my jeep. The guys in the air were then able to see where my jeep was and could tell us how the crowd was moving relative to the jeep. When I asked Johan where he'd got this from, because as far as I knew we didn't have such things in the Swedish army, he said that he'd taken it with him from the previous time he'd been here. It turned out he'd been down here with KS01, the first battalion, and that at that time, he'd belonged to a team that had been deployed near the Serbian border whose task it was to guide American helicopters and attack aircraft. What he didn't know about aerial reconnaissance wasn't worth knowing. He used his old call signal from 1999 and the Americans up there accepted this as if he were a forward air controller. They simply took orders from him.

Then alarming reports of evasive measures and the like continued to come in. And now I'm a little unsure of the sequence. We were reinforced by a Norwegian company that was on its way to us. I met their commander when they rolled up. At that time, they had already been involved in a number of incidents on the road down to us. They had broken aerials and scorch marks on their vehicles when they arrived. And they already had injured soldiers, smashed windscreens, and so on. However, they were a really sharp bunch, a strong company and they were well-trained. I receive the Norwegian commander, but since Marko and Niklas are in charge of detailed command and control, I hand him over to them. That didn't feel quite right. I should have been the one to have given him a clear order. But I only familiarized him with the situation and then Marko had to give him detailed instructions about where he should deploy and reinforce.

What makes you say that it didn't feel right?

It was my responsibility; I was the commander on the ground. It felt as if I foisted this onto Marko.

But were you free? You had other things to do, didn't you?

I had mixed feeling about it. Maybe I actually wanted to be at the front with the soldiers. I felt slightly useless standing there at the rear.

Sometimes it appears that some tasks that are apparently being carried out in the background aren't all that important . . .

Yes, they are important. I once listened to a lecture by a Swedish military reserarcher Lars Andersson who presented his doctoral thesis on experience from serving overseas. He said something to the effect that 'the staff officers were so cowardly that they didn't have the courage to be out with their soldiers when firing was going on but remained at staff headquarters instead', and in my world, the staff officer who is out with his soldiers is in the wrong place. His duty is to be at staff headquarters, making sure that the soldiers get medical attention, food and potatoes, ammunition, orders, and he should manage contacts with his superiors. I thought that his view of staff work was wrong.

While carrying out my interview study, I have met a number of people who have told me that they don't have that much to say because 'they have only been at staff headquarters'.

That's probably a culture that has spread within the Swedish Armed Forces, that it's bad to be a staff officer; staff work is disparaged because you have to be macho; you must be at the front and have lots of magazines. There is contempt for staff officers.

I wonder whether the image we have of a profession can sometimes deceive us. The image of doing staff work in front of a computer compared to the image of soldiers battling riots is naturally radically different.

I believe that anyone at staff headquarters must have knowledge and an understanding of the parts at the very bottom of the gearbox; for the task that they are called upon to supervise. And contempt for staff work arises when those who are members of the staff cannot do this. . . .

When I was there in the village receiving the one disastrous report after the other; that Kosovo is on fire, more crowds on their way, helicopters reporting that people are pouring out of Pristina and joining the demonstrators, company commanders reporting that the demonstrators are becoming increasingly violent, they are starting to get injured soldiers . . . then I started getting a funny feeling. It felt as if I was taking part in an exercise. You take so much crap during

exercises where leadership trainers have designed problems for you and it almost felt as if there was an exercise leader standing there who was dumping new problems on you. 'Oh, he managed that; then let's add another thing. If he manages that, then we'll add one more thing'. I almost expected a leadership trainer to appear and tell us to now stop the exercise.

Were these the kinds of exercises you had benefited from when you were down there?

I had benefited from having been exposed to so many stressful situations, so I had confidence. Which, I might add, I normally don't have all that much of. But standing there, I felt that I had been under so much pressure before that I could manage this. And I knew that I would be able to keep a cool head. I would not panic. The command and leadership training I have received was really good.

What do you mean then? Are you referring to courses, books, or something else?

Practical experience. What I benefited from when I was there was all the practical training that I have been fortunate enough to take part in, for example after having been a platoon commander, a company commander, and a battalion commander of troops at the large exercises down in Skåne [a province in southern Sweden]. Practical experience – this is something you can't learn from reading. It gave me confidence when I was there in Caglavica.

However, what made the spectre of panic surface was the fact that it was a completely unknown situation. We were in open terrain, with an unpredictable crowd, without tools. Normally, when you are carrying out exercises, you have a toolbox; you have access to alternatives. If this happens, then I have these alternatives to resort to. But there was nothing like this in Caglavica. No functioning command and control organization (because it wasn't needed since we were not supposed to display any leadership). I didn't even have a map with me. It was as far away from NCW (Network Centric Warfare) as you could get. I have worked for seven years on the Attle Project, developing computerized control and command systems for combat. And here I was without paper and pen. Marko had to draw what was going on in the dust on the car.

Why did things turn out the way they did?

An awful lot of luck. The efforts of the company commanders; that they succeeded in staying together and that the soldiers were so persevering. They remained there and took a battering hour after hour after hour. A terrible amount of force was used. Another success factor was that everyone was so controlled; no one began firing indiscriminately. If a single soldier panics and starts firing, or if one of the gunners operating the heavy machine guns had gone off the rails, twenty or so people could have been shot to death in the blink of an eye.

"*Oh, he managed that; then let's add another thing. If he manages that, then we'll add one more thing". I almost expected a leadership trainer to appear and tell us to now stop the exercise.*"

The situation might have got out of hand if he had simply seen his mate fall to the ground in a bloody heap and be dragged away. However, the soldiers were so extremely controlled and I believe that since we did not fire indiscriminately, the demonstrators did not return fire on us either. It would have resulted in a bloodbath if they had started shooting. Another alternative had been if the soldiers hadn't stood firm because they couldn't take any more punishment. Then there would also have been a bloodbath in the village. But the soldiers stood their ground.

“
However, the soldiers were so extremely controlled and I believe that since we did not fire indiscriminately, the demonstrators did not return fire on us either.
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What happened then?

The crowd breaks through along the road. There are several different reasons why this happened. What happened was that the Albanians sent patrols into the village. They were well organized. They had long sticks around the ends of which they had wrapped blankets doused in petrol. Then they pushed these sticks through the glass windows of the houses. They caught fire immediately. Some houses exploded because there were so many weapons and so much ammunition stored in them. I had to advance my position when the village started to burn, so I ended up around 100 metres behind the riot line.

A house began burning right next to where I was and a dog fled the house. Some kind of projectile exploded from inside the house and blew off the dog's legs. It ran around in the garden yelping.

The breakthrough by the Albanians who managed to enter the village was yet another defeat. When this happened, the Serbs in the village concluded that KFOR (Kosovo Force) couldn't protect them and then they started firing on the Albanians who had torched the houses. There was violent shooting. And then some Albanians in the crowd then pull out weapons and start returning fire. Our soldiers are standing there as targets between them in this gunfire whilst at the same time they are still fighting people. The soldiers on the road try to eject the Albanians and close up the gap in the line. Some of them are shot right before my eyes as they are standing there fighting. They are shot in the head, in the chest and sink to the ground in front of the soldiers, who, even in the midst of the chaos, try resuscitating the people they had only recently been fighting with. But the injured are engulfed by the crowd and are pulled backwards to the Albanian ambulances that have arrived at the scene.

Just then, the company commanders contact me and tell me that the situation is completely out of hand. Now we have to protect ourselves and our soldiers. They wanted permission to open fire with an exemption from the rules of engagement, meaning they would be allowed to open fire without prior warning. And I gave them that permission. This was also a violation of what was allowed, but I didn't give it that much thought at the time. But afterwards, you actually think about things when making such an unsanctioned decision. But

on that occasion, I requested that staff headquarters call ATC (Army Tactical Command) back in Sweden, telling them that from this very moment we would be firing live rounds.

Just then a Swedish special forces unit appears. They were stationed at the camp but normally didn't have anything to do with us. They were there carrying out tasks for an entirely different master. Normally, we had nothing to do with them other than make sure they had food and potatoes, so I had no idea that they were available. All of a sudden, they call us on the radio, notifying that they will be joining up with us in the village. So I met up with them in the village. They arrived in a dozen or so jeeps, with special equipment that I had only ever seen in pictures; space guns and all kinds of things. They simply asked, 'What do you want us to do?' and in that situation, with the firing going on, the order to give them was obvious: put a stop to the Serbs' firing. Their commander only had one question, 'Do we have permission to open fire? to which I answered, 'Yes'. Then they disappeared. After an hour, some of them came back and delivered ten to fifteen weapons that they had taken from the Serbs. What they actually did and how they got the Serbs to stop shooting I don't know to this day. And I will never find out either; they are so secretive about such things.

Nevertheless, it was really great having them there?

It was a godsend.

What do you think would have happened if the Swedish special forces unit had not turned up and removed the shooters?

I believe our situation would have been untenable. We wouldn't have been able to remain in the crossfire. And it was the Serbs from inside the village who were doing most of the shooting. It wasn't realistic to try to disarm Albanians in the crowd, but it was possible to track down the Serbs.

In the documentation on Caglavica that I have studied, I have felt that time was a decisive factor in order for you to pull through. But was it actually time; you are now giving me several other explanations?

Time – well, yes and no. The fact that we stuck it out was crucial, but actually time was a disadvantage for us. There were so many Albanians that they were able to advance and turn on our soldiers for five minutes and then retreat and rest. Our soldiers could not do this; they had to stand there all the time. And we were losing people because of exhaustion and injuries all the time.

It sounds as if it was a kind of morale, not giving up despite the ever-worsening situation. What makes Mark and Niklas and their soldiers remain there?

Giving up was never on the cards. The way I understood it was that when

they called me and wanted to have permission to open fire, they wanted an assurance that they had the right to shoot their way out if needed. They did not use the permission to open fire except in one case. And actually they hadn't needed to request permission to open fire, because, according to the rules of engagement, they were allowed to shoot their way out. But I understand that they wanted me to reaffirm that it was OK.

Just then an Albanian negotiator appears. He says that they only wanted to march through the village and that they didn't have anything against KFOR. But if they weren't allowed to march through the village, they would kill us. It wasn't possible to allow them to go through the village, partly because we wouldn't have been able to secure the village but also because we knew that there were several Serbian villages after Caglavica. In our opinion, we didn't have any other option than to do what we were doing now. I called Anders Brännström on the phone and told him that we had received this negotiation proposal and, in my opinion, we were only minutes from losing the situation here, but that we couldn't do things any other way than we were doing them now. I had the backing of Marko and Niklas who also felt that it wouldn't be possible to do things any other way. Anders Brännström told me that I was the commander on the ground and I should decide what should be done and that he would support me regardless of the decision I made. That was good moral support.

Was that really support? It could also be interpreted as if he had left you high and dry?

No, it was support. What could he do – he was stuck in a camp three kilometres away. He had done the only thing he could have done, which was to provide reinforcements. I thought it was great to hear him say that, because I thought that if we blow this, I won't be the only one responsible. He knows what's happening and he knew the kind of decision situation I found myself in. It felt reassuring that he was with me in this.

Did you already know him?

Yes, and that is also one of those random things. When I was the commander of an armoured battalion in a large exercise down in Skåne, he observed me of all people. So he had seen me and how I acted as a commander in stressful exercise situations. And I observed him for twenty-five freezing days up in Norrland when he was a brigade commander in 2000. So I knew what he was like as a brigade commander and I had immense confidence in him.

Here you return to the fact that practical exercises have been important?

Yes, that's right. And in this connection, I can say that I am more than a little worried about all the academic stuff that is now being introduced. I'm afraid

that they are throwing the baby out with the bathwater. What was so great about my training was that I did a year of general training and then had two or three years of practical experience, whereupon I returned for one more year of general training. I think that this has been a great mix of acquiring theory and subsequently practising, during which I gained experience before returning for the next training course. . . .

Now the medics started to gather the wounded right next to my car. Bloody soldiers from different nations were being carried on stretchers. In a normal situation, the status of the medical services is reported continuously so that the commander is always kept updated of the injury toll. No such system worked now. We did not have any command and control organization.

I stood there watching how the medics came carrying unconscious, bloodstained soldiers. There and then I believed that we already had dead soldiers. If I have previously said that all the exercises and training we had done gave us confidence, this was something I was not prepared for. I thought it was extremely unpleasant to see our own wounded. I was not prepared for this. All of a sudden, they became 'my soldiers', although I didn't know them as well as battalion commander Engelbrektson did, who was out with them every day. It was a strong feeling. And then I started thinking about whether this was correct. Do I have the right to demand this of my soldiers? How much is this village worth? Must Swedish soldiers die here? Is the village worth two dead Swedish soldiers? Or ten deaths? . . .

The next big thing to happen is that the second Norwegian company arrives. They had been under fire during the day but had been ordered to redeploy in order to reinforce us. I believe that this was a defining moment as we received reinforcements at the same time as the Albanians began to feel that they weren't getting anywhere with us. The Albanians believed American soldiers had arrived.

What happened then?

On Thursday, I was contacted by the Swedish media. They were friendly and wanted to have a general briefing on what had taken place. Later the international media turned up; they had an entirely different attitude. This surprised me; I was feeling cocky because we had successfully carried out our mission. But the BBC and CNN didn't care about this – they regarded me as a representative of the entire KFOR force and wanted me to explain why KFOR had failed to protect the Serbian population.

The battalion commander Engelbrektson returned to camp on Thursday evening. ATC had assigned him a bodyguard since they deemed the situation so serious. At the camp, he was met by our physiotherapist, Sirpa, the only person who was available to act as a bodyguard.

Engelbrektson told me to carry on until the task was completed. After all, being Swedish he had a different mindset. It was a good decision, even if I was physically spent. After all, right then I had an overview of the situation and there were lots of other things that he could deal with. We had a burnt-out SISU [armoured personnel carrier]; which hospitals were the Swedish soldiers in; debriefing of the wounded, etc. It was prudent of Engelbrektson to be thinking unselfishly in this situation.

In hindsight, is there anything you would have done differently?

Perhaps I would have used the liaison section more. When the situation was brewing, they wanted to move into the villages and try to influence the civilian village leaders, but I wouldn't let them do it. I thought it was too dangerous. However, that may have been an option.

‘You only get one bit of the puzzle at a time’

Interview with Anders Brännström

From the *Collapse in Kosovo* report by the International Crisis Group:

On 17 March 2004, the unstable foundations of four and a half years of gradual progress in Kosovo buckled and gave way. Within hours the province was immersed in anti-Serb and anti-UN rioting and had regressed to levels of violence not seen since 1999. By 18 March the violence mutated into the ethnic cleansing of entire minority villages and neighbourhoods. The mobs of Albanian youths, extremists and criminals exposed the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the NATO-led peacekeeping force (KFOR) as very weak. . . . The rampage left nineteen dead, nearly 900 injured, over 700 Serb, Ashkali and Roma homes, up to ten public buildings and 30 Serbian churches and two monasteries damaged or destroyed, and roughly 4,500 people displaced. . . . KFOR was caught without a contingency plan. Its troops often appeared to lack a coherent use-of-force continuum, caught between ineffectively attempting to stop mobs with their bare hands and firing live rounds at them – a last resort which, again to soldiers’ credit, was used sparingly. KFOR did a creditable humanitarian job, but a terrible military one. *Except at Caglavica, it [KFOR] was defeated.*

(ICG Europe Report no. 155, 22 April 2004; italics added)

The interview with Anders Brännström was conducted on 18 December 2008 by Lotta Victor Tillberg at the Swedish Armed Forces Headquarters in Stockholm.

I start each interview by asking the interviewee if he experienced a situation where his professional skills were tested to their limits. Do you have any such experience you would like to tell us about?

Well, that would be the March riots. The other situation that came to mind was when I was battalion commander in Kosovo in 2000; there was also an incident at that time. However, it was not as big as the March riots in 2004 (shows me his memory book). They almost shot the brigade commander and there were a few other ingredients included at that time. But that incident took place eight years ago, so my memories of it are a bit hazier.

You have written a text that you have read on Swedish Radio's P1's 'Thoughts for the Day' and you read the text at the Mission Abroad conference. Was that text written about any of these incidents?

Yes, not directly about, but it was written after the March riots in Kosovo in 2004. Let's talk about the March riots then. I was brigade commander for 2,000 soldiers from eight nations. I had three battalions: one Swedish, one Finnish–Irish, and one Czech–Slovakian. On 1 November 2003, I reported to the German lieutenant-general Holger Kammerhoff, commander of Kosovo Force (KFOR). The only thing they were talking about in Kosovo at that time was that the area was calm, as calm as it could be. I had been there once before. When I left Kosovo in October 2000, I was dead sure I would never go back there. And I remember so clearly what my thoughts were during those last days down there in Kosovo in 2000. The entire area in which we operated was fortified. There were roadblocks and guard posts everywhere. Fhleming Christensen, who was commander of KS01 [the Swedish battalion], had experienced drive-by shootings there; Albanians came in a car, stopped, and fired bazookas right into a house. That is what happened in Caglavica in the spring of 2000. I remember thinking when I left there, 'Will they ever be able to remove all this, the roadblocks, the guard posts?' When I returned in 2003, everything was removed; they had taken it all down. Everything was said to be peaceful. I got caught up in this. Someone should do research on it; on how we collectively can deceive ourselves in that way. When I was down there on a recce, the only thing being talked about was downsizing. The British had coined the term unfixing. Did you know that?

When I left Kosovo in October 2000, I was dead sure I would never go back there.

No . . .

It is called fixed positions when you have roadblocks and the like. Unfixing was about removing roadblocks, about closing down fixed positions that had previously been employed. The English used the term need to unfix, and transferring to civilian authorities. These were the kinds of words used.

I have read about reduced footprints . . .

Yes, of course, it's part of the same gospel. When I took over, KFOR commander Kammerhoff told me, 'You are the last commander of MNB C (Multinational Brigade Centre)'. Everything was going so well here, and I was informed that NATO was planning to disband MNB C. At this time, the force in Kosovo comprised a total of 22,000 men and there were plans to reduce that to 7,000 men during 2005. My task was to prepare for this downsizing. It was a clearly stated task. So we pressed ahead in that spirit despite things happening all the time. People were being blown up, shot. But this was somehow explained away. In retrospect, it's weird to think about it. And so it continued until the evening of 15 March. I was in my barrack when I received information that a young Serb had been shot in Caglavica. We thought that some Albanians had driven by and done this. As usual, people were upset when something like this happened. They went out into the streets and set fire to tyres. The Hawk road was clogged again from Pristina to Skopje. The same thing happened in Gracanica. The Albanians were really frustrated and traffic had to be diverted.

“People were being blown up, shot. But this was somehow explained away.”

Didn't these incidents serve as warning signals?

No. When I was the battalion commander in the same area in 2000, we often had to close the villages and divert the traffic. So that in itself wasn't anything particularly alarming.

What happened next?

The first thing I did was to send the brigade reserve to the area and create a new brigade reserve. The 16 March came around. Two of my battalion commanders were on leave. That tells you how calm we thought it was. Deputy battalion commander Håkansson was here looking after the day-to-day business. The guy shot in Caglavica did not die, but in the villages, frustration was mounting. And the Albanians were up in arms because the roads were not passable. There then followed the incident involving the children who drowned in a completely different area. On the morning of 17 March, the mass media reported on this incident in a very ghoulish way. The media claimed that the children had been chased into the water by Serbs with dogs.

. . . the developments were still not regarded as alarming. This had so often been the case in the past. The Irish were mainly preoccupied with celebrating St Patrick's Day. As the multinational commander, I was to attend their celebrations. They were waiting for a Catholic priest but he was very late. This was because of the many roadblocks on the way to the camp. However, on the morning of 17 March, it was still the case that nobody regarded the situation as serious. When I was going to lunch, I popped by the Tactical Operations Centre (TOC) and we received a report that it was teeming with people who were on their way

to the Serbian roadblocks. It was then that I realized that this was a new push; this was something different. In 2000, I had witnessed Albanians march from Pristina to Mitrovica, a stretch of forty kilometres. Now they were on their way to Caglavica, only a two-kilometre stretch. I then realized that this could get really ugly. . . .

What did you do then?

I knew that KFOR had a reserve [battalion] that I wanted to have at our disposal. It was a Norwegian battalion that had just finished an exercise and was north of Pristina. I got on the phone to Kammerhoff. When I got hold of him, I realized that he had tunnel vision, which even a lieutenant general can have. He said that he would dispatch his chief of staff in a helicopter to me. 'A helicopter', I said. 'We are only a couple of kilometres away'. And then he informed me that there were major riots in Mitrovica and so on'.

Did you not know this at the time?

No. If I had known that, I would have ordered the entire brigade to Caglavica on the morning of 17 March. However, you only get one bit of the puzzle at a time. I now became aware that there were riots in at least two places in Kosovo. The KFOR commander also told me that there were ten severely wounded French soldiers and one French soldier had been shot to death. I then told him that things would more or less go pear-shaped in my sector if I did not get this Norwegian battalion. He couldn't give me an answer at that time, so we hung up. I had telephone contact with Håkansson the whole time and I gave him what I had at my disposal, another company.

Were you at the camp when this took place?

Yes, I couldn't get anywhere on 17 March.

. . .

After a while, I called Kammerhoff again and explained to him that things would come a cropper if I didn't get the Norwegian battalion. 'There are thousands of Albanians coming up the hill here towards Caglavica and they will kill each other. I can't take the responsibility for what will happen if I don't get the Norwegian battalion', I told him. I can't remember exactly what words I used, but, in the end, he said: 'You can have it'. We hung up. Now it was only Kammerhoff and I who knew that I had got the Norwegian soldiers. Now I had to quickly get hold of the Norwegian battalion commander. I called him and, believe it or not, I managed to get hold of him on the phone within one minute. . . .

Did you already know him?

No. I had played squash at their camp together with my staff. I had said hello

at that time and introduced myself. That was all. We didn't know each other. I now called him on the phone and said, 'You have to listen to me and you mustn't start any bureaucratic procedures'. I told him that Kammerhoff had just told me that you are my subordinate and things are going for a burton in Caglavica. 'You have to go there and your task will be to repel the advance against Caglavica'. What I didn't know then when I talked to the Norwegian battalion commander was that it was an impossible task. The demonstrators were already outside Caglavica. I also told him that he must use a lot of different roads to get there since the roads in the entire area were blocked. My thinking was roughly along the same lines as for attacking an airdrop; send the units on different routes and one of them will always get there.

How do you know where to begin in a situation such as this? Everything now is going very fast?

I had two things to focus on during this day. The first was to support Håkansson with everything I could get my hands on. He was given companies, he was given the Norwegian battalion, and we sent medical services, helicopters, everything that could be sent. The second thing was to make sure that we would be prepared when the crowd became tired. I thought that at some time the civilians must get tired, and then we will regain the initiative. I gave the staff the task to plan something that we could do when the crowd grew tired.

. . .

I ordered an O Group (Orders Group) at Camp Victoria at 21.00 hours. All battalion commanders were to attend. A Swedish intelligence officer ran the O Group. He described the current situation and that there were now tens of thousands of Albanians on the move. Caglavica was described as an awful mess. The intelligence officer said that their assessment of the situation was that the crowd would not give in. 'New people are continually coming to the place and they will pound away day after day after day'. I then told him that my opinion differed from his. My assessment was that they would grow tired some time during the night and that we should be prepared when that happened. I didn't know what we would do if that wasn't the case. So we gave them the order to solve it. I told them that if things turned out as I thought they would, they would have to be able to apply pressure at the right time and then I would be convinced we would be able to solve this.

What made you assess the situation differently?

I was convinced that it would be like that. The crowd would grow tired.

Why were you convinced of that?

In the same way you underestimate things, you can also overestimate matters.

Just as we underestimated the underlying threats in Kosovo, we could also overestimate what was going on. This Swedish intelligence officer who described that the Albanian crowd would not give in and would pound away day after day was really stressed. His friends were perhaps dying down there in Caglavica. When I was a battalion commander in Kosovo in 2000, I attended the first anniversary of Operation Horseshoe. The Serbian army and their special police force were carrying out raids in the villages in a sector where they were hunting down the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army). During these raids, the Serbs killed many Albanians. This took place at the beginning of April 1999. And on the first anniversary of the raids, many Albanians were going to visit memorial sites. On the date of the first anniversary, my battalion had only been down there for two weeks. There was a really tense atmosphere spreading throughout the battalion about what might happen. Some staff members got caught up in this. We expected the worst and overstated the threat of possible riots and clashes. But there was a guy from Södermanland Regiment called Håkan Forsmark. I had inherited him from Fhleming Christensen's battalion and he had seen all this before.

Was he more familiar with the situation than you were since you had newly arrived?

Yes, he had a perspective. He said that it had been like this before. We had to make a realistic assessment of how dangerous it can be. His attitude was that we shouldn't be rash and be drawn into a tense atmosphere. We had to sort this out. We deploy sentries, we monitor but we can't start operating based on something that hasn't happened. I had also experienced the same thing – of being drawn into a tense atmosphere – when I was a platoon leader in Cyprus. On that occasion, we were there with the old combat crew for half a week. After that, we were on our own. During the first week, people reported everything that happened. Everything!

So you had this in mind at the O Group at Camp Victoria?

Yes. This was why I said that I made a different assessment. One battalion commander there was riled because I had taken away some of his resources. I said, 'Caglavica is important now. Everything else is of less importance. My assessment is what matters'. In the middle of my O Group, they came from the TOC and said that a crisis was brewing down there in Caglavica. So I had to interrupt the O Group to go and talk with Håkansson on the radio. He then said that things were going pear-shaped. It had now grown dark there so they couldn't see the stones or other things being thrown at them. They couldn't see what was happening around them or how people were moving around.

When I interviewed him [Hans Håkansson], he said that when he phoned you at

that time, his opinion was that it would only be a matter of minutes before they would be overrun.

Yes. That was the situation. I told him, 'It's your call whether to retreat to save the lives of your soldiers. I can't make that decision sitting here in a camp'. And then I told him how I assessed the situation. That I believed that the crowd would grow tired if he could just stick it out. And then we would be prepared.

I told him, 'It's your call whether to retreat to save the lives of your soldiers. I can't make that decision sitting here in a camp'.

Did you already know Håkansson?

Yes.

Did this have any significance? Would things have been different if he had been an Englishman or a Czech ?

It had great significance. I knew that Håkansson was reliable. I was taking part in a tank exercise in the south of Sweden; it might have been in 1995, when he took a poor soldier from the South Skåne Regiment down a peg or two. He was good. And he was Karl Engelbrektson's deputy and chief of staff. So I did know him.

How did the conversation end?

He said that they had to stay because otherwise there would be a bloodbath. And he said that he would fire for effect, which I should notify the LCC (Land Component Command). 'You bet', I said. Being there, this was a decision that he had to make.

. . . Things were going on all the time during these days. What I have just told you are the main features. I kept on at KFOR for more resources. Things were happening all the time.

. . . The plan was that the Albanians would retreat during the evening or night, but would return in even larger numbers the next morning. And then we would be on the road, prepared. The Norwegian battalion was then to be deployed at the front with the Swedes behind, prepared for the next thrust. In 2000, there were 40,000 people in Mitrovica, and I estimated that there could be even more here. At around eleven o'clock in the evening, we received a report that the Albanians were beginning to retreat. It was the most satisfying feeling I have experienced in my professional life. Until then, we had only been fumbling. All incoming information had been negative. In Podujevo, someone was burning down the church; elsewhere someone had set fire to something else. Each time this occurred, people wanted me to take resources from Caglavica and send them there. I refused and said that would not happen. When the Albanians started to retreat, we ordered the Norwegians to advance exactly according to my plan.

Early on the morning of 18 March, I was in a forward command post that we

had set up on the road. The road, which is normally a busy motorway, was completely empty. The Norwegians were deployed in front of me in the middle of the road at Veternik Ridge. They had armoured vehicles and barbed wire. I was right behind the Norwegians and then, outside of Caglavica, were the Swedes, reinforced by the Finnish, Irish, Slovakian, and Czech troops. No one knows how well they would have coped with an onslaught the next day. They were extremely shaken. They had looked death straight in the eyes. I had told the Norwegian battalion commander that he would have to be prepared for things being tough; there would be any number of people coming from Pristina; yesterday was child's play, and there would be no more resources available. He was also reliable. However, no more than 2,000 came on the second day. The Norwegians fired warning shots and teargas. There was no uprising.

"
They had looked death straight in the eyes.
"

In retrospect, when you think about this incident, what enabled you to keep a cool head?

As the brigade commander, my mission is to have a plan and to make sure that others keep to it. The objective here was to clarify what was the most important task. I assessed that the most important thing was to resolve the situation in Caglavica on 17 March. My job was to direct resources and to coordinate.

What happened after 18 March? How did you assess the situation? Were things still unsettled?

I had Ivan Tomovic, an intelligence officer, hovering above the area in a helicopter all the time. He provided me with continuous reports about what was happening in the area. We had a Finnish RAATE (RAdio Access TEtra) system via which we could communicate and send text messages. So he submitted reports to me via text message. For example, 'Kosovo-Polje at 13.00 hours: all quiet'. This was reassuring to know. I had told him that I wanted to know if crowds were assembling anywhere. If more than fifty people were assembling, we would go there and check it out. On the morning of 19 March, a British battalion commander came in to my office and reported to me. He was the operational reserve. He came with six companies at my disposal, one they had taken from Bosnia; the other five had landed at Pristina Airport. 'We have been put under your command; what would you like us to do?' Then I felt I was really at home. So we were able to deploy them in different municipalities. And we still had the Norwegians. It took Sweden three weeks to provide reinforcements.

I had planned that we would regain the initiative even better on 20 March. We would end the deployment at Veternik, and the Norwegian battalion would start patrolling. It was all about regaining and maintaining the initiative. Just when the Norwegians were about to start their vehicle patrols, Kammerhoff's chief of staff phoned from KFOR and said, 'We are taking the battalion from

you because things are unsettled in Mitrovica'. So we simply had to wave goodbye to them. It is just as easy to lose resources as it is to acquire them. However, things turned out OK. This was the short story of what happened.

…

If we are talking about military professionalism and making decisions, then we can compare it to a puzzle with hundreds of different pieces. Only when all the hundreds of pieces have been put together will you be able to say that you know what it looks like. However, as commander you can never wait until you have all the pieces of the puzzle. You have to act on what you have.

I find the puzzle metaphor a little difficult since it presupposes that there is a ready-made design that can be put together . . .

What I mean is that you must be able to make decisions based on unreliable data, on very unreliable data. You have to be able to make decisions based on your *gut feeling.* You have to get a sense of where things are going. You can't wait until the staff have finished thinking. You must have an idea before then. You have to choose the direction. And you have to also be lucky.

What enabled Swedish officers to keep things together when the officers of other nationalities couldn't do this? We're still a relatively small, let's say inexperienced, nation in the international arena compared to other countries . . .

First, it is important to remember that my brigade didn't consist only of Swedish officers and soldiers, but also personnel from the other troop-contributing countries. I believe that it may have been to do with the fact that paradoxically we were the smallest brigade. We never had enough personnel. The Germans and the Italians had 7,000–8,000 soldiers; we had 2,000. We always had to juggle resources. The other KFOR forces had never experienced taking a company and sending it from one battalion to another. This wasn't part of their mindset. But we always did this. As brigade commander, I always had to take a company here and dispatch it and place it under someone else's command somewhere else. I learned this from the brigade commander I had in Kosovo in 2000, Brigadier Richard Shirreff; the one who was almost shot. He was really good where this was concerned.

In what way was he really good?

He was really good at manoeuvring. Always taking what was most important into consideration. When I took charge of the Swedish battalion on 8 April 2000, there had been riots in Gracanica. A Finnish dog had bitten a demonstrator the previous evening and there was a really hostile atmosphere in the area just when I took command. I was going to deal with this during my first O Group there at 08.00 hours. Sitting there were my own company commanders,

two British company commanders, and a Canadian. I had the full support of the brigade commander. He asked, 'Anders, is there anything more you want? I will support you with what you need'. However, the reverse was also true. One time he had a very successful operation in the Canadian sector (shows me on a map). They found large weapons caches and ammunition. On that occasion, he took so many of my men – platoons and companies – that ultimately I had to dispatch the battalion staff's assistant personnel officer, armed with a gun, to escort children to school. At that time, it was most important to have the resources somewhere else. I asked him if I could have some of the men back, but he looked at me as if to say, 'Are you not professional, Brännström?' It's about dynamics. A demonstration of strength is not just being strong in one area. It is daring to be weak in another one.

"*I asked him if I could have some of the men back, but he looked at me as if to say, 'Are you not professional, Brännström?'*"

. . . If I hadn't had this experience, I would probably not have made the decisions regarding Caglavica that I did. If we hadn't had the Norwegian battalion, we wouldn't have been able to protect Caglavica. If I hadn't immediately got on the phone, some other brigade would have got the Norwegian battalion and it would then have been on its way to Mitrovica instead of Caglavica. I would not have had that knowledge if I hadn't been a battalion commander under Richard Shirreff in Kosovo in 2000.

Do you train to handle a number of units in this dynamic way at home in Sweden? Taking away resources when things are going well in one place?

No, not in the preparations for Kosovo in 2004. Once again, what perceptions did we have when we went down there? The most dangerous thing we believed we would encounter in 2004 was probably the traffic and traffic accidents. Those were the perceptions we had when we went down there.

. . . Åke Norling, who was a company commander when I was the battalion commander in Kosovo in 2000, was the head of G-5 in Kosovo in 2004. He could read me like a book. I could tell him to 'think this way', and then after two hours, he would come back to me with a plan on which we based an order. Mostly it's about having people around you who you can trust. You don't have to think alike, but it is important that you have the same mental approach. It's dangerous if everyone thinks alike.

. . . There is a quote by Douglas MacArthur, whose career came to an abrupt end when he was dismissed by Truman. He was a general in the Pacific [theatre of war] during World War II. He expressed it very well, more or less that the history of failures in war and military operations can be summed up in two words: 'Too late!' Realizing too late that there is a growing threat. Decisions about mobilization that come too late. The initial deployment of troops comes too late. The order to attack comes too late. This is what it's always about. The higher the level you work at, the more important it is to look ahead. What will happen in

the next phase? What will it be like? And it's important to have a good intelligence service. If you don't always look ahead, you will make decisions too late. When the chap was shot in the stomach on 15 March, dispatch a company. You have to disregard objections that it costs money and diverts resources – dispatch a company; it's better that they are in Caglavica when the day breaks than being somewhere else. This is what it's about: looking ahead, having a good intelligence service, making decisions.

. . . The worst thing I could have done was to jump into a vehicle and try to drive down to see Håkansson. Then I would have been stuck in roadblocks for five hours. I have learned this from exercises at home. When you are in a vehicle, you are stuck. It's all very gung-ho to be at the front, but it is not the job of the brigade commander to stand holding a baton in one hand and a shield in the other. His duty is to make sure that resources reach the military units and that they receive command and control so that they can solve their task.

I have also interviewed Jan-Gunnar Isberg about his experiences from the Congo. If I understand you both correctly, you express slightly different perspectives on where the brigade commander should be? Jan-Gunnar felt it necessary for him to be at the forefront when things happened.

According to the textbook, that's where you should be. And I was up there at the front on 18 March.

Perhaps it's two completely different situations. Jan-Gunnar was the only Swede in his brigade; that's perhaps why he needed to be closer to the front, to see things with his own eyes . . .

When I attended the Swedish National Defence College, we had a very good tactics teacher. He was a lieutenant-colonel in the armoured forces; you never forget a good teacher. He impressed upon us that 'no situation is the other alike'. According to the textbook, I should have gone down to Håkansson because there were two battalions that were to be coordinated. I know that there were problems with coordination, and the staff were on at me and wanted me to go down there. Still, in the prevailing situation, it was more important to play my role. Principles can be a guiding factor. However, you yourself have to decide how the common good is best served. If Jan-Gunnar had been in my shoes in Kosovo, I believe he would have come to the same conclusion.

Earlier you mentioned the importance of daring to act on a gut feeling and unreliable data. What is it that makes you dare to act and not become passive?

I think it's about confidence. You are confident in your professional knowledge, in your experience, and you are confident in the system in which you operate; you have been allowed to make mistakes.

> *"He could read me like a book. I could tell him to 'think this way', and then after two hours, he would come back to me with a plan on which we based an order."*

During these days did you ever feel that this was all too much; that you had bitten off more than you could chew?

No, not in that way. That may sound a little cocky, but no. If things had gone wrong and lots of people had died, and so on, then perhaps I wouldn't still be in the armed forces today. However, when you are in the middle of what is happening, you must focus on the things you have to do. Realize that many people are depending on what you do. Just as the soldiers who stood outside Caglavica having stones thrown at them for ten hours would have to do their job, I would have to do mine. I would get the Norwegian battalion from COM KFOR by nagging, make sure that we had helicopters, try to look ahead, and find a solution to regain the initiative. . . .

Kosovo


Prishtine
Pristina
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‘You solve the task’

Interview with Ulf Henricsson

From Sydsvenskan (a Swedish daily regional newspaper)
on 8 December 2008

Croat confesses to 1993 massacre
‘Ivica Rajic, the man behind the massacre in the Bosnian village of Stupni Do in October 1993, has confessed. He was in hiding for eight years but was handed over to the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague a little more than two years ago. At that time, he declared that he was innocent – now he will be sentenced to a minimum of 12 years’ imprisonment.

In October 1993, fighting broke out between Croatian and Bosnian forces around the small mining town of Vares in Bosnia. Croatian forces under Ivica Rajic’s command had threatened Bosnian Muslims and demanded that they either hand over all weapons or flee. . . . The Croatian forces had also interned all Muslim men fit for military service in two of the city’s schools. The Croats in the city who had protested were also interned under appalling conditions. At the same time, the first Swedish UN force arrives in the same city’.

Interview with Ulf Henricsson conducted on 27 November 2008 by Lotta Victor Tillberg.

I’m interested in finding out more about a real incident that happened when you served overseas in which your professionalism has been tested to the extreme.

Then I think it must be the events in Vares and Stupni Do in October 1993. Vares was a well-known problem. The city had geographical significance for transports between the northern and southern parts of Bosnia. It was located

in a valley with Serbian positions close by; it was difficult, almost impossible, to get round it. And inside the city, there were tensions between the inhabitants since the population was made up of a Croatian majority and a Bosnian minority. When we arrived there, things were working pretty well in the town. There was a brigade, the Bobovac Brigade, which was part of the Second Corps of the Federative Army. It turned out that there were tensions within the corps. The commander of the corps didn't think he could fully rely on the Croatian brigade; nevertheless, it was part of the corps.

And you were to cooperate with these people?

Yes, that was part of the mission. However, as mentioned, there was tension, primarily between the Second and Third Corps which were both Bosnian. For precisely this reason, we deployed the first company that arrived (the Eighth Mechanized Infantry Company) in Vares in order to secure the road. It was important to keep the road open, not only for the sake of transports, but also to stop the Serbs from taking over the area. If they did this, we would definitely be trapped in a pocket. Our Eighth Mechanized Infantry Company took over the Canadian camp and our area of responsibility was moved to the south of Vares. Our headquarters was located seventy kilometres to the north of Vares, in Tuzla.

The company commander in Vares had good contacts with the mayor, the Bobovac Brigade, and the police. Initially, there was a good working relationship between them and us.

After about two weeks, fighting breaks out in a village (Kopijari) in the vicinity of Vares that is attacked by the Third Corps. They took the village and there was some bloodshed. That's where the Eighth Company had its baptism of fire. There was a lot of shooting; Croatian refugees were handed over. That's when we got the first sign that this wouldn't be such an easy mission. For example, when our company commander was negotiating with a number of Croats, one of the people he was negotiating with was shot right next to him. We were given a clear sign that they didn't care all that much whether you had white UN vehicles.

“
That's when we got the first sign that this wouldn't be such an easy mission.
”

On 23 October, I was in Sarajevo; however, I am on my way back to camp when I am told that fighting is going on in Vares. A convoy that had left earlier during the day comes back and the combat crew tells me that it's impossible to get through. I still decide to try to drive to Vares because I want to see what's going on with my own eyes. We drive towards Vares and we get there thanks to the persuasive power of my interpreter. He was good; his fuse was just as short as mine. Eventually, we found a dead cow and a dead farmer on the road. There had been fighting. Then a Bosnian unit came and told us that we couldn't go any further as it was highly dangerous; fighting was going on. As I had the

postmaster and postmistress with me, I decided to turn back. On the way back, we met one of our SISUs [armoured personnel carriers] and I decided that we would redistribute things in the vehicles. The crew of the SISU would take my Toyota and I would take the SISU and we would continue on to Vares. On the way there, I receive a report that there had been a massacre in the village of Stupni Do outside of Vares and that the Third Corps wanted to attack. Instead, I proposed to a Bosnian commander that I should drive up to Vares and ascertain what had happened. I didn't think they would attack before we knew what had happened. I took it upon myself to find out. They agreed to this and we got this confirmed in writing; we were promised that we would be allowed through all roadblocks, and so on. It had now become dark, but we put on the blue light and drove right into the battle. When we got to Vares, we saw how the fires in Stupni Do were burning. Then I realized that this was probably not going to end well.

“I didn't think they would attack before we knew what had happened. I took it upon myself to find out.”

You were outside the village then?

Yes. We couldn't get in. We drove into the town of Vares and up to the camp of the Eighth Company. There I met the company commander, who was just about to leave to go to the Bobovac Brigade. He told me that the town had a new regime. A couple of hundred extremists had come into town and taken it over just as in the Wild West. Then I told him that I would accompany him. We met Ivica Rajic, who said that he had now taken over the Bobovac Brigade. They had locked up the mayor, the chief of police, and the regular brigade commander. The discussion was not a friendly one. I demanded to be allowed to enter Stupni Do; I said that I had talked to representatives of the Third Corps and they would attack if we didn't find out what had happened. He said no. Furthermore, they didn't want the UN to remain there; there was talk that we should leave. However, for me, leaving was never an option. Not with the mission we had.

To me, what you're describing here sounds as if there were no existing rules or agreements. How do you orientate yourself in such an environment where you can't trust what anyone says or does?

It's all about having an internal compass. Deciding what should be done. I am schooled in something called mission tactics – you solve the task. I believed that my task was to provide support and escorts so that humanitarian aid got there, to protect the safe zones, and to try to negotiate a ceasefire. We also had a Chapter VII mandate allowing us to use armed force. I felt sure that we had the law on our side. A civilian convoy had recently been attacked and the drivers had been beaten to death while British soldiers stood looking on. This had been up for discussion with the lawyers at UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force), who clarified that in such a situation, it is international law and not the mandate that applies. According to international law, you are obliged to

intervene. This made our rules of engagement easier. I never hesitated about our mandate – it was here about establishing a ceasefire, about preventing genocide. Furthermore, I was convinced that I had a good unit with good soldiers. . . .

After several discussions with commander Ivica Rajic, where he didn't want to let us enter Stupni Do, I got the feeling that he didn't have control of the situation himself. I could see that he was damned worried about this. We got nowhere in our negotiations. So I left him and said that we would go to the village anyway. It was now the middle of the night.

How well did you know him? How did you know that he was worried?

No, I didn't know him at all. This was the first time I had met him. You can look at people and see if they are afraid or uncertain by the way they act. If he'd been sure of himself, he would have told me to go to hell. But he didn't. He hummed and hawed, saying that we might be allowed to enter, but tomorrow or something. That was the technique they used down there; it isn't possible today, but perhaps tomorrow; and then it won't be possible tomorrow, but perhaps the day after tomorrow. . . .

> *The discussion was not a friendly one. I demanded to be allowed to enter Stupni Do…*

So I left Ivica Rajic in the middle of the night with the order 'we'll go in anyway'. But this is where professionalism comes in. This was on a dark, miserable night in October. I realized that after fourteen days in Bosnia without any knowledge of the terrain, I couldn't set off in the dead of night on an unknown road with mined roadblocks. So I decided to wait until it became light. Nevertheless, I had intimidated him and shown him that we didn't intend to let this go.

The next day we entered Vares. Stupni Do was still on fire, but we were not allowed to enter. There was great tension between us and the Croats there. I felt that when we advanced we couldn't be too heavy-handed. The dead were already dead. In the situation we were in, it was too late to save lives. It was more important to do the follow-up work accurately and safely. . . .

Before that, I had set the bar when we had been stopped at a roadblock to the south of Vares. Even though I had a paper from Rajic, stating that I could pass, the sentry at the roadblock said, 'Stop, and no, you may not pass through'. Then I became really irritated. 'We'll call our commander', they said. 'Yes, you do that', I said. They had no connection; this was a typical way for them to play for time. I then said to the sentry via the interpreter that he should bloody well stand completely still and do nothing. And then I ordered the heavy machine gun to be aimed at the sentry. 'Open fire if they do anything'. And then I told the Croatian sentry that I was now going to remove the mine. 'We'll open fire if you do anything stupid'. He then started crying. There were a number of mines on the road. They were ordinary pressure-activated anti-tank mines. There is no danger in moving them. But there was one I was unsure of because it had prongs. They can have an inbuilt anti-handling device, meaning that they will explode

if tipped too much. Since I was also trained as a sapper officer (essentially in an armoured regiment), I know quite a lot about mines.

What is a sapper?

A sapper is an engineer soldier in the infantry or the armoured troops. He makes sure that roads are accessible and mines are removed. I knew what was on the road. When I had removed the pressure mines, I told the sentry, 'Now remove that one'. And he was now sufficiently frightened, because he did it.

Did he know what kind of mine it was?

Of course. And what was good about him moving it was that now we knew that they could also remove them in future. . . .

Later that became a tall tale that I greatly benefited from down in Bosnia. However, the same tall tale has led to a few complications here in Sweden, for there they thought I was crazy. The story developed into a tall tale in which I put a gun to the head of a Serb and got through the roadblock in that way. This was not at all true. But the tall tale appeared in reports and the media. 'Swedish colonel kicks mines out of the way'. But what was good about the story down there was that it made demands on my soldiers. If our commander can, so can we. It's an interesting effect. This wasn't actually what I had in mind; I was mostly upset at having been stopped for the third time despite having a pass. There was actually very little risk in what I did. If the sentry had moved, he would have been shot with a heavy machine gun.

When I hear 'he goes up and moves the mine', then I think, what if it had exploded; what a madman; what risks he takes. But when you tell me what you had in mind and about your background as a sapper officer, I understand that you knew exactly what you were doing. Was this the way it was?

If I hadn't known what I was doing, I wouldn't have done it. I had complete control of the situation. Being a colonel, you might wonder if I should know anything about mines at my level. 'Yes, I should', I say. You should know about mines. I should know about things I am doing. It is crucial to be a role model for others in a situation like this. People do as you do, not what you tell them to do. This incident at the roadblock was crucial for the pressure on those around me. I believe, no, I'm convinced that the situation was also an eye-opener for the Bobovac Brigade. Suddenly, we had a UN unit that didn't back down. They had expected us to be passive and just look on as so many UN units had done before. We were within the brigade commander's decision-making circle and he wasn't able to keep up. He probably thought, 'Oh, shit, there went the plan; they didn't scarper'. . . .

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We were within the brigade commander's decision-making circle and he wasn't able to keep up.
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Then I drove back to Tuzla as I had a meeting with a Serbian commander that I didn't want to miss. I believed that we had the situation in Vares under control and we had a promise that we would be allowed to enter Stupni Do. Another reason why I went was to do with my confidence in the Swedish company commander there. I felt that if I remained, there might be a risk that I would take over his job. It's not easy to be in a crisis situation and not to intervene at the wrong level. So I went to Tuzla and met that brigade commander. In the evening, I realized that they hadn't been allowed to enter Stupni Do. And later in the evening, I got a call from the company commander, who was clearly jittery. He told me that they had been fired upon and an armoured ambulance had been attacked. They shot at the vehicles' windscreens, which in itself was a good thing, because then we could see that the windscreens were intact. But we realized that the Red Cross wasn't protecting us. If anything, the Red Cross was a target.

How well did you know the company commander?

He was new to me. I knew him from the training phase in Sweden that took place about four months before. I trusted him. He was a good officer and he had control of the situation. He also reported that he had an armoured tracked vehicle that had been fired upon and a shell had actually penetrated the vehicle. This was not music to my ears. All the Swedes had survived and everyone was at home. He asked for permission to leave Vares. My initial thought was, 'Hell, no, that's not possible'. Meanwhile, we had received information that they had locked up 200 Bosnian men in two schools in Vares. This was getting on eleven o'clock in the evening. Before I could say no, I thought: 'Hell, Ulf, knock it off; you have no idea what the situation is like seventy kilometres away; you don't know what the mood of the soldiers is like'. So I told the company commander, 'Ok, you decide, you make the decision'. He got out of Vares and it was totally the right action.

"*Hell, Ulf, knock it off; you have no idea what the situation is like seventy kilometres away; you don't know what the mood of the soldiers is like.*"

What happened then?

The company got out of Vares but we set up a new OP (observation post) around the town. We are now getting onto something that I realize is crucial for the officer profession, and that is being able to assess terrain. What does the terrain look like? At this point in time, I had practised in the field for more than thirty years – I always look at the terrain and I'm good at memorizing it. Being able to assess the terrain is a skill I'm afraid we are currently losing within the officer profession.

Why do you think we are losing this?

We don't exercise. We don't go out with a map in our hands and make a field assessment. You must have got stuck; you must have tried it yourself. I have

learned a lot here at home from working in the forest and driving a tractor. Then you learn where you can get through and where you can't. I've also had the privilege of exercising as a unit commander at all levels and I've been able to experience what's possible and what's not. Before we went to Bosnia, I had been involved in developing combat vehicle 90 and I can say that with that we had tested everything regarding accessibility. If there was one thing I could really do, I knew 'where I could get through'. This enabled me to have a really good basis to work from when I was down there. I knew where we could drive with armoured tracked vehicles and where we could drive with an SISU. If you know this, it can be easier to make decisions and make demands on the commanders.

Well, the company got out of Vares and then I felt that I couldn't remain here in the camp. I had to go to Vares myself; it's a crisis. As commander, you must be prepared to take the same risks as the soldiers. After all, going down to Vares in the middle of the night wasn't without danger, but I had been there enough times, so I assessed that it was worth taking the risk. And it wasn't possible to take the armoured tracked vehicle, so we took my Toyota and a team of military police.

'I had to go to Vares myself; it's a crisis. As commander, you must be prepared to take the same risks as the soldiers.

Because it would go fast?

Yes. The armoured tracked vehicle would have to come afterwards. Before setting off, I had given my company commander a very clear order. He was to tell commander Rajic that, from now on, we would be only firing live rounds. We would no longer be firing warning shots.

Why did you do that?

This was to bring matters to a head. I had been advised by my British colleague to return fire as quickly as possible. I now felt that this was enough; they have fired on us; now we are going to return fire. . . .

So when I met Ivica Rajic later, I repeated this, 'Now we are going to fire live rounds; we will no longer be firing warning shots'. I also said that our armoured track vehicles would flatten his vehicles that had tried to mow down my troops in town. The vehicles in question were a blue Audi, a yellow Opel, and a white Golf. 'If we see them, we'll flatten them straight away'. 'You can't do that', he said. 'You don't have a mandate for that'. 'Of course we do', I said. 'You don't have any mandate, but I do – international law'. The order was given to the company; it was already clear that this is how we would do things. I had a few butterflies in my stomach, but the order was given. But then I saw that Ivica Rajic was scared. He was more scared than I was.

How come you dared to give such an order?

We had had a brigade exercise here in Sweden in May the previous year. Two

officers had fallen out and had started to yell at each other in front of the troops. That wasn't a good thing. The staff doctor had observed this and he came to me and said, 'Tell those idiots to take their sunglasses off'. I asked him why. The doctor, who used to work on call at a psychiatric clinic, then said that if the police came to him with a junkie and he made eye contact with the junkie within thirty seconds, the police were no longer needed. If he didn't establish eye contact, the police would have to take the junkie out again because it would be no point. The doctor explained that we have six nerve pathways that exit the back of the brain. One of these is visible: the eye nerve; the eyes, body language. That's what I saw in Ivica Rajic. The bloody idiot was scared. I was 99 per cent certain that this would work, and this was a result of my experiences from that brigade exercise. This meant that we didn't have to fire a single round. We didn't have to flatten them.

We had decided that we were now going to go into Stupni Do regardless of whether or not we had permission. We gave them an ultimatum: 'We're going in at 13.00'. As usual, they tried to bullshit us; they didn't want to let us in and there was a lot of toing and froing. They had a new excuse when it was 13.00. By then, I had issued an order that we would go in regardless of whether or not we had permission. So I went with the one Swedish platoon towards Stupni Do.

Why was that? Was it your job?

Yes. It was my job. To get in, they would have to pass roadblocks at which they would be stopped. And I felt that it was my job – not the job of a platoon commander – to start the war in the Balkans by removing their mines. As usual, they stopped us by using mines again. And then it was really lucky that I was there since it wasn't the job of a lieutenant to decide how we would deal with them. After some discussion, the soldiers at the roadblock said that only I would be allowed to go into Stupni Do, but not the platoon. I had threatened them that if they did not move the mines, we would blow them up with the gun. This was quite possible. I then issued an order to the platoon commander, 'When my SISU leaves, follow close behind me. Keep the vehicles close together; no distance at all between them. It doesn't matter if you run into each other, but it shouldn't be possible to get a single mine between the vehicles'. We drove straight through. That's how we got into Stupni Do.

Is this almost twenty-four hours after you'd received information about something happening in the village?

No, two days had passed by now. So we got there and found all this wretchedness. We found nineteen corpses and the final count came to forty dead. I handed over command of surveillance to the platoon commander and drive on to the other side of the village. That's where I meet up with Janne Almgård's

platoon, standing at a roadblock and being prevented from entering. That's where the incident took place that Jan Almgård has written about "Mine games" in the book *Mission Abroad – Military experience from international operations*. The roadblock made me hopping mad. We were already inside Stupni Do; we'd already seen what had happened, and they still wouldn't let Almgård's platoon enter.

In the aforementioned book, Jan Almgård describes his surprise at how you acted.

Yes, but my circumstances were different. I had already managed to get through several of their roadblocks. I had already moved mines. And I had learned that the soldiers at the roadblocks were command driven and their threats were empty. They did what they had been ordered to do but they didn't think for themselves. They weren't prepared to die for this cause.

Now you're into something that's difficult to explain here in Sweden. Down there, I won't get anywhere if I'm not prepared to do it. I was prepared to fire and we would have done it if we'd had to. But we didn't have to. If I'm prepared enough to do it, then I won't have to do it. It doesn't become reality until I squeeze the trigger. So I had to push it pretty far.

"*It doesn't become reality until I squeeze the trigger. So I had to push it pretty far.*"

Earlier you talked about tall tales that you found useful down there but not here in Sweden.

Here in Sweden, it's been difficult to get people to understand how I made the assessment there right when it happened. The tall tale was that I had put a pistol to the head of a Serb. However, what I had done was to explain to a young, frightened Croat that 'don't do anything, lad. Just stay where you are and nothing will happen when I remove the mines'. But it's clear that if people at home only hear that I put a pistol to the head of a Serb, then nothing about the context will be revealed. I had learned the Balkan way; that it was good to be livid. You got your way if you were really nasty. . . .

Another episode from the same morning was when they didn't want to let us enter when we were going to meet Ivica Rajic. We were standing outside the headquarters of the Bobovac Brigade at a checkpoint. There I was with an armoured vehicle, my interpreter, my driver, my bodyguard, and one or two military police. I told them that I knew that he was there. And that if he didn't want us to enter, then he could come out and meet us instead, if he dared. Then the checkpoint guards became upset. The headquarters of the Bobovac Brigade was a sports hotel with sundecks, and onto one of the decks, four or five thugs with cartridge belts and Kalashnikovs appear making bolt movements. That's when I realized that this was no fun. I actually loosened up my holster. 'I'm not going to die willingly if they open fire'. And while we were standing there discussing matters with the sentry, and there was a very tense atmosphere, I hear a familiar

metallic sound behind me. It was the gunner on the heavy machine gun loading. It's a distinct sound. Then the thugs disappeared from the balcony with their Kalashnikovs and we were told that the interpreter and I would be allowed in but that the interpreter wouldn't be allowed to carry his weapon. I said that I couldn't accept this. 'You have weapons; then we will have weapons'. 'No', they said. 'That's not possible'. 'To hell with this', I said. 'Let's go into Stupni Do anyway'. 'OK', they said. 'You can come in anyway'. So we entered but when we came into the building, they still wanted to take Ruzdi's automatic carbine. But then we just went straight in; I was really fuming then. And then what ensued was that bit about us firing live rounds. It felt right to do things this way. We would never have got anywhere if I had used the usual Swedish politeness.

Where did you get this approach from? Or were you just infuriated?

It's probably my disposition. It's about having courage.

Have you trained this here in Sweden? Have you been in similar situations and learned that it works?

I've had the opportunity to do things and I have chosen solutions that have produced results. I've learned that if you have an adversary, then the best way of doing this is to surprise him. You should be thinking, 'What does he think I won't do'.

Was this an idea you had got from exercises in Sweden?

Yes. Do what an adversary doesn't think you will do. Charles XII at Narva or Hannibal when he crossed the Alps spring to mind. You must accept the challenge. For example, when we were testing the new combat vehicles, we took them out and tested them in the terrain and found the faults. And the fault was because we hadn't fully tested them earlier. No one had taken that challenge.

All the people I've interviewed about their experience of serving overseas return to how important exercises are for successfully carrying out missions. And then you all say that you've had the good fortune or privilege of being able to do a lot of exercises. For me, an outsider, it's obvious that you have to train in order to successfully complete such missions as these – is this not the case in the armed forces?

There is an expressed willingness to train. And we do train, but I think that there are flaws in the implementation. There are too many who have become planning generals. I think that Karl Ydén is right in his dissertation. You shouldn't end up in higher positions if you don't have professional military experience as a commander. If you don't have that experience, you won't

understand what you are leading the production of and are planning. I have also greatly benefited from knowing the finance system. . . .

When you accepted the mission to go to Bosnia, what kind of preparations had you had yourself?

Bear in mind that the Nordic Battle Group has three years of preparations. I was commissioned on 20 April and we were ready to go down there in the middle of July. We actually went down there at the end of August. I was a brigade commander when I was commissioned to go to Bosnia. For me, it was only natural to go there; it was a challenge I was looking forward to. I received my order from the supreme commander [of the Swedish Armed Forces] to start working, to recruit people even before we had received an order from the government. We got a move-on and the supreme commander said, 'If you have any problems, call us immediately'. We made things easy; we took what was in the mobilization depots. We called the soldiers with war postings; the company commanders called theirs, the platoon commanders called theirs, and we managed to get together 30 per cent of the troops. The rest we recruited in the usual way. I had worked with materials handling for four years; I knew exactly what kinds of things we had and where they could be found. I had been involved in the preliminary training of a force that should have gone to Namibia but was never allowed to go. I knew about the material flows and dared to delegate to my quartermaster. He had to fix that; I had other things to do. And we also drew up a tactical, organizational, and economic objective. What's the size of the area? Nobody knew. I called Jan-Gunnar Isberg, who was in Macedonia; he would have to provide map data. And then we calculated it. . . .

What did you know about the Balkans when you were commissioned?

Not a damn thing. I had a general knowledge of Yugoslavia. We had been there on a study visit when I completed the staff course. And we had undergone training in Sweden, but what they said was incorrect. In my opinion, what the Balkan experts here in Sweden said about what was happening down there was wrong. There was no ethnic or religious war going on down there; it was a war conducted by thugs. And there is a great difference if you are going down there believing you are going to serve in a peoples' war or if you encounter a few thugs. Apart from the thugs down there, I only met people who wanted peace and quiet. What do we need to learn? I needed to learn their mentality; what kind of things are appreciated. I needed to know what worked. You can't come there as a consensus-seeking Swede. . . .

Down there it was important that you kept your word. If I said I would do something, I did it. If I said there was something I wouldn't do, I didn't do it. It

was important to make people respect you down there. For example, on a number of occasions, I banged the table with my helmet and said, 'To hell with this, I'm leaving', and that's what I did. And that's when they became cooperative. . . .

Self-confidence grows if you know you can do something well. This is very useful. You can be humble, but you can't destroy yourself. . . .

If we return to Stupni Do, what happens afterwards?

The other part of the company is in Vares and is going into the schools. They find the imprisoned Bosnian men. We found and took care of thirty, forty refugees who had fled to the forest from Stupni Do. We picked them up under fairly dramatic circumstances. The result of this was that commander Ivica Rajic and his gang scarpered. Our operation resulted in Vares not being destroyed. But all the Croats fled from there.

What happened to the Bosnians whom you found in the schools?

They came out. Then the Muslim forces came and took over the town. You may think that we should have prevented ethnic cleansing, but, in my opinion, there were far too few of us to be able to do that. And we hadn't received that information at that time. It's difficult to say. But if you compare it with Srebrenica, at least we did save several hundreds of lives, without doubt. And we created liveable conditions. However, more than anything, we made people respect us, which affected the entire Swedish operation in the Balkans.

In Johanne Hildebrandt's book Blackout, she writes that you were called the shoot-back battalion?

You are expected to do that down there. You have to find out what the culture expects of you. In Sri Lanka, you can't go up to a woman in the rural districts and take her by the hand. You have to learn to greet people in accordance with the codes of that country. If you greet someone like this (demonstrates), they are really happy and it works a treat. I have sat with the Tamil Tigers under a mango tree and have had several extremely good discussions – you don't have to know everything about their culture – but you must respect it. Then you can build trust in you as a person. They must know that they can trust you. . .

"*You don't have to know everything about their culture – but you must respect it.*"

How does someone learn what you're talking about now?

It's common sense. Either you have it or you don't.

I don't believe that. If you were to only recruit based on the common-sense criterion, you would never be able to assemble an entire brigade.

You must have commanders who have common sense. The commanders are the most important.

So soldiers don't need common sense?

What I mean is that common sense is contagious. It's important to have good commanders. In Sweden, we sometimes say that good commanders aren't so important. I say, of course they are. Some organizations can get by with bad commanders because the organization has an inherent self-preservation instinct. However, you can never expect any boost from such an organization. The commander is the difference between being hugely successful or not.

What made the strongest impression on you in this course of events (Vares and Stupni Do) that you have described?

It's difficult to say. It's the whole thing.

Is it a rapid course of events? You don't write anything in your war diary during these days?

Yes, it was an intense sequence of events. But I made sure I could get some sleep. I think that this is an important part of military professionalism – keeping yourself fit and rested. When I worked at the Eastern Joint Command Headquarters in the 1980s, I was the exercise leader for the senior staff officers. That's when I saw how many senior commanders, when they actually took the time to take part in the exercise, wanted to take part all the time. Working five days in a row without sleep makes you doolally. When I have taken part in exercises here in Sweden, my goal has been that after I completed a one-week exercise, I had to be able to go for another month. You must rest. I had this mindset when I went down to Bosnia, that I wouldn't be exhausted and doolally. And you must be in good shape. I found this extremely useful. Because then I knew that when I was tired, the others would be even more tired. . . .

"*That's when I saw how many senior commanders, when they actually took the time to take part in the exercise, wanted to take part all the time. Working five days in a row without sleep makes you doolally.*"

It's questionable whether I should have been the first person to enter Vares. 'Yes', I say. I should have been. I shouldn't be in command of every soldier who is there, but I should be visible to them. I should be there picking up the vibes. Being a good role model is crucial.

Where did you get your idea about being a role model from?

From my training. I had the privilege of entering the system during the 1960s, during the Vietnam War. I received Stockholm conscripts at the end of the 1960s, at the start of the 1970s, in Enköping at the Göta Life Guards. It was a hard school.

In what way?

There was anarchy. You met members of the NLF (National Liberation Front) and all kinds of people there. You couldn't just order them to stand at attention. You had to stand by what you said. If you said we begin at 07.30, then we begin

at 07.30 and not 07.35. It was important to have the courage to take matters to an extreme. That was when I knew I was not going to be loved. What the hell would I do then? Yes, I would be respected. That time was a tough school. Furthermore, in the 1960s and the 1970s, the officer profession was a calling. I think that is important. There were obvious problems with discipline in the 1960s and 1970s, and that's when they removed the 'forward march' command and introduced the 'follow me' command according to an Israeli model. It was spot on.

In one of the defence magazines, I read a quote by General Franks, who led the US invasion of Iraq. He said, 'I can't think of a single occasion where a commander ever has managed people up a hill under fire'. He means it's not about management, but leadership. . . .

I recall all that talk about the vehicles in Afghanistan. There they drive Toyotas because it is cheap and that's what we can afford. But that's not a good thing. I drove a Toyota in Sri Lanka on roads with bombs and other horrible things, so I know what it is like to drive a Toyota. Instead, if you have a proper tracked vehicle, you can drive around anything that's dangerous; you can both advance and get away if things become dangerous. The simple fact that the armoured tracked vehicles can rotate their own axles and can turn in a narrow street instead of having to reverse for half a kilometre can be a deciding factor. But some generals at the [Swedish] Armed Forces Headquarters don't understand this. This is because they have never sat in the driver's seat and needed to turn round on a narrow mountain road. You must have trained to understand this. If you have trained, you wouldn't say that it'll be OK with Toyotas in Afghanistan. A Toyota gets stuck in the sand, it tips over and flips over and if you add one and a half metric tons of armour to it, it immediately becomes a bad vehicle. . . .

‘It must be second nature’

Interview with Mats Ström

The interview with Mats Ström was conducted on 3 December 2008 by Lotta Victor Tillberg.

I’m interested in professional military skills displayed by officers in high-level positions during their overseas deployment. Is there an event you have been involved in where you have felt that your professional skills have been tested to the extreme?

That’s a difficult question. I feel that the positions I have held have validated my training. The biggest upheaval was probably my first mission in Bosnia. What I experienced there changed me both as a person and a professional.

What do you mean then?

I mean the situation that we lived and worked in during the peacekeeping operation of Nordbat 2 (a Nordic battalion) in 1995 in Bosnia.

What happened?

When we came down there, the war started again after a ceasefire period. For eight months, we were under constant fire. When you were down there, the firing and everything that happened there became routine after a while, but when I look back on it, I realize how intensive it was all the time. I had two important things confirmed for me when I was down there. The first thing was that the education and training I had acquired, starting in 1974, were right. The second insight I obtained was that I cut the mustard; that I could cope with the pressure. We were under great pressure, both the staff and the battalion. However,

this gave me an experience of life, so that most incidents in subsequent missions have actually been predictable.

What was your assignment?

I was deputy chief of staff.

Can you describe what a working day might be like?

A normal working day began at 07.00; that's when you were up checking things in the Tactical Operations Centre (TOC) to see if anything had happened during the night. After breakfast, there was the morning briefing and then the daily routines began. This could be anything from holding a press conference, carrying out a special operation, or managing daily routines. The tasks also had a lot to do with dealing with everything that was event driven. If anything happened during the night, which it often did, then we were even up in the night. What almost broke our spirit in the staff was when the warring sides restarted the war, because that meant that it was impossible to maintain anything like a normal Swedish schedule, with half of Saturday and all of Sunday as days of rest. The Bosnian Serbs attacked the Bosnian Muslims on their day of rest, which was Thursday, and the Muslims attacked the Serbs on Sundays. We never had any time to recover. The first three months down there gave us very little time for rest, with constant event-driven tasks, such as bombardments, disrupted convoys, and soldiers (not Swedes) who were killed, and then there was Srebrenica in July.

When you say event driven, do you mean that you reacted instead of being proactive, that you devoted most of your time responding to calls to deal with emergency situations?

Since our UN mandate was a weak one – it was a Chapter VI mandate – it was difficult to be proactive.

Since our UN mandate was a weak one – it was a Chapter VI mandate – it was difficult to be proactive. Our tasks involved monitoring and reporting, protecting specific transports, and the like. As a last resort, we were allowed to protect ourselves. This summer, doubts were being raised about UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force). For example, we were preparing a withdrawal together with the British units. Towards the autumn, we received more-robust rules of engagement. Then there was NATO's air campaign, where we were involved in determining targets. This was an intensive period and during which there was a risk of being fired upon. We came under artillery fire not only when we were moving about outside the camp, but also in and around the camp.

Were bombardments something you learned to live with?

Yes, you could say that. I noticed that when I came home, it took time to wind down. It took me two and a half years before I could stop thinking about

Bosnia. Actually, I only stopped thinking about it when I was back in Bosnia on a fact-finding tour.

When you were down there in 1994, were there tasks that were easier than others? Can you describe anything that was problematic?

The everyday things we had to do, namely established procedures, were no problem. The biggest problem had to do with internal staff relationships. Getting the commanders to work together, battalion commander vis-à-vis deputy battalion commander; my chief of staff and I, we were like chalk and cheese. The staff consisted of about sixty people, from career officers, reserve officers, trained civilians, women and men, Swedes and Danes.

When you say that relationships were a problem, do you mean cultural differences between Swedes and Danes or something else?

It was everything. Women and men, Danes and Swedes, people who just don't get on with each other. Furthermore, when you are under the kind of pressure we were, the atmosphere becomes very tense. It was everything from fits of rage, weeping, 'the gnashing of teeth', everything. I've learned that there is a pattern that essentially all groups follow in these kinds of situations (draws). You're a happy bunch and sympathetic to each other when you first arrive down there. Then the control phase starts; people then began monitoring each other and their own territory. I've learned that these kinds of things usually level off towards the end of the mission and end up at an acceptable level.

What you're describing now sounds like problems with group dynamics? Did this have anything to do with what was going on in the outside world?

No, not really. This was more about classic staff problems requiring internal leadership in order for the machine to be well oiled. . . .

Being a deputy commander in real-life operations is hell. For if staff cooperation and briefing do not work as they should, the deputy commander then becomes a buffer between the commander and the organization under the commander. You have an informal role and you have to cope with the subordinates questioning whether 'this is really the right thing to do?' You may end up having to support your commander while at the same time you may not really agree with his decisions. It becomes a balancing act not to bring him down completely. . . .

These kinds of relationship problems that we have now talked about: can you keep them within the staff or are they even noticed outside the staff?

For the most part, you can keep them within the staff. There's a formal chain of command that applies, namely the commander makes the decisions. But if

the company commanders know people in the staff, this is not possible to conceal. And, consequently, situations can arise where company commanders try to secure things that are in their own interest. If there are staff problems, this can, of course, also create mistrust in the companies regarding how things actually work. In addition, the physical distance between the companies and the staff can create misunderstanding. Because of the distance to the highest decision-making body, the companies make their own decisions and do their own thing. Sometimes this is good and sometimes it's bad, and it's also a matter of trust. I have concluded that it's mentally arduous to work under pressure, but it doesn't have to be the external threat that is mentally arduous. What is arduous is the incessantness, everything that is going on around you. If you have a normal job, you can go home after work, but here, you're living under the same roof twenty-four hours a day. It drains you. . . .

Earlier you said that during your first mission you learned that you had the right training. What part of your training/experience did you benefit from?

I had good knowledge of the system and the right experience. By system, I mean I personally had been at that time squad commander, platoon commander, company commander, and battalion commander; that I had been a staff officer at the [Swedish] Armed Forces Headquarters and attended the military academies. From the Armed Forces Headquarters, I had the context; I understood our part in the bigger picture. What we did down there was support the company commanders when anything happened. 'What do we do now', increased preparedness, and so on. The tactical decisions were based on the wealth of experience I brought. All the exercises I have taken part in since 1974 were of significance. And that we were trained in the same system, the armoured structure. The amount of training meant that we had a tool. The routines worked when faced with danger.

> *"There was firing around battalion headquarters all the time, both day and night. You could hear detonations around the clock."*

Can you give me an example of when the routines 'worked'?

We had an incident with an OP (observation post) that had come under Serbian artillery fire and had been forced to pull out. This took place approximately seventy kilometres from Tuzla, near to the line of confrontation. The next day we drove up to do a recce of the site. We were going to reoccupy and reinforce the position. We shield the armoured cross-country vehicle on the slope and walk up to see what has happened. We are six or seven Swedes and Danes. When we had been there for about fifty minutes and done a recce, we assembled near the vehicle. Since we estimated the Serbs' decision cycle to be about an hour, it was time for us to retreat before we would come under fire. The company commanders were just about to leave and give the platoon commanders

their final order. They leave and I'm left standing by the vehicle. Suddenly, I see the Swedish company commander and his platoon commander come running over the crest of the hill. It's just like in an American western – a few come riding over the horizon. Then I hear the company commander shout, 'Incoming!' This means that he has heard that they are firing their artillery and we have about thirty seconds to take shelter. I throw myself into the vehicle, making sure I open the doors so that the others can dive in too. It was as if time stood still before they also arrived and threw themselves in. I just waited for the bang. Everything went very fast but I was still able to think, 'Why the hell is there no explosion?' On my way down to the rear protective cover, my pulse was racing and I had such a feeling of euphoria. The adrenaline was pumping; I had a strange feeling of happiness.

"Everything went very fast but I was still able to think, 'Why the hell is there no explosion?'"

Fear?

No, I don't think so. It was some form of focusing. All my senses were on tenterhooks. Later that evening, we reoccupied the OP. A few days later, I asked the company commander what actually happened with that incoming. He told me that they had found a 15.5 cm shell approximately fifty metres from where the vehicle had been parked. But it had not exploded.

When this took place, had you ever before experienced direct bombardment?

There was firing around battalion headquarters all the time, both day and night. You could hear detonations around the clock. Detonations and the sound of explosions were not uncommon. However, the feeling at headquarters was that they weren't firing at us but at each other. Here, at the OP, they were firing directly at us and that left with a different feeling, one of vulnerability.

The euphoria you describe, what do you think that represented? You were happy to survive?

Well, I had read about focusing on excitement. I don't think it was happiness at having survived. Many people who have been fired upon describe that they experience elatedness. I think it's about mobilizing oneself to do something. In our case, the only thing we could do was to retreat.

Did it have any significance that you already knew the company commander?

No, it had nothing to do with that. People probably act like this in such situations. My field of vision was very focused. Anything at the periphery of my field of vision was very blurry. . . .

On another occasion, a conscript officer and I were out doing physical training outside the camp. When we came past a residential area, they started shooting at us with Kalashnikovs. The fact that they were shooting in this area was

by no means unusual. But their shooting directly at us was something new. I clearly heard the bullets as they flew past. I called out to the conscript to 'take cover', but he didn't react. He didn't assess the situation as I did. In the end, I had to pull him down into cover. And then we had to sneak out of there behind a hedge. I reacted to what I heard based on how I was trained. I recognized the firing of live rounds from close range. 'Tzing', that's a distinct sound. My training paid off. However, this conscript officer wasn't trained in the same way; he didn't understand how exposed he was. In retrospect, I haven't given all that much thought to this situation. But I know that afterwards, this guy thought a lot about his wrong actions. Education, training, and drills are good things – in situations like this, it must be second nature.

What do you mean by drill?

That you recognize sounds, for example. It doesn't only have to come from exercises in Sweden. As there was a lot of shooting around the camp, I learned to recognize the sound of their different weapons; when it was dangerous and when it wasn't. Often they fired their weapons in the air as we drove by. Or they fired directly into the barrier wall around the camp. You learned to distinguish if the firing was close or at a distance. You learned to hear the difference between Kalashnikovs and other weapons they used down there. That bullet that whistled past too close, I recognized that from live-firing training here in Sweden; I've been subjected to that before. Close is dangerous; I know that.

For me, proven experience is having been exposed to a lot of different situations. None of this can be found in books. And when a new situation arises that you have not previously experienced, you're able to act because you recognize situations you've been involved in before. Even if the whole picture isn't clear, you will still be able to make a qualified assessment and act based on different recognizable factors. You will be too late if you wait to act until you've got all the facts.

"*Even if the whole picture isn't clear, you will still be able to make a qualified assessment and act based on different recognizable factors. You will be too late if you wait to act until you've got all the facts.*"

I'm wondering now about Caglavica. There were signs that something was wrong, but nobody acted until riots had already taken place. Were you involved in Caglavica?

I came in at a later stage. In the case of Caglavica, neither NATO nor the EU wanted to see what was happening. There were signs, but nobody took them seriously. They had decided that the process of withdrawing from Kosovo was a step in the right direction. They didn't want to know anything else. I was involved in the inquiries into what happened afterwards. I found out that prior to the riots when the UN's local civilian organizations sent reports to UN headquarters in New York about what was about to happen, the reports came back to Pristina amended because they had to be politically correct. They did not

carefully note the different incidents, and, consequently, they were deluded into thinking that everything was quiet and peaceful. . . .

My basic philosophy is to act. Act immediately if situation one happens first, and is then followed by situation two. I usually give this example. The enemy makes an airdrop behind our lines. Send the fastest unit, open artillery fire on the area, make sure you get additional resources, etc. You go from fending off to taking action.

But how does this kind of proactive philosophy work in the political game, for example what we talked about with regard to Caglavica, if there are limitations in your mandate and rules of engagement that do not allow you to be proactive?

What you have to do then is to protect your own troops. This is what we did in Bosnia when we had a weak mandate. As soon as anything happened, if the units were fired upon or the like, send reinforcements and show your flag; make sure to deploy medical resources, etc. Stress that we are here; we see you. But it's extremely frustrating not being able to act. Things were completely different when we came to Kosovo; then both the police and the military could act. It's important that the people in the units know they can do something important, that they can be effective, act and influence the situation. Then it'll be easier for them to take their stress and frustration out on the external threat. When you can't cope with the external threat, you channel your stress and your frustration inwards and totally different demands are made on the inner leadership.

Is the task of the commander different?

It becomes much more difficult. It's easier to be a commander when you can influence the external circumstances and achieve your objectives. It is of huge importance to both the troops and the staff that they feel that they can do some good.

What does this mean for the staff? Is it important for them to be able to 'check off' that they have met their objectives?

Of course. The staff have an operational plan with lines of operations specifying what is to be done. If you are constantly facing external resistance that prevents you from accomplishing your objectives, then the organization functions just like an ice hockey team. The personnel become uncertain of themselves and lose confidence. They are unsure of how to act and then they start picking on each other and, in the end, they start picking on the leader.

What should a commander do then?

You must manage the team. You must get them to face the external threats. These are general processes. They are always ongoing. It is important not to

have them become inward looking. Which they do, for example, when the units don't have anything to do. That's when devilry starts. We Swedes want to be effective and if we don't have anything to do, we start to find things that we feel should be improved or done differently. That's when you start focusing on your own welfare and unnecessary chatter starts. As commander, you have to spot this in plenty of time.

As commander, what do you do, then? Do you exaggerate the external threats or something else?

You have to find something for them to do. When we were in Kosovo the first time, we had these kinds of problems; above all, this was true of the medical chain. At that time, we had doctors and nurses and six or seven field ambulances that didn't have anything to do. They had to drive around the area looking for potential patients, providing humanitarian help, doing what they were good at. Then the next problem arises – they came up with lots of things they want to do – then you have to be able to restrain them. The important thing is that people don't go around waiting for things to do but are doing something they feel is meaningful. You have to keep them updated until you can use them to carry out tasks for which they are intended.

Is it a part of military professionalism to be able to keep people occupied so that they don't start stirring up trouble?

Yes. If you see that they don't have anything to do, then send them off on a mission.

Is this something you have learned here in Sweden?

No, I've learned this on the ground. These situations where you're waiting for things to happen don't occur here in Sweden in the same way. National service involves lots of training and when the soldiers have completed this, they are demobbed. And when they came for a refresher exercise, we had a plan for how this would be carried out; then they went home. After having served overseas, probably one of the biggest lessons I've learned is how to handle the inner leadership.

Is this a consequence of Sweden not having that much experience of having units deployed on longer missions? I mean if you compare with the UK or the USA?

No. As for the medics, they were civilians who accompanied the units because they wanted to make a contribution. If anything, they were too motivated. As for international professional units, they are accustomed to handling the wait; instead, they can be sluggish when it's time to get them going again.

At the Mission Abroad conference, you talked about experiences from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

I arrived at EU OHQ (Operational Headquarters) in Potsdam with seventy-two hours' notice as my predecessor had suddenly resigned. What was new for me there was working in a German-led staff; we had a German general who was commander and a German colonel who was chief of staff. In the department I was to take over and which was being set up, I had a German deputy, an older colonel. I quickly realized that he was some kind of backup, someone who would keep an eye on the work in the department. They placed a German deputy in many departments that didn't have German commanders. In my case, he went to the chief of staff after a fortnight and said that he didn't feel he was needed in my J-3 department.

What did the mission involve?

During the ongoing mission in the *DRC*, we were to develop the command and control function. We would also plan; leading the deployment of and operations by the approximately 3,000-strong European forces. Gradually, the J-3 department was manned with personnel from twelve different nations who were under my command. There I was faced with the problem of how to build confidence when you are not from NATO but from quite a small nation.

"*There I was faced with the problem of how to build confidence when you are not from NATO but from quite a small nation.*"

How do you do that?

When I got there, I saw that they hadn't made much progress in their work. They hadn't established any joint operation cell; I saw that no methods were in place.

Were there methods of working that you knew about?

Yes. I had worked for three years at Armed Forces Headquarters with similar assignments. I am trained in NATO's command and control system, so I knew what had to be done. My German deputy saw that I knew what I was doing.

So you didn't have any Swedish methods for control and command?

No, no, that wouldn't have been possible. The German deputy recognized what I was doing; I used NATO's control and command system for command execution. He saw that things were beginning to happen and then he was satisfied.

Had you recruited your group yourself?

No. The positions are distributed between the EU member states. So, gradually, Italians, a Pole, a Spaniard, a few Irishmen, and others reported to the group. It took a little time for me to understand how I would manage the

working group; initially, I was thinking in Swedish terms. I was thinking here's a lieutenant-colonel, 'then you can do this today and something else tomorrow'. That didn't work. This may be due to both language and culture. I learned that things work like this in Europe (draws pieces of a pie). 'I have my job. Then I'll do it. Someone else will do his job'. The dividing lines between whose job is whose are important. In comparison, we Swedes are much more flexible; we can flit between different jobs. Here, it wasn't possible to use the Swedish way of lining up in the morning and saying, 'now we are going to concentrate our efforts in that direction'.

How do you deal with this? Can you give an example?

For instance, a daily order was sent between Brussels and the *DRC* that went via the staff in Potsdam. On one occasion, an order went through that was not OK; it was incorrectly structured. The English was not correct and the content was wrong. I suppose I should have checked it better, but I admit that I didn't do this. The German commander discovered this and called attention to it. I took my deputy with me and we went down and rewrote the order. When we did this, it was as if a shiver went through the entire department. The commander is correcting an order. My fellow officers were ashamed; they came and apologized and afterwards they started to work properly. On other occasions, I asked them if they needed help and offered them my assistance. My fellow officers refused this since they felt it was embarrassing to be helped; consequently, they solved the problem themselves. This was a good way of getting your own house in order. This is my type of leadership; if things aren't working, then I'll come down and help you fix it. They weren't accustomed to this in Germany.

It sounds like a humble way of working as a commander?

I can give another example. The EU forces in Kananga were going to test the concept. The commander ordered me to go down and monitor the operation in Kananga. He told me that I could go since I had *Fingerspitzengefühl* (an instinctive feeling). I wasn't welcome down there; I was regarded as the German commander's spy and was met with great suspicion. I took a French major with me who was very good and who, as it turned out, had a very good reputation within the system. And I also had a German female doctor with me who was to check the medical side. When I get there, I am met by the French general, who talks to me in French because he knows I don't speak French. I am treated as if I do not exist. When I met the chief of staff, he explained that I was not welcome. I replied that I was carrying out a given order and I had a task I intended to complete. I said that I was going to submit a report to Potsdam and that he would be able to read this before I went home. Then we went down to Kananga and I carried out the inspection as I usually do. I went on missions with the

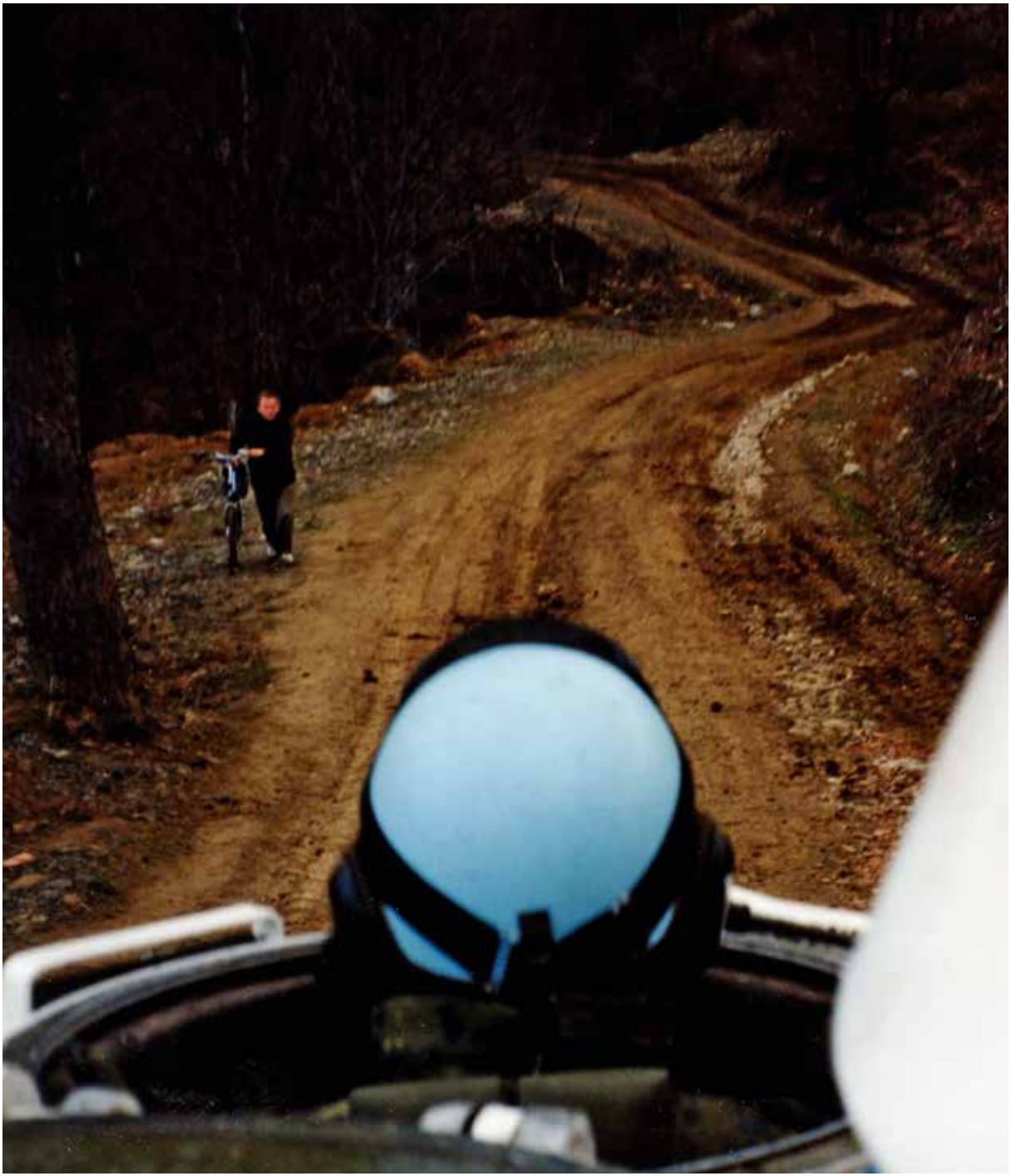
different units. I accompanied the non-commissioned officers and their groups on patrols, the logisticians on their missions, etc. I lined up with them in the mornings. I didn't take up any space. When I felt that it was time to go home after three to four days, the commander on the ground wanted me to stay until the exercise was over. When I asked why they wanted me to stay, they said they wanted the report to be a good one. So I stayed there until the exercise was completed. When we returned to Kinshasa, I was invited to lunch by the general. It was a pleasant event and he now suddenly started speaking to me in English.

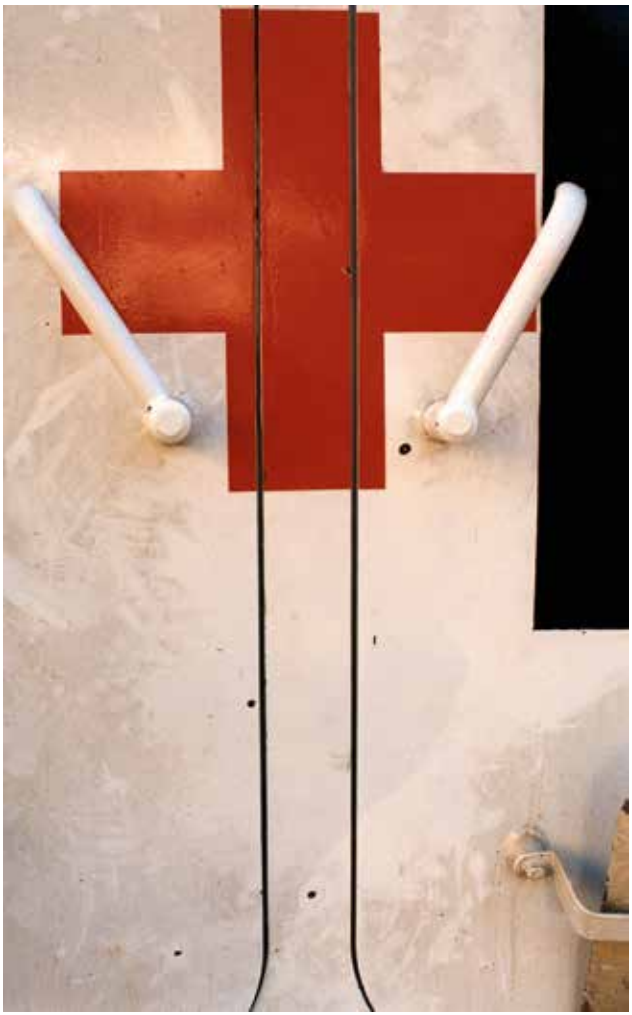
What did you do to become accepted?

I think it was because I worked humbly. I didn't come there and set myself up as the envoy of the general in Potsdam. I operated on internal lines; showed I was a soldier; I was out with the troops. Then they realized that I was experienced. I could ask questions that were credible to them. They had expected that I would come as if from the court of Louis XIV, because that's the way so many of their commanders act. . . .

If you want to do things, you have to go down into the organization and tinker. In these countries, you are a soldier and an officer, just as in Sweden, and if they can tell you are a soldier, then you are one of them. That's when you gain their confidence.

Bosnia



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‘Things never turn out as expected’

Interview with Hans Ilis-Alm

The interview with Hans Ilis-Alm was conducted on 22 October 2010 by Lotta Victor Tillberg.

Can you tell me about any incident in which you feel you have been tested in your professional role?

There are quite a few incidents in which I have been tested, but in different ways. As you become more experienced, you are more prepared and it was certainly more difficult to find my bearings the first times I was deployed overseas. I basically felt that I had good professional skills; however, the context and the environment were completely new as we started to operate outside Europe. Being a product of the Swedish national service system, I had throughout my initial ten years of service mainly focused on homeland defence. During that period, it was difficult to imagine that I would end up in Afghanistan and in several places in Africa and other remote places. Instead, I envisaged operations in northern Finland or something similar. As I now am asked to reflect on my experiences, there have been many situations during which I have learned a lot of lessons that, in hindsight, I have added to my list of how I would subsequently act. If I were to summarize my most important lesson learned from my operational experiences, it is that things never turn out as expected. You can do as much planning as you want to, and you must certainly do this, but reality seldom turns out as you expected. You must be aware of this. It’s important to have confidence in your preparations, but you should also know that you will have to rethink things as situations evolve. You’ll be working with live material where conditions are constantly changing. In particular, this applies to rapid response operations, where there seldom is sufficient time for reconnaissance

and coordination between all actors. As the Chief of the Swedish Special Forces Command, I have also been responsible for the national planning and coordination of our special operations. In that role, I have been involved in many operations where I personally have not been part of the deployed force, but I have still been responsible for operational-level planning and execution. Also from that perspective, the same thing is constantly being repeated; you think you know everything and are on top of everything, but things seldom turn out as expected.

Can you give an example of an incident where you have had an idea that subsequently did not correspond to the situation that you ended up in?

I can tell you about two incidents. The first was in Afghanistan, where I arrived early as part of the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) advance team, already at the turn of 2002. Our special forces were the first Swedish troops that were deployed to Afghanistan. I went there with a team from the prospective MN ISAF force, where I would command the Swedish contingent primarily consisting of my unit. The advance team's primary task was to conduct a recce, define where the force would establish its camp and other very basic things. After some time in the area, I returned to Sweden to conduct the final planning and preparations. When I returned to Afghanistan a week later with my advance party, conditions had changed completely. Our camp was not in the same location at all; nothing was as we had anticipated and this was only one week after I had been there doing the recce. The conditions had changed entirely.

The same thing happened when we deployed to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where we had an idea of the concept of operations and the setup when we left Sweden. The idea was that we would keep a part of the force in Entebbe in Uganda, which was the forward mounting base to where we deployed with AN 124 aircraft to then use smaller C-130/C-160 tactical aircraft for the last leg into Bunia in the DRC. The force in Entebbe would function as a search and rescue team, while the bulk of our task group would operate in the area of operations (AO) in the DRC. We knew very little about the living conditions in the AO, so we brought equipment to cater for all possible situations with us. We could basically end up living in anything from our small tents to existing buildings. Once we got there, conditions had changed in many aspects. We were able to bring the whole task group in and we suddenly had fairly good living conditions in a school. I deployed with a few others in an advance party fairly early on, and that's when we realized that we did not need as much camp equipment as anticipated. We had to contact the unit back in Sweden and told them to leave all the equipment that suddenly was not needed anymore. Often when starting the planning of an operation, you have an approximate idea of how things will be, but it very rarely turns out to be this way.

What were things like in Afghanistan when nothing made sense? Did you get a good place to live there?

Yes, it was near Camp Warehouse, at that time the vehicle graveyard of the Kabul Municipality; it looked nothing like a place where you could live and there was a lot of work to do there to make it habitable. There was a run-down building that we could use for communications and planning purposes and we also brought large tents to live in. But with the standard of the Swedish equipment, we were well prepared, to improvise and were quickly able to create decent accommodation. We essentially lived off *rations* all the time we were there, and only towards the end of our tour did we manage to get something better organized food-wise in our camp. Under such conditions, you need to be innovative and creative to fix things such as heating shower water and temporary showers. Basically, you shower by pouring water over yourself; that also works.

The other people I have interviewed usually come to an area where everything is already developed, so I haven't heard anyone say what you do when you are the first on the scene. There must subsequently be a phase when you fix practical things?

There is a phase when you need to solve the practical things; at the same time, it is very important that you begin what you are there to do: operations. Special operations units normally have a light footprint in an operation like this. You don't have a large logistics component with you that will support you in establishing your base or camp. You have to do that yourself. So it is very much a question of attitude, and I think you can see a difference between what I call the 'German school' and the 'Anglo-Saxon school', literally speaking. The German model entails deploying and then first dealing with your own practicalities before starting any significant operations. Swedes tend, generally speaking, to be a little like the Germans. While the Brits and the French have an extremely pragmatic approach; they normally start operating on day one and the other things they fix when operational matters allow.

> *"The whole thing becomes almost ridiculous and puts a heavy burden on the logistic and transport resources without adding any effect whatsoever."*

What is the Swedish approach?

I don't want to speak for everyone as I don't know what it's been like in other operations. However, my feeling is that we have more of what I call the 'German' approach. I can recount an incident from the Force Headquarters (FHQ) in Kinshasa in the DRC in 2006, when the German Surgeon General discovered that there were no toilets of the standard that was stipulated in the German regulations at the FHQ. For a six-month mission, they subsequently shipped porcelain toilets from Germany to be installed in Kinshasa in order to comply with a rule that, under these circumstances, felt a bit misplaced. Sometimes we tend to be like this when we draw up our packing lists in Sweden. I don't want

to point the finger at anyone, but one example is when the amphibious company that deployed to Chad in 2008 brought a number of things with them that they immediately had to send back home as these were not needed. That could easily have been avoided by applying a more flexible approach than just following a standard generic packing list. Often our way of thinking is inflexible and we have problems in rethinking the plan and adapting to the operational reality. The urge to have an extra layer of security 'in case' something happens. This approach presents a problem. As a commander, you always need to take calculated risks; this also applies to logistical matters. We also have a number of strange regulations that are not applicable when we are in remote places with conditions that are totally different to those we have back home. The whole thing becomes almost ridiculous and puts a heavy burden on the logistic and transport resources without adding any effect whatsoever.

What do you do when you come to a place that is more or less unknown while at the same time you have to be operational and carry out your mission from the start? How do you do this?

You must have such a concept that, with the materiel you have with you, you are able to create decent conditions, within means and capabilities. This can be everything from living in small tents to living in larger medical tents. These conditions are quite simple but still OK. As long as you have sufficient weather protection, anything goes. You must have a mindset that prepares you for accepting that the external conditions are not so important and that you are there to do a job. The comfort aspect must take a back seat. This doesn't mean that if it becomes a very protracted operation, that things shouldn't be improved little by little. However, there is sometimes a tendency for wanting to have everything in place before you can start solving what you are there to do.

In these kinds of rapid reaction operations, there is, of course, seldom an already existing infrastructure to rely on. How do you deal with that?

Basically, you start with what you bring and then you improve things. There is also an economic perspective in this. Enormous amounts of money can be invested in building up an infrastructure that may subsequently be left behind after six months or a fairly short period. The EU operations have been such examples, where the contracts for constructing the EU camps have not been completed before the forces have pulled out. However, seen from another perspective, this could also be a way of providing aid to the host nation, namely that it can take over the camp.

If things never turn out as expected, isn't life pretty uncertain then?

Yes, but, at the same time, you have to be assured that you have people with

you who can come up with clever solutions to the practical problems when you are there. And that people have an attitude that allows them to accept the fact that instead of having a shower in the camp, they can have a bag filled with water that can be heated by the sun as a good enough substitute for a shower. For a period of time, you live in fairly primitive conditions, only to have things gradually improved. It has a lot to do with your attitude and perhaps even more with your approach to your task and the expectations you have, how flexible you are, and how well you can adapt. If we then have people with the right mindset in the team, that all know their job, and we also have fairly good equipment, even if this will not afford us a life of luxury, that's good enough. Then we will all feel really comfortable and can confidently go into this 'blind spot' still feeling that we can solve anything that may occur.

Do you and your people talk about how things never turn out as expected? I would think that this should be self-evident for special forces operations?

I think that this has been self-evident for us. When I started in the special forces, we had an idea of what the operations would involve. Initially, we envisaged something more like police duties, for example hostage rescue missions where we would only really be utilised in short, sharp surgical style operations. Subsequently, reality has turned out to be something completely different. There was a time at the beginning when we needed to talk about this, but also to bring about a change in the attitude of some of the people in our units. They were very skilled people, but they had a different view of what we really were there for, based on a perception that never became reality. Reality changed and subsequently we had to change our mindset and our way of operating. This change was not painless or easy. It's just like with the transformation of the Swedish Armed Forces as a whole; you mustn't stagnate as an organization, but you must be perpetually in motion, changing according to how the world changes.

“There was a time at the beginning when we needed to talk about this, but also to bring about a change in the attitude of some of the people in our units.”

The categories of people who are serving in the special forces have very high aspirations and set high standards for themselves. Most of us could often be described as being like overachievers. It can be difficult for us to accept that we can't keep our skill levels in all disciplines at the very highest standard 365 days of the year and there are many skills to master. If you train or practise one thing intensively for a period of time, you develop your skills to a superb level within that specific function. At the same time, there is something else that will have to lose out, and your skill level will decrease since you haven't practised that specific skill for some time. You can't always be the best at all disciplines. This can be difficult for some people to accept and cope with because perfection is the mindset.

How do you notice this?

Frustration.

Which you have to deal with as a commander?

Of course, you have to. You have to explain to people (and to yourself) and get them to understand that in the long term, they cannot always be the best at everything at any given time. If you want to be extremely good at 'this thing', then 'this other thing' must be put on the back burner and this means that the capability not being used will deteriorate gradually. Thus, when selecting people, largely it is about trying to find those individuals who can live with this fact. Because things never turn out as expected and you will not always be at your peak in everything. If a situation unfolds requiring you to be at the peak of your ability in a specific discipline that you have not trained for a while, it's important that you have individuals with a very good basic standard who can quickly work their way up to an acceptable level again.

When you talk about being able to develop an ability that has deteriorated, what is the time frame?

Some skills take a long time to master and they need constant practise. Not practising them means degrading but depending on what it is and the maturity of your competence we are talking everything from days to perhaps a week.

Can you give a specific example?

A fictitious example could, for instance, be a unit including a combat diver component. It may be that you suddenly have to carry out a complex diving operation, but refresher training for diving has been shelved for various reasons (for example you have been on a land operation for a longer period of time). In order to feel confident about executing the mission and to avoid making any mistakes, they would need to carry out a number of dives before it would be OK to carry out the operation with an acceptable risk. Even if you have a good basic competence, this is something that has a limited shelf life; however, the level of it can be quickly raised. But also the fact that you have people who are innovative and intellectually flexible so that they are not limited to only seeing the SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) in front of them stipulating how things should be. They must be able to quickly adapt to any change in the external circumstances without panicking. This is an important selection criterion and it's important to have people who can assimilate new technology as it is developed and becomes operational; something that happens all the time. This is an important ability that unfortunately can be slightly underrated, but that you are constantly exposed to in the special operations world.

Have you been involved in situations where people have had a rigid view of how something should be done?

Yes, I have, but I have no concrete example that I can tell you about. Once

again, there are different schools of thought depending on where you come from and what type of person you are. One school of thought says that we must make packing lists right down to what toothpaste to take and that everything can be planned in advance. While the school of thought I represent says that you should perhaps have a packing plan for different types of scenarios. You take the most important things with you, but you must then adapt the rest according to the unique conditions of each situation. Mindsets and philosophy are things you must work with in a unit. 'Which route shall we take?' I admit that initially I was one of those 'toothpaste-tube people' and believed in it a great deal. Gradually, I have completely switched to the other philosophy. I think that plans are a good thing, and very important, but I only see a plan as the basic foundation for improvisation. Big boys rules apply – if you don't have it you do without it.

Is this realization built on your operational experience of plans and planning?

Yes, but the plan is good, for then you have something to use as a foundation. Yet there are those who, almost at any price, must carry out their plan and must stick to it.

There is a story in the book Mission Abroad where there are a number of soldiers in Liberia who are going on a long-range patrol, but they don't have a safety-approved vehicle. Among other things, the problem is how to transport fuel and water and how they resolve this in a way that completely contravenes the safety regulations but is necessary for that particular situation. Is that what you mean when you say that you have to be innovative?

Yes. If you look at the regulations we have, they are usually tailored for civilian activities and then we just adopt them, without much questioning of their relevance to our needs, and put a military cover on them. For example, when it comes to flight operations, the Swedish Armed Forces have adopted something called Rules for Military Aviation, which initially was a civilian set of regulations. If these are adhered to, there are lots of things in them that afford security from one perspective but that also vastly increase the risk from another perspective. Subsequently, I would suggest that before they have been militarily packaged, these rules have not undergone sufficient critical analysis using the military operational context in which they are to be applied. I can give a specific example: if an operation is to be carried out, including a direct heli approach into a target area, (which is not the primary choice), you may fast rope, rappel, or land in the target area as close to your target as possible and then begin your attack. If you then follow the current Rules for Military Aviation, the helicopter doors must not be open during the approach. Everyone sitting in the helicopter must also be strapped in so that during the approach there is very little risk that anyone will fall out, thereby fulfilling the civilian safety criteria. The condition

that will not be fulfilled is that you will be in an extremely exposed position when flying into a place full of armed people who can shoot at the helicopter during those extra few seconds it will take you to remove your safety belt, open the door, in order to get out or go down the rope. This will, of course, mean a much greater risk of the helicopter being shot down. There are other threats to safety than just falling out of the helicopter, but if you don't understand the tactical context, these risks are not understood.

What do you do in practice then? Do you follow the rules?

Yes and no. We do what the situation requires of us but based on a risk analysis and normally even an agreed exemption to the rules. However, as we now have come this far in the learning process and have experience of operations in different environments, we nowadays have rules and regulations that are generally well adapted to our tasks. When a rule or regulation is deemed unsuitable, we request, prior to our departure, an exemption to the rules that apply. Every deploying Swedish unit requests a lot of exceptions to or exemptions from the different rules that apply for military activities when training in Sweden. The fact that we even need to have exceptions shows that our set of rules isn't always adapted to the operational requirements. What we try to do in such situations is to constantly work with risk management regardless of where we are. No chain is stronger than its weakest link, so you always need a systemic approach to your tasks. If we are going to carry out a helicopter operation, every member of the heli crew needs to be just as competent in his or her line of work as the special operator. By increasing competence, you will be able to reduce the margins in other areas and expose yourself to situations that would constitute a risk with less-skilled personnel carrying out the mission. Nobody wants to fall out of a helicopter; people naturally want to live.

"*Nobody wants to fall out of a helicopter; people naturally want to live.*"

Is there always a Swede piloting the helicopter? Do you always have a say in the matter?

No, it could be someone of a different nationality, but then we would have to do some training before the operation. This is called a CET/FIT (Combat Enhancement Training/Force Integration Training) phase when you, prior to deployment or in the AO, train together and run through all relevant procedures together. You have a foreign helicopter crew and a helicopter that you train together with until you and the crew have reached the required level of proficiency and cooperation.

During the 1990s in the Balkans, lots of tall tales were circulating about how different nations viewed the use of helicopters differently, for example that the risk was sometimes greater due to complicated security procedures?

It's based on skills and confidence in those you're operating with, and, of course, it would be ideal if there was time to create some kind of relationship before an operation. You must be aware of the difference between real-life operations and the rules and regulations. The rules and regulations are often written for entirely different conditions than those that sometimes exist in an operational environment. Thus, primarily you will either have to work on being granted exemptions or on taking your command responsibility and making decisions on the ground. On such occasions, you are aware that you're taking a risk, but you assess that that risk may not be as great as what the alternative would be. However, this means that if something goes wrong, you may be held responsible for it afterwards and it's something you must be aware of before making a decision.

Is what you call an exemption an administrative process?

Yes, that's correct. You request an exemption from the Armed Forces Safety Inspection Agency. As you analyse your mission, you will identify possible requirements for exemptions based on what your tasks are and all the factors that will affect your mission. Then you file a formal request to the director of operations, who, with the support of the Armed Forces Safety Inspection, makes a decision. This will give you, as the on-scene operational commander, the necessary freedom of action.

Do you request these exemptions before deploying? What's it like if things don't turn out as expected? It may well be that the real-life situation requires an exemption to something other than what you have foreseen and requested.

Experience provides us with knowledge of the exemptions that normally will be needed but also with the understanding that there will be unique requirements depending on the specific conditions in an operations area. If you have a lot of operational experience, you will know, for instance, that in the initial phase of an operation, it is extremely difficult to store ammunition in the way the rules and regulations specify that ammunition must be stored. Subsequently, you know that you will have to have an exemption. You simply must do what you can to meet the requirements but also understand that it will not always be possible from day one in the theatre. By using common sense, you can minimize risks and achieve a lot. However, a formal permission to deviate from the regulations is what legally covers you if something goes wrong.

Do you have the required permission in all situations or do you have to develop tricks to get around the rules?

No, the whole process is built on trust and professional judgement you don't want to cover up things. Then there might be situations that suddenly arise

where, for some reason or other, you have to ignore the rules and regulations since time may not allow you to file the request. It may be small little things, but something that has to be dealt with there and then. There could, for instance, be an airport manager or some official person in a country suddenly demanding that you must pay him a sum of money to land your aircraft. You have no way of checking whether or not such a charge exists. In that case, you would either have to abort the landing there or pay up and subsequently officially account for this expenditure. When you pay, you might not have had time to obtain all permits as such a situation can arise very suddenly and in a critical phase, such as when the aircraft is approaching. Then you must make a decision there and then. And even if you know that eight times out of ten in these regions, we are undoubtedly talking about money someone is lining his own pockets with, you need to act.

You wouldn't get a receipt?

Well, you have to ask for one. However, despite all the fancy stamps, you can be quite sure that the money won't be going into the state coffers. Some situations are, of course, unique and probably will not reoccur. Others are likely to happen again and this is where the lessons learned process plays an important role. That process must be used to adapt rules and regulations to the operational requirements. I believe that very few people are actually looking for some kind of lawless existence. However, you must understand that reality is constantly at conflict with the rules and regulations. Consequently, you have to adapt and find suitable solutions. In the special forces, we have been privileged since we have a very streamlined decision-making process with direct access to the person mandated to take decisions. Whereas Nordbat, the first Swedish battalion in Bosnia, for example, was forced to fight its way through a lot of bureaucracy. I believe that at that time in the early 1990s, we here in Sweden had great difficulty in understanding all the in-theatre operational needs they had. My feeling is that we have improved with almost twenty years of operational experience of other types of operations other than UN Chapter VI operations. I also believe that today we have a greater insight into the fact that we actually need to make changes and adapt to the situation.

Would you say that in your experience the rules are different in theory and in practise?

Well, this is normally the case as most rules are set for training requirements. There is always a risk that you look too one-dimensionally at problems when creating rules.

Have you experienced that safety systems can be restrictive or disruptive when assignments are to be carried out?

Yes, but, at the same time, I would also say that in a combat situation, for example, things may not be as one would imagine them to be. When I was a national serviceman or a young officer, I thought that some of the things dealing with safety aspects of shooting angles for instance, were things that only applied during training and that you really don't have to pay too much attention to them when you are in combat. But, of course, you must or you will risk shooting your own personnel or civilians. What I once thought was very abstract actually has a real significance in combat. In fact, you often need to have a compass in your hand. It's not as scientific as when you organize a live-firing exercise, where you carry out precise measurements, but, nevertheless, you must still have a feeling for how it should be done. In combat, everyone has to keep track of each other and apply an extreme level of situational awareness. Understanding this, the rules and regulations are not abstract, but you should train as you fight.

"*What I once thought was very abstract actually has a real significance in combat.*"

Have you ever felt that safety regulations were a hindrance?

No, but I have been very fortunate since in the special forces, we have always worked according to the motto 'train as you fight' and have thereby, together with the Armed Forces Safety Inspection, already been able to draw up sensible and multifaceted safety regulations for operational activities also applying during training. However, some new interesting challenges usually crop up during every operation. So naturally, there have been many occasions where I have had to think about how to deal with the mismatch between reality and regulations. However, most regulations provide direction for how things should be in an optimal situation. Naturally, you try to accomplish this as far as possible. Sometimes you are not even aware of the existing regulation but with common sense, you will be close to fulfilling it anyhow. As the Swedish Armed Forces are in transition, from just being a training organization to becoming more operational, we learn and apply many new things. It is important to learn from experience and make sure that this is codified and institutionalized in manuals, regulations, and rules when it comes to things that are generally applicable.

Do you see the actual effects of having gained more experience?

Yes, I think so, the way of thinking is changing with increased experience, but as always, it is also a question of attitude and your level of understanding. The perspective you have from a heated office in Stockholm is not always relevant to the reality in the theatre. It is therefore extremely important that everyone on a regular basis is deployed and actively involved in operations. Memories are short and, therefore, you need to see both sides of the coin once in a while in order to fully understand. But the more people we have deployed and are participating in different operations, and it is beginning to be quite a few now, the better things become. You can look at how not only the Swedish

Armed Forces but also the Swedish Government Offices have developed since we became engaged in the EU Battle Group as a framework nation. For Sweden it was a steep learning curve and not many in Sweden had a clue about the implications of assuming the responsibility of a framework nation, what responsibility you assume, and the level of integration needed with other countries. There are a number of practical problems that have to be dealt with. There was no knowledge of or competence in these areas, neither here at the Swedish Armed Forces Headquarters nor in the ministries. But that journey has meant, both mentally and in the form of organizational development, that we have developed a lot as a nation. If we hadn't done this, we would still have been somewhat novice. We have matured in many ways as a nation in regard to multinational military matters. Sadly, the media and the public debate have not kept up to date with this development.

I don't know if it is the Swedish Armed Forces, or if it's the media or politicians, but they have depicted our international operations as being all about 'distributing sweets to kids'. It's similar to what you said before about those cartoon figures [in military teaching aids]; the whole thing has a bit of a Winnie-the-Pooh feel to it. But this is quite a long way from reality. Naturally, by being there we help children, but primarily by dealing with security problems rather than by going around and making people happy for five minutes by handing out teddy bears. You can't eat teddy bears and they don't help improve security. Thus, we have projected an image of something that is very far removed from reality. We then get a wake-up call when the ugly reality suddenly creeps up on us in the shape of casualties. Everyone knows that a *surge* is currently under way in Afghanistan. The strategy is to put pressure on the Taliban to force them to the negotiating table in a weakened state, and gradually to get them to realize that there is no other solution than to participate in political dialogue. You also know that this period will result in very intensive combat operations and disorder, and most likely in losses and casualties. Surprisingly there are still many so-called defence reporters and politicians who pretend they don't understand, or perhaps don't understand, these consequences.

Could it be that the Taliban are rubbing their hands right now when we are talking about an exit date for ISAF?

Yes, that's exactly what their strategic goal is. They want to influence nations by killing a few Swedish or other soldiers in order to start a political snowball effect in these countries as they did with the Madrid bombing and other events. By giving in and complying, we make their strategy successful.

What is the approximate length of your missions?

When I was part of the Swedish special operations force (SOF) up until 2009,

the longest mission was six months, while our normal missions were quite short. Minor operations are always ongoing and these can last one or two weeks. However, in the larger operations, like those in Afghanistan and the Congo, we are talking about a maximum of four to six months, so, in relative terms, still fairly short missions. The character of operations has, with the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, changed for all Western SOFs.

Let's talk about the lessons learned process. Since you have been deployed many times as an initial entry force in places where Sweden had no prior experience, how do you prepare prior to your missions?

During the preparation phase, you want to talk to people who have experience of the country you are going to. For example, before we went to Afghanistan, Jan-Gunnar Isberg, who had served there as an observer, came and told us some of his experiences and what it was like there when he was there. Before going to the Congo, we also talked to people who had been in the area where we were going. For some areas, there are, for instance, lots of people who have been there as missionaries or aid workers. In this way, you will be able to develop a deeper kind of knowledge than one gained from reading.

Is this a job that is systematized?

No, I wouldn't say systematized. It's more something you do, if time allows, when you are assigned a mission. From a more bureaucratic and financial point of view, the Administrative Procedure Act stipulates that no assignment may cost money before a directive is received from the Government. The political process, as is normally the case, is a rather lengthy one. Timelines have been shortened since the world is getting faster, at least when it comes to conflict management, but it's still quite a lengthy process. In 2003, we got to hear about the Congo quite early on, but then it was very much up in the air whether or not it would actually become an operation and if Sweden would be involved. It was, however, very clear that there was a strong political will within the Swedish government to participate. This gradually increased and as a result of this, we could assess that it was highly likely that the operation would take place even if no decision had, as yet, been made. If we had to follow the letter of the law, we would not be allowed to make any preparations for the mission before obtaining a government directive. That would formally have been to preclude the parliamentary decision. As the system does not allow this, you have to act at the lower level, as unit commander. There you and your people are affected and that's why you need to start acting if there are strong indications that you will go. Consequently, I had to make a decision, that we would start preparing for this operation rather than pretending that it was business as usual. In this way, we did not lose two weeks of valuable preparations. Subsequently, in the preparations for

the potential operation, we had to use money that normally should have been used for other things. So in a global perspective, it didn't cost the taxpayers any extra money but if there hadn't been a 'go' later, we would have spent money intended for other things.

Being a commander, you weren't restrained by the law but were able to make such a decision.

From a formal point of view, if you were to literally interpret it, you would be restricted. We rearranged a number of procurements, equipment that we knew we would need for an operation in Africa. It was actually a matter of revising the priorities.

When you made the decision, you knew that you would be going to the Congo, but no more? Did you know where you would be deployed in the Congo?

Yes, I did know, but that didn't help us that much. Most of us had never been in Africa. The term 'Africa' is often used as if it was a homogenous, rather small place. But, in reality, we are talking about a very diverse continent with a thousand different types of environments. Honestly, I can't say that I really fully appreciated this.

What is the time frame from a government directive to the start of operations?

It can be really short. Again, this depends mainly on the political process. The Government may decide to issue a directive while waiting for the Riksdag [the Swedish Parliament] to make a decision; this way it can be a parallel process. Now, in the case of the Congo, things went surprisingly fast considering we are talking about Sweden in the early 2000s. Historically, three months is the normal period for a government bill before it is put before the Riksdag for a decision and this time it only took a week or so. In a country shaped by a long peace, there is not really the mindset to speed things up, even when we are talking crisis management. But contrary to the embarrassing way we handled Kosovo, this time the political process was quite speedy. This was in 2003 and there was quite a lot of focus on Afghanistan and the Middle East; then, out of nowhere, the Congo appeared and this was a slightly different environment than we had imagined.

Was it different in that it involved major changes in capabilities that you had to train or was it different with respect to materiel?

Yes, to a certain extent, it was both of the above, but we didn't know that then. Take the climate, for example: in the Congo, a country the size of Europe, there are incredibly diverse conditions within the country. So in some places, you will find what the Swedish UN force in Liberia encountered; a humidity so extreme

that things rotted very quickly and it turned out that much of the materiel they brought couldn't withstand the rigours of the climate. This was not the case for us in the north-western DRC, but we didn't know this beforehand. As it turned out, we ended up on a high plateau with a fairly pleasant climate. A small part of the area was rainforest, but we weren't operating there that much. We mainly spent our time in an open landscape with hills, at an altitude that meant the climate was pleasant.

We also knew that there were a lot of other things to consider, like malaria, that meant we would have to sleep in mosquito nets. We had to arrange such things. Everyone had to have yellow fever injections and this cost a lot of money that we had to pay to a civilian hospital; this was a lesson learned. This is typically something that we were not allowed to spend money on until we had a formal directive. However, knowing that there was an incubation period of a couple of weeks, I never hesitated in vaccinating all my guys. If not, we would have faced either a delay in the deployment or being forced to take a medical risk. A simple and understandable violation of the rules but also an example of where the rules do not work. Of course, today all rapid response units have all their people vaccinated for most contingencies. So this is one of the lessons learned that has resulted in something concrete and positive.

I'm interested in concrete examples of problematic situations. I usually ask the people I interview about aggravating circumstances, about limitations or friction.

If we stick to the Congo, then I thought that although things didn't turn out as we believed they would, many things were actually better than expected when we arrived in theatre. Once you are there, it has a lot to do with relationships and your ability to build relationships with the host and framework nation. As in life in general, it's very much about building relationships with those who have a strong influence on your situation and thereby making things work.

"As in life in general, it's very much about building relationships with those who have a strong influence on your situation and thereby making things work."

Are the relationships you're talking about a part of the EU force or did you talk to the local civilian leaders?

Well, primarily I mean within the force, in order to get that bit right. In this case, we were part of an EU force that mainly consisted of French units; there were also a few Belgian and British ones. When it came to agreements and the like, the purely formal relationship with the local leaders there was usually handled at the force commander level.

Did you already know the other members of the EU force?

No, we had no prior relationship with the French SOF. It is, of course, much easier if that is the case but here I met the French colonel, to whom I would be

the deputy, for the first time at the airfield in Bunia. Our deployment was gradual; first, a liaison team as soon as we had the orders for that, then I deployed with a small advance party and some days later the main force deployed.

In such a situation, I imagine that the relationship between the deputy commander and the commander is crucial for how well the mission can be executed? How did you work together?

Yes, that relationship is important. The level of success is always about people and how we interact. Of course, on day one you won't know how it will work. Like all relationships, it's something that matures as you gradually get to know one another. The process is usually quicker when you're under a little pressure and matters are brought to a head. One of the first questions the SOF commander asked me was if we would fire if the situation so required. I then realized that his perception of Swedes and Swedish military units was that we would back down in such a situation. Perhaps he also believed that we didn't have a mandate from home allowing us to engage in combat. But we did have such a mandate, and everyone at home was aware that the situation in the Congo was complex and quite dangerous. No one had been uncertain concerning the force's rules of engagement. There were no Swedish caveats or anything like that. His fear was, of course, that this would be the case. It wasn't too long ago that in the Balkan conflict, we earned such a reputation due to some statements from a former defence minister. Already during the force generation conference, we noted that the operational commander's requirements were not the same as stated in his 'wish list', the Status of Forces Requirements (SOR). As Sweden only had the SOF available at such short notice to move as was required in this operation, we were the obvious choice. But at the force generation conference, when we offered this as the Swedish contribution, the answer was: 'Well, we don't need any special forces'. However, Anna Lindh [the Swedish minister for foreign affairs] and the French defence minister had already decided that we should take part in this operation with our special forces. The person in charge of the force generation conference was not aware of this and it was clear that he really wasn't keen on having any Swedish special forces.

Was it special forces in general or just Swedish ones that they didn't want?

They ruled out the need for special forces very early on in the conference. The SOF requirement was included in the SOR table from the beginning but all of a sudden, there was no longer any need for additional SOFs and probably this was because they did not believe that the Swedes would stand up and could be counted on when the going got tough. With the question posed by the French colonel upon our arrival in the Congo, I suddenly understood the underlying reasons a little better. My response to his question was: 'We will open fire when

it's necessary'. I didn't think he needed to worry about that. We were there to do the job within the given mandate.

The colonel, now our boss, took very good care of us once we had arrived in theatre. As I have mentioned, we had no previous experience of operations on the African continent and clearly had to be regarded as novices when it came to the environment and in our encounters with the local population. From the outset, we worked very closely with the French. They regarded this as a period of training for us and their ambition was to have us up to speed on the local conditions as soon as possible, which would allow us to start operating more independently.

Were the French units already deployed when you arrived?

Yes, they were. Some of them had been there for almost two weeks.

How long did it take from the time you were asked if you would open fire if needed until you were actually operating independently?

We already began our work on day two. We had an advance party in theatre first, that was myself and four others. We joined the operations the French were carrying out in order to learn from them and quickly become acclimatized. We carried out a number of joint patrols with them. The first major joint search operation was in a militia camp. The way we carried out search operations was by making the same plans as you would prior to an assault. However, you do not open fire (if not fired upon, of course) but you secure the terrain and then you search the camp for what you are looking for, for example weapons or a person. Before we deployed to the Congo, we were quite certain that we would see action (in other words, find ourselves in combat). This was not the case during this our first search operation, but in this very operation, we were clearly a little more tense compared to how the French handled things. But that was, of course, the obvious difference between being more or less newly arrived in the AO and units which were the first to enter this area and already had conquered their initial nerves.

How did you notice this?

In such a situation, it's important that you don't provoke violence. You need to be calm and confident and not project a feeling of nervousness. This manifests itself in how you act and how you take care of your personnel and how you are. We talked about this afterwards and we were also a bit criticized by the commander who told us what we should think about. We talked about this in the unit, then subsequently tried to change it. All this took place during our start-up period, and I think that it's important to quickly expose yourself to these situations so that you can understand and adapt to the situation as quickly

as possible and become a little more mature. You have to shake off this initial fear of the unknown. If you are on base too much, uncertainty and waiting around the camp can cause nervousness and tension and, therefore, it's important to get out in the AO and get work done.

When we undertook our first Swedish operations in the Balkans, too much initially revolved around building this fine base and this was a perception I really wanted to change in the unit. It's about reaching operational capability as quickly as possible. It's not only about how well they shoot, but also about whether they have lowered their pulse rate and understand the importance of certain things that are taking place, things you didn't understand when you first arrived in the AO.

Was there any particular time when you felt that the French no longer had any doubts about you?

After a short time in theatre, we carried out another search operation that developed into a battle; actually quite a large one. On this occasion, the French showed great confidence in us and we were to enter the target area first as we had impressive firepower mounted on our vehicles. This time the militia started firing at us even before we got close to their camp and the mission subsequently developed from just securing the terrain to taking it by force of arms. Everything changed after that day in our relationship with the framework nation. We had stood the test in some way, and after that our relationship developed extremely well. My boss, the French colonel, matched us well by assigning us on operations that gradually increased both in the level of difficulty and in the responsibility we assumed. I have an enormous respect for that SOF CO. I think that he was a very talented and skilled military commander and he had good leadership qualities. He had good risk management skills and he had roughly the same way of thinking as I did, which was naturally conducive to a good working atmosphere in the command group.

Do you have any examples of relationship problems or friction in international cooperation?

Any situation taken out of its context could be interpreted as relationship problems. Therefore, you need to be careful when answering such a question. In my opinion, it is quite normal that it takes some time for new colleagues to get to know each other and develop a well-functioning professional relationship. We are different people and we come from different cultures. If you add the language dimension to this, then there is an obvious complexity in bringing people from different countries together in an operation. Everyone who has taken part in international operations probably recognizes this. The important thing is that in a relationship, there must be an air of openness and that it is possible

for the commanders to conduct constructive discussions with each other. It's more a question of luck if everything works out fine from the start. But by closely working together, the 'get-to-know phase' is substantially reduced. The ideal is, of course, that you have torn down these barriers already in 'peacetime' combined training and exercises.

I have seen some friction when commanders rotate and new ways of working are applied during an operation. Such a change normally requires some time to adjust to and to find the right tone in the relationship.

How do you deal with this as the commanding officer of a national contingent?

You aren't only a solider and a military man, but you are also a diplomat and a politician and you have a responsibility for ensuring that a multinational relationship is going to work. You have an official duty that must be carried out and you can't devote your energy to infighting. You have an obligation to strive for a good relationship. However, this does not mean that you must accept everything. As a military man and soldier, you try, in the best way possible, to comply with the assignment unless it is beyond your moral boundaries or rules of engagement or indeed other existing regulations. As a commander, I am never willing to put my personnel in situations where the risk is not justified by what you can achieve. Sometimes you may, however, have to accept tasks that you don't always find relevant, but since they do not mean any of the above, you still take them on for the sake of harmony in the force. But you may also come to the end of the road. This happened to me on one occasion in a multinational operation. We had a new commander who had just taken over from the previous one who had been quite successful during his time in theatre. We were out on a mission, and the commanding officer kept deviating from our initial plan, making up new tasks and extending the mission as the days went by (mission creep). It was hard for anyone to see what effects and results he wanted to achieve. To me, it appeared that he was desperate to try to find a situation that would make him look good in the eyes of his superiors. I accepted the first mission extensions after having discussed it with my troop commanders. It was hard to make them understand that we had to do international relations and diplomacy instead of solving meaningful military tasks. But when he, for the third time, wanted to extend the mission, which was now already a couple of days overdue, I felt that it would be extremely bad for the unit's morale if I would agree to yet another strange and unexplainable task. The original mission we were there to carry out was already completed and there was no logical military reason whatsoever for remaining there. The day before, I had agreed to carry on for another twenty-four hours even if I didn't believe in what we were doing, but after that, that was it. When we had completed those twenty-four hours, he said that we had to do yet another mission. I then answered:

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It was hard to make them understand that we had to do international relations and diplomacy instead of solving meaningful military tasks.
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'No, I am sorry I won't do that. I'm going back to camp with my force according to what we agreed on yesterday. There is nothing new that changes the situation'. And that's what we did.

Were there any repercussions?

Well . . . actually only positive ones. Afterwards, his own personnel, as confused as everyone else, said that they thought my decision was a good one. After this incident, his leadership and his managerial skills changed for the better, perhaps this was an eye-opener for him.

Could the fact that you took your force with you and went back to camp be regarded as a refusal to obey orders?

No, of course, I would never have done this if the situation had required several extensions of the mission. But under the present circumstances, I could do it. This had nothing to do with being disobedient; it was all about common sense and indicating to him that he needed to think bigger than just chasing personal success. The two of us had an agreement about what to achieve with the mission. Nothing new had actually happened that created the need to make up new artificial tasks all the time.

As in all special operations missions, the on-scene commander normally has a national box or mandate in which he can maneuver in relation to an approved task or mission. The mandate normally covers things, such as type of task, distances, time, etc. When you receive the orders for a new mission, you make a mission approval request (MAR) to your capital (if the mission is outside your box). Then you get a mandate for the new mission (or not) stating what you can and can't do., If you need to go outside the box, you will need a new mission approval from home. Often extending a mission, or drastically changing its focus, is an example of needing a new decision. When it comes to special forces, there is still a fairly large element of national command and control.

Do you mean to the Swedish capital in your case?

Yes, and for other countries to their respective capitals and there is nothing strange about this, for everyone knows that this is the way it is. This means that this MAR is required if you want to deviate from the mandate you have. You must then report back to your general in Stockholm with the request describing what type of task it is and what risk assessment you are making based on certain criteria. Then I must also include whether or not I am personally going to recommend that the mission be executed. The request serves two purposes. Naturally, one purpose is having somebody else's point of view regarding the matter. Seldom does anyone in Stockholm know better than those in the field. However, on the other hand, out in the operations area, you can be blinkered [i.e. silo

thinking] and aren't always able to see things clearly. You can get counter-questions such as: 'What about medical? How far away is the closest Role 2 [medical support] that is available? Are the means for MEDEVAC (Medical Evacuation)/CASEVAC (Casualty Evacuation) sufficient, etc?' But the system also functions as a kind of lifeline for you as a commander, since you can always say that you have submitted an approval request but that it was denied back home in the capital. Everyone knows that this is just a façade, but it's still a way to avoid carrying the can locally and everyone accepts this with no hard feelings.

Can you threaten to take this to a board of inquiry or is this another way of not having to end up there?

Yes, but in this case, we had an agreement and we had made a plan from the outset that we had agreed upon and had been approved. Then I agreed on extending the plan, but, at the same time, I agreed that we would not 'go any further than this'. When we subsequently came to that point, he still wanted to continue. What he was wondering then was if I could consider lending him some medical facilities for another twenty-four hours. I did this after talking to the personnel concerned. So there were no hard feelings, but I still believe that this served as an eye-opener for him as his leadership gradually changed and became better. I think he was really good in the end and that we worked well together. However, it's also about a relationship that you form with an individual; in this case, the initial commanding officer who then suddenly was replaced and another person arrived in his place. Then you need to start all over again. And, undoubtedly, it is always about people and how well we function together. I'm not sure that I always understood the new commander in the beginning. I am sure that he also had views about me and my force, and you have to accept the fact that it takes some time to make things work and during that time, you can only hope that you are not faced with any tough tests.

"*What he was wondering then was if I could consider lending him some medical facilities for another twenty-four hours.*"

If we return to the Congo, where the UN was to take over after you. How did you hand over to your successors? Was there anyone you were to hand over to?

Yes, in one way there was. EUFOR (European Union Force) handed over to the new UN Ituri Brigade under the command of the Swedish general Jan-Gunnar Isberg. So, of course, I briefed him but the bulk of the handover was from the force commander General Thonier to him and from subunit to subunit. Basically, the main task for EUFOR was to make sure that the UN had time enough to generate and deploy a new and larger force to the area. But our mission also included stopping the genocide and creating a secure environment in Bunia and the surrounding area.

Were you subsequently surprised that a Swede was commanding the Ituri Brigade?

No, I had received information from home that he would be the one coming. So when he arrived, we sat down and talked for a while, and I tried to provide him with some intelligence and reports that we had compiled during our time in the area. We also talked a little about what lessons we had learned. It wasn't a very long or formal discussion. His task was different to ours. My advice to him was that he should make sure that he should be the winner in every situation whether it was a verbal negotiation or an armed encounter. I told him that he could never let the militia interpret him or his actions as being weak. You have to look strong in this environment. If you appear to be weak, you will make someone think that they have a chance of taking over control. You will be tested immediately if this is the case. These are the kinds of mechanisms that you don't really understand when you live in the western world, where there is more peace. When you find yourself in this magnitude of evil and you are totally immersed in a primitive way of life, it's very much about all players trying to see what chances and possibilities that will benefit them.

If you appear to be weak, you will make someone think that they have a chance of taking over control.

Did you think the situation was different from that in the Balkans and Afghanistan?

When it comes to the Balkans, the situations were different in Kosovo and at the start of the Bosnia operation. I don't think there was any great difference between the Congo and how things were in Bosnia when the Nordbat units were there. We had to deal with the same madmen and psychopaths whom you tend to find in conflict environments. In Afghanistan in 2002, the situation was different since most of the conflict between the Taliban and the US-backed Northern Alliance was over. When we arrived, it was kind of a vacuum in the area surrounding Kabul, while there was still quite some heavy fighting in other areas of the country. We didn't know what would happen: continued fighting or a more stable and secure environment. Throughout the country, there were a tremendous number of weapons that were not decommissioned and several units that were not demobilized, so we didn't know if this would result in all-out war. When we, in retroperspective, look back at things, there was a period at the beginning when ISAF entered the scene when the population had many positive expectations. Really this was a window of opportunity that was missed when the attention turned to Iraq. Of course, there were a number of attempts to sabotage the benign development but they were averted. Compared to today, Afghanistan was a much calmer environment.

Do you usually pass on lessons learned when you have been on a mission? Normally, does someone come in and take over?

No, there's not always someone to take over from you, and, in particular, there is seldom anyone who comes in and takes over the same mission or task. In the EU operations, the SOF has primarily been used as an early entry force. The SOF does not normally have a specific assigned AO where you have territorial control. You normally operate in someone else's AO or you get a temporary AO assigned to you for a specific task. The EU operations have also been fairly short in duration. However, the lessons are always identified and learned. The trick is to understand which of the identified lessons may be applicable also in future operations.

Would you say that, formally speaking, it's rarely your job to hand over to the next person?

Well, yes and no. If there is a new special operations force to relieve us, that would, of course, be done. But we always try to hand over experiences or lessons identified that are generic and could be used by other units. If we take Liberia as an example, we briefed the first Swedish unit to go there, LA 01, on what we had learned, which we thought would be of help to them. Now, the environment and the climate weren't the same in the Congo as they were in Liberia, but it was still possible to pass on some things. The open lessons learned report that we published after the first mission in the Congo is an example of passing on lessons learned. The media coverage of that report is also an example of how tabloid media create headlines that have little to do with reality by taking things out of their context. That time it concerned the quality of the body bags. However, over the years, we have worked a lot with directly passing on lessons identified or learned to the soldiers in the units deploying to environments where we have already been.

I have no more questions. Is there anything you would like to add to what we have talked about?

I think it's important to talk about life experience and such things. I believe that people with more life experience find it easier to handle complex situations. That is, you will progress or mature more quickly from a novice to another level of competence because you find it easier to put things into a context. Naturally, this doesn't apply to everyone, but if I were to be really crass, I do believe that this is the case since you have lots of things to relate to and you, therefore, can understand things better than an 18-year-old. I can compare my own perspective from the days when we only had conscripts. During that time, I served in a ranger unit at the FJS (Parachute Ranger School) for many years. We really achieved a lot during the fifteen months of training that these units did and the soldiers were really capable. We considered them to be as capable as soldiers could ever be. Now I see that they were very capable for having only had fifteen

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months of training, but, in no way, as capable as a soldier can become. After having served with professional units, in the special forces, I understand that there are completely different aspects of competence and skills. Beginning with a rigorous selection process and then entering an eighteen-month-long SOF basic training course, you are at a good starting point when the soldier becomes operational. Even though everyone entering the SOF already has military training and experience when they arrive, you might think that, at this point, they could be considered masters when they start their operational service. But far from it; when they have completed the special forces' basic training course, we still consider them novices. It's only after a couple of years as an operator when they have been exposed to a number of different situations and have been serving together with more-experienced fellow soldiers both during training and in real-life operations that they attain higher levels of competence. Whereas previously during conscription periods, we had had a tendency to believe that you became a master by the end of your conscription period. But that is, of course, not true. You may know your SOPs and unit drills but you may not be able to translate these and to apply them in all contexts.

There is criticism from some quarters that the Swedish Armed Forces may not want masters because they are somewhat difficult and can be more demanding. Owing to their experience, they will not accept certain things. Do you recognize that?

No, I think that this is simply a preconception. Ultimately, I think it's about leadership. In the Swedish Armed Forces, we (or rather the politicians) have chosen a path where we have abandoned the idea that you need both specialists and generalists. We stopped training NCOs (non-commissioned officers) and only had the officer category. That basically turned everyone into more of a generalist and, consequently, we have lost a lot of in-depth knowledge. Traditionally, based on our experiences of UN Chapter VI operations, we have sometimes had a tendency to value civilian skills, such as being a skilful plumber who can fix things around the camp, as a greater asset than a really skilled and capable soldier. This is how we have marketed peacekeeping and perhaps it works there. When we started to do other types of operations and missions, higher on the conflict scale, it's of less importance that you are good at fixing things around the camp. Now it's more important that you can handle your weapon and other equipment that you have been assigned in a professional way. All of us in the Swedish Armed Forces understand this fact but among the Swedish public and in the media, the notion that skills other than soldiering are more important for the military is still very much alive.

‘You will have to take full responsibility . . .’

Interview with Jan-Gunnar Isberg

The background to Jan-Gunnar Isberg’s mission

The African war from 1996 to 2002 did not only affect the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). A number of neighbouring countries were also involved. The war officially came to an end when the peace agreement was signed in 2002. A large number of groups, totalling approximately 65,000 militiamen in an area half the size of Sweden, had, however, not accepted the agreement. The first few years after the signing of the agreement, they actively opposed the peace process. They preyed on and exploited the civilian population who suffered enormously. In 2003, the situation in the north-eastern Congo was described as a slow, ongoing genocide. The United Nations (UN) mission in the DRC, called MONUC (Mission de l’Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo), was established in 1999 and reinforced with a robust Chapter VII mandate in 2003. (From july 2010 the misson is named MONUSCO.)

MONUC’s demobilization programmes developed slowly from 2003. These were meant to entice the militiamen to surrender their weapons and return home to their villages. However, when the militiamen did not turn up for demobilization, the UN military forces had to be used to protect the civilian population from further devastation at the hands of the armed groups. It was not possible to even create any security through static grouping and patrolling. The operations area was gigantic. Furthermore, the armed groups were moving across the area. The only way was to deploy at strategically important sites and then, using powerful force, search for militia units and disarm them in order to provide the population with long-term protection in the area in question. Gradually, with the support of UN efforts, area after area came under government control and could be normalized.

The UN brought in more UN troops that operated under Chapter VII of the

UN Charter. These were organized into two brigades: the Ituri Brigade from August 2003 with 5,000 men and the Kivu Brigade from March 2004 with 4,000 men. Thus, two multinational brigade commands led battalions from South Asia, North and South Africa, and South America. Each brigade had nearly 100 armoured vehicles. All battalions were equipped with both light and heavy mortars. Each brigade had its own helicopter battalion. During operations, each brigade could receive air support from MI-24 attack helicopters. Both the brigades operated under a particularly strong UN mandate with broad powers to use force.

A rough count of the incidents from the middle of 2003 up to the beginning of 2005 showed that on average the brigades were involved in some kind of combat every three days. This could involve anything from an exchange of fire and armed ambushes to almost medium-intensity warfare primarily during the large-scale proactive operations. During these nineteen months, approximately thirty-five high-profile operations were carried out with everything from a few hundred to well over a thousand UN troops. During the same period, the UN units lost a total of twenty-one men killed as a result of combat firing and accidents. Approximately thirty troops were similarly injured. Jan-Gunnar Isberg's experiences from the Congo are described in detail in the book *By All Necessary Means: Brigadier General Jan-Gunnar Isberg's Experiences from Service in the Congo, 2003–2005* (2012).

The interview with Jan-Gunnar Isberg was conducted on 12 December 2008 by Lotta Victor Tillberg.

I wonder what was going through your mind when you were assigned the mission in the Congo. It is a huge country with very complex conditions?

My knowledge of the conditions in the DRC and of the UN organization and operations there was initially limited even though I devoted all available time before, during, and after my departure to reading up on it. After just seven days in Kinshasa, I was sent to north-east Congo at the beginning of August 2003 to take command of the Ituri Brigade that was on its way there. I was now able to focus on a smaller part of the Congo and the conditions there: the Ituri district, the organization of the brigade, how it was equipped, the interpretation of our mandate, and the rules for the use of force, and so on. Initially, I probably did not realize that we would come into conflict to the extent we actually did. It was difficult to come to grips with the different militia groups in the Ituri district. Had they accepted the peace agreement? Were they going to agree to being disarmed, and so on? What were the agendas of the leadership?

On my fifth or sixth day in Kinshasa, I was approached by a civilian UN

official. We had met at MONUC HQ as well as at a dinner, and we got on well together. At our third meeting, he told me plainly and squarely roughly the following: 'The papers making you commander of the Ituri Brigade have now been signed. MONUC HQ won't give a monkey's about you over there in Ituri. You will be entirely responsible for what goes on. If things go pear-shaped, you will have sole responsibility for that also'. He also told me that he wanted to bring to my attention the fact that I would not have access to any level 2 hospital in Ituri. That was still in Kisangani, some 600 km away from Bunia. My newfound friend also said that if any UN personnel were to die as a result of the lack of surgical capacity, this would also be my responsibility.

Initially, I probably did not realize that we would come into conflict at the extent we actually did.

What did you think when he told you this?

I was startled. One of the first things I did when I had landed in Bunia was to make sure there was an aircraft with medical personnel at Bunia Airport in a high state of preparedness so that any injured could be transported to Kisangani for care and attention.

That sounds like pretty tough conditions. What do you do in a situation like this coming in as the only Swede? How do you create an overview of everything that must be done?

Once I had arrived in Bunia, I was initially able to identify what the situation looked like in Ituri. Operation Artemis comprised an approximately 1,200-strong French-led EU force (Interim Multinational Emergency Force) that had stabilized the situation, but only in Bunia in accordance with its mandate. Its operations area was fifteen by fifteen kilometres in size. Despite their efforts, there was gunfire every night in Bunia. Through the reports presented by them and information we started accumulating at our own headquarters, we began to form a clear picture of the situation. I learnt where the border lines between the different militias went and obtained more-detailed information about the different groupings. It was important to learn about who was allied with whom and how the ethnic tribes were represented in the militias and where they belonged geographically. Leadership played a decisive role in the actions of the different groupings. The UN's idea was to demobilize the militias, which, in the Ituri district, numbered approximately 25,000 armed individuals in different groupings. The militia movements were also to be transformed into political parties as soon as possible. However, in Ituri, none of these new political parties could acquire national importance, only a regional influence. This situation would not facilitate a demobilization.

Were you military people the ones negotiating with the militia? If so, what was it about?

We could talk to them as long as the militia groups adhered to the peace agreement and UN intentions. It could, for example, involve practical issues: how demobilization should be carried out and how the militias would align themselves up to the time of disarmament. What would their freedom of movement be like? Would they receive support, for example food, while awaiting demobilization? Problems arose when they did not keep to agreements they had made.

Did you yourself negotiate with the militias?

The entire time the UN political representative [i.e. the Director of Office] in Bunia refused to discredit himself by talking to suspected war criminals. He felt that the military were the ones who had to have the contacts with the militia. He was absolutely correct in this respect. The UN was working pragmatically here. The UN continued talking to these leaders as long it believed they could fulfil a function in the peace process.

How was a meeting between you and the militia arranged? Where did you meet? And what language did you use?

I used interpreters. I had a French adjutant who could be used in certain situations. Otherwise, we used interpreters from West Africa. We required that they speak Swahili, preferably lingual, French, and English. We could speak French with most leaders; otherwise, we used one of the local languages. We met at their HQ or one of the UN HQs. If the militia leaders were afraid of being arrested, they required that we were lightly escorted when we came to them.

What kind of talks were these? Were they conducted in a constructive spirit? And how were they arranged?

The meetings could take place at their initiative or ours. The meetings were planned only as long as the militia leader adhered to the aims of the peace agreement. On one occasion, the UPC (Union of Congolese Patriots) militia group had captured seven local policemen. So I summoned the chief of staff of the UPC militia, General Kisembo. He was a typical war criminal. I explained to him that the UN took the capture very, very seriously. In the middle of the negotiations, one of the policemen managed to escape from the militia camp where they were being interned and could also tell us where his comrades were being held prisoner.

Did Kisembo confess that he had taken the policemen prisoner?

He claimed that they were being protected by the UPC.

What argument did Kisembo use for capturing the policemen?

He was under pressure as we had defeated the UPC militia in street fighting

in Bunia on 15 and 16 June 2003, resulting in many dead and injured militiamen. At that time, I also had him arrested, together with seventy other UPC members, but had to release him. He maintained that he did not have control over his subordinate commanders and felt that much of what had happened was the result of the people acting spontaneously. Now he also wanted to go down the political route. This also suited the UN. There was nothing directly that we could apprehend him for, even if there was a lot of circumstantial evidence, and he was still cooperative and useful for the UN. When negotiating for the release of the captured policemen, Kisembo argued for a manifestation, which I refused. I told him to turn over the policemen immediately, and he actually did this. Then Kisembo carried out his own gathering, including a speech, in which we did not take part. His aim was to improve his popularity among Bunia's population. The following night, I sent a combat patrol that launched a surprise attack on the camp where the policemen had been taken prisoner, primarily to secure evidence. This took place at 04.00. At 12.00 the following day, we had a meeting with Kisembo already arranged, and I never believed he would come to that meeting. However, he happily came to the agreed meeting.

Why did he do that?

He had got his little demonstration. He was rid of the problem to do with the policemen. The fact that militiamen lost their lives meant nothing to him. That's life. Kisembo's successor was called Bosco and was a known war criminal. He was also a Rwandan. The first thing I did when rumours were circulating about the UPC's appointment was to offer a reward of $100 for any information that would lead to his capture. The UN did no such thing. This was my largest private contribution. It was a fierce challenge directed at the UPC. We never could, or never wanted to, negotiate with Bosco. That would have been a kind of acceptance of blatant war crimes. We recaptured Kisembo a year later, and a Congolese court handed down to him a long prison sentence for war crimes.

“The first thing I did when rumours were circulating about the UPC's appointment was to offer a reward of $100 for any information that would lead to his capture.”

How do you know what to begin with in an area like Ituri where it has to be teeming with different militia hideouts?

The first thing we did in 2003 was to secure the district capital Bunia, including the airport. The next step was to secure the other major cities and open the roads between these cities. Thus, roads were opened for transports to the fortified camps that were subsequently established. The helicopters could now be freed up for transporting troops in operations where new areas were to be liberated. Perhaps an even more important advantage with opening the roads was the fact that people could now begin moving around within larger areas and regions. Thus, the militia also partly lost control over the population. This led to the start of some trade but also to word spreading among the population about

what was happening in the different areas. The influence of the militias was weakened. Opening up the country constituted an extremely important part of the democratization and peace process. The roads were repaired by the Ituri Brigade's three strong engineering units and were subsequently secured by the deployment of units and patrols.

Did you police the roads?

Yes, we deployed companies along the roads and patrolled them. Naturally, our operations area was too large and people were often assaulted along these very roads. A fisherman with fish to sell placed his catch on the luggage carrier and began cycling into a town to sell his wares. He might have to pay tax on his fish several times to the militia before arriving in the town. When we were not present, the militia were there demanding the fisherman pay duty. Since he usually did not have any money, they took some of his catch from him but never the entire catch. If he ceased trading, they could not rob him again.

"*Since he usually did not have any money, they took some of his catch from him but never the entire catch. If he ceased trading, they could not rob him again.*"

I am wondering about the military staff – what was working with them like? Were you the one doing the recruiting?

No, the staff officers were selected by the UN in New York and arrived one by one from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, South Africa, Indonesia, South America, etc. The same was also true of the military observers.

How did staff-level cooperation work?

Many staff officers were experienced and capable. They were schooled in the British tradition of staff work, except those from Uruguay and Bolivia, who worked more in line with American methods. Generally speaking, on the one hand their ambition was to serve their country well and on the other hand to further their own careers. Many of them showed great commitment to the peace process. As always, the quality varied. The top 25 per cent did most of the work. Some officers came from countries with no military levels above that of the battalion. These officers had little understanding and often were not very productive.

What was working with the military staff like? Did you often meet the staff?

There was a daily morning briefing at 07.30 with heads of staffs sections and liaison officers. We went through the events of the night and the coming day, confirming the day's meetings and visits, and so on. In extreme situations, we were, operationally speaking, very focused. If I or others saw anything that we needed to do in the coming days or beyond, I assembled the chief of staff and the heads of the operations and intelligence sections, after my morning meeting with the military staff. For the most part, I was well updated and went through

the background and motives and then my commander's intent and guidelines. After this, these section heads set the staff to work to draw up a plan or usually a FRAGO (fragmentary order). I went out in the field and followed ongoing operations or other activities. In the evening, I went through their proposals for FRAGOs and made corrections where necessary. When appropriate, we assembled the unit commanders in question in the evening and gained support for future operations, whereupon the preparations could be started. We spoke on the telephone with unit commanders who were deployed far away. Generally speaking, during the Bukavu Crisis (26 May–22 June 2004), we went through one order each day. After this, the units made themselves ready overnight and then the operation was executed the following day. All units available for the operation were in Bukavu.

Did you ever experience that the military staff had difficulty working together? Was this anything you had to devote time to?

For example, the Kivu Brigade's first chief of staff was a South African and he handled the staff perfectly. There were no problems. However, the next chief of staff, also a South African and a product of the African National Congress's quota system with a fast-track promotion, could not hack it. Consequently, the current operations commander informally took over this responsibility without hurting anybody's feelings. He became both chief of staff and head of G3 (operations). Actually, there was nothing strange about this as the current operations commander always has a dominant staff role during ongoing operations.

But you were not involved in the staff's internal work?

No. They had a task to do and they solved it; they came back with a plan or order, and I corrected what I thought was missing or found to be incorrect. The twenty-eight South Africans, the core of the staff, came from the same brigade staff in South Africa. Twelve of them played a very active part in the staff work as well as in the command and control procedures of the brigade. Six of them were the engines that strongly supported the staff work. Doing anything else than taking my responsibility, being in the field, and keeping abreast of the situation, and thinking ahead would have been an insult to these extremely professional officers.

Did you feel that there were any cultural clashes?

Between me and the contingents of the brigades? No, I didn't. However, I think it is easy for me to deal with people, even in such an international environment as this was.

Why is that? You were the only European there?

There are universal codes in the military systems. These make things easier; still, you must not get them wrong too often either. The basis, however, is leadership. It is important to make well-justified and exacting demands on the organization, including the operations, from a safety, a qualitative, and a quantitative perspective. Commanders must conduct themselves in an exemplary manner, but must also be prepared to take responsibility for what goes on in the field. You can only do this fully if you are there. Commanders must also find it easy to say no, initially very tongue in cheek. At the beginning, when the organization is establishing itself, such a commander is not popular, but after a few months, it changes and there is respect.

The second, and equally important, aspect is the level of care. If you are a slightly more senior commander, direct care can include staff officers, battalion commanders, and company commanders. It is about showing an interest in this staff, their future, and in deciding whether recommendations but also rewards by way of special citations are warranted. This applies internationally, but even more so in Sweden. Even that aspect can only be taken care of if the commander is often out in the field and part of the activities. I have tried to live up to this as best I could as a battalion commander, a regimental commander, and a brigade commander at home and abroad, and I feel that I have found it easy to deal with people.

Not being a military person myself, is it normal for a regimental commander to spend so much time individually meeting personnel and being out in the field?

I know that this varies greatly. However, the unit commander is responsible for the operation and the outcome. This means that it is his responsibility to ensure quality and security. He is also responsible for developing the unit. An important part of being able to control and influence the operation is gathering knowledge and experience. Another part is to intervene when things go wrong or if there is a breach of security. How will the regimental commander be able to provide comments on selection for mandatory training if he does not know his personnel well and has not been with them on operations? The same applies to RALS (Framework Agreement on Pay, etc., for State Employees). Personally, my rule was to be out on operations half of the time. The remainder of the time I devoted to other things. In the Congo, I was out on operations more than half of the time.

But couldn't this be seen as being provocative, that you were going in and doing their job?

If senior commanders don't visit, inspect, and intervene, quality and security will gradually deteriorate. Through contacts with senior commanders, the young officers acquire role models and support.

Whilst operating in the kind of conditions that existed in the Congo, do you think about your career?

Yes, doubtless you do. In the Swedish international forces, many people hope that attention will be paid to the fact that they have served abroad and this should be a merit. Naturally, the people I worked with in Africa were thinking about their future, promotion, salary, and job assignments after returning home.

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What did you do to obtain an overview of everything that was going on in the Congo? From time to time, you were commander of the entire UN force both in Kivu and Ituri? How did you have time for that? You negotiated with the militia. I read in the Force Commander's Commendation Report that you personally went out and collected weapons from the militia?

During my time in the eastern part of the Congo, my focus was on the area I was responsible for; an area as large as half of Sweden. It is true that occasionally I was in direct command of the Ituri Brigade despite also being commander of the Kivu Brigade. Things were really hectic then. Negotiations with the different militia groups were not an everyday occurrence. Generally speaking, during the course of a day, I could, between the morning and evening meeting with the brigade staff, both negotiate and observe our units engaged in an operation as we had helicopters at our disposal. The weapons mentioned in the Force Commander's Commendation Report were confiscated on 8 June 2004, when we surrounded all the rebel positions in Bukavu, taking arms depots with approximately 400 weapons and ammunition. We also took thirty prisoners. It goes without saying that I led the operation. This was when we retook the initiative in Bukavu. Being 2,000 km away, the Force Commander would never have had a clear picture of the situation.

. . .

But was there time to sleep . . . and so on?

Why, yes. Commanders must not become embroiled in staff work and such duties. They must be out and about. The staff must carry out their own duties. When you are out in the field, you get many ideas about what must be done in the next stage and the stage after that. You form many impressions, talk with people, and hold negotiations and meetings. You meet civilian representatives of local authorities, the UN, and other organizations out there. These are the impressions you take back with you. As a commander, these are the things you need to drive development. Furthermore, you can use these impressions in the evening when reviewing the reports forwarded within the UN. As commander, you must have a good picture of what is happening in the field.

“*When you are out in the field, you get many ideas about what must be done in the next stage and the stage after that.*”

Why are you able to cope with this kind of mission? Earlier you said that you had practised a lot?

I became commander of the Boden Engineer Corps (Ing 3) in 1993 after having been commander of a rifle battalion in Macedonia. At the same time, I became commander of the Haparanda Border Regiment that consisted of the 2nd brigade of the Norrbotten Regiment. Over a three-year period, this border regiment conducted unit exercises and afterwards basic unit exercises. The regiment comprised more than 6,000 men and our largest unit exercise was carried out in 1994 with more than 2,000 men. This is where I was able to rehearse everything I had been doing gradually during my entire military life. A brigade structure is complex with indirect fire systems, air support, communication systems, transports, medical services, supply services, personnel services, etc. Leadership is required for such activities. During the three years, exercises were going on all the time involving at least one battalion. Consequently, it took me twenty-four years as an officer, with four years of studying, and most of the remaining years as a platoon leader, a company commander, and a battalion commander at home and abroad to become a brigade commander. I felt confident in my role. It was the result of education and long periods of training.

So the wintertime exercises in Haparanda [northernmost Sweden] were of benefit to you in Africa?

Absolutely. The principles were the same. Actually, it was somewhat easier in Africa as we didn't have such a complex artillery system and the communications structure was simpler. We didn't have an amphibian battalion in Africa either; something I did have in the Haparanda Archipelago. In addition, we didn't have to think about the safety of the opposing force (OPFOR). In Africa, it was obvious who the OPFOR was. The evaluations from the operations in Africa were much easier. In the operations area, snow and the cold were replaced by mosquitoes, elephant grass, and sections of the jungle.

Earlier you said that in Sweden you had learned a few things about friction that were of use to you in the Congo?

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Only experience enables you to be prepared and to eliminate as many disruptions as possible in advance.
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That's correct. Air and ground transports always involve friction with long delays due to bad weather and ground conditions. In addition to this, there are navigational errors and problems with the availability of indirect fire and air support. Lots of things can go wrong. The communications systems were a limiting factor in both Norrbotten and East Africa. The list can go on and on. Only experience enables you to be prepared and to eliminate as many disruptions as possible in advance. It is impossible to completely eliminate friction.

I didn't experience any problems with using my box of tools in the Congo. I knew the systems we were using there. One part was managing military

operations and the equipment and supplies, and the other part was managing the personnel; this was very important. And then there was also the political/diplomatic dimension to deal with.

What about the political game in the Congo that you were dependent on but which you had no control over?

The things I could influence, together with the UN diplomats, were regional issues to do with the peace agreement and Security Council resolutions. This involved quite a few things.

What do you mean?

We influenced regional political representatives, visiting diplomats and politicians, as well as the population primarily through our radio broadcasts and information operations.

What about what happened in Bukavu, where you were told that you couldn't do what you wanted to do?

That's correct. My superior at MONUC HQ in Kinshasa prevented me from using force when a rebel army bludgeoned its way into Bukavu. This resulted in the vicious sudden deaths of many civilians, a looted city, a discredited international community, and a five-month delay in the peace process. It was the worst six days of my life so far.

Because the UN didn't allow you to do something you knew had to be done?

I thought, 'Is there something wrong with my whole perception? Don't they see what I see? Why isn't my plan in keeping with the mandate?' The UN political representative in the Bukavu office was behind me, but I was stopped by UN headquarters in Kinshasa. That was such a terrible feeling. At that time, I didn't know that the UN headquarters in New York had not been informed by MONUC HQ in Kinshasa. A week later, the UN headquarters in New York claimed that MONUC should have intervened in accordance with my plan.

What did you do then? How did you deal with this?

The Force Commander was out of office. The person I mainly had discussions with during the Bukavu crisis was the Chief of Staff at MONUC HQ. The Chief of Staff fully liaised with MONUC's political leadership. I had thus already received a written order that I must not use force and disarm the rebels inside Bukavu. The chief of staff outlined a number of problems with having to deal with the rebel army on its way to Bukavu: we didn't have enough resources; there were constructive negotiations going on; we probably shouldn't antagonize the Rwandans; and so on. He further referred to the civilian staff, who

consequently saw political problems with my plans to intervene with force. I asked him what my rules of engagement were and what I should do if we were not allowed to use deadly force. He said he would get back to me. After having consulted with the MONUC leadership, his answer was: 'You can always block the road'. We did this, but it didn't help.

A recurring theme in my interviews deals with whether there was a need to bend the rules or exceed one's powers: is this something you've experienced?

You have wide-ranging powers if you have a Chapter VII mandate. But I can give an example. We carried out some operations south of Bukavu with attack helicopters. Respond on fire presumes that something is going to happen immediately. But what does that mean? There is an unwritten rule that if you are fired upon, you will respond with almost immediate fire. We returned around two-and-a-half to three hours later with attack helicopters and took out a machine-gun position. This is perhaps a slight bending of a rule. It was also very difficult to know if any act of abuse was committed when we took out the militia hideouts. If I had been on the ground, I would have had a very poor overview, and if I had been in the helicopter, I would have had to fly at a high altitude to avoid being hit by fire. The target area for an operation could be five times six kilometres in size and even larger. If, after we had taken control of the area, I had heard the clatter of a carbine here, shots being fired there, and so on, within the area and subsequently asked what had happened, I might have been told that was just a snake. After my period of service, it was investigated whether contingents fired without justification, but this was not talked about during my tour of duty. A couple of times I had the feeling that something wasn't quite right.

In some passages in your articles in the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences Proceedings and Journal, you write that there was a 'willingness' to use force. Might there be a problem when soldiers don't want to resort to force?

In the Congo, they were willing, but getting them going could be a problem. They had to be pressured into doing it. Everyone was a little worried about making mistakes. This is why it was important that commanders were on the ground; commanders who were prepared to take responsibility. The attack-helicopter crews were no exception.

Do you have an example?

After the Bukavu crisis, one contingent found itself in a number of situations where they didn't return fire when fired upon. On another occasion, UN soldiers in the autumn of 2003 destroyed a militia hideout and unfortunately incurred collateral damage. There was a militiaman who had a woman with a child in there. The woman was injured and the child died. It was very unfortunate, but

could not be helped. I couldn't see that they really could have done anything different, but the event repulsed the soldiers who were there. What made me angry in this case was that they didn't complete the operation; they let the armed militiamen escape. You can't do that. The militia then stop after a hundred metres and start firing at you again.

Is there any difference between nations when it comes to readiness to resort to force? What is your experience?

During international operations, nations with professional soldiers and professional non-commissioned officers find it easier to resort to force. Sweden has been at a disadvantage where this is concerned, but this is now being remedied. Otherwise, it is probably primarily the unwillingness of commanders to take responsibility and if there are any national caveats that are most inhibitive.

And this is different to Sweden?

In Sweden, we have up until recently had conscripts serving in posts for non-commissioned officers, as section leaders. That is a great difference. There is a difference in the training period of perhaps five years compared to a section leader from a country with professional armed forces. One knows all relevant systems inside out; the other only has his military service to fall back on. Experience and training are important factors when it comes to operational safety, for instance.

Did you ever doubt yourself when you were in the Congo? About whether you would successfully complete the mission?

After the Bukavu crisis, the Kivu Brigade was completely rocked to its core. Self-confidence was low. The peace process was shamefully delayed. We were greatly affected by the criticism of us that appeared in the media, and the civilian population was against us. My conduct during the Bukavu crisis was investigated regarding the question of responsibility. As a precautionary measure, I had printed the order I had received from the UN in Kinshasa, so I was exonerated at an early stage and was asked if I would like to sign an extended contract. Some of the officials at MONUC HQ were asked to resign their posts. After Bukavu, I started preparing a number of operations to the south. For example, there were areas with Rwandan Hutu rebels, whose leader, Interhamwe, had taken part in the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. They fled to the Congo and had controlled large areas and exploited the population and the natural resources for the past ten years. A couple of contingent commanders now objected so as to avoid taking part. There was a battle of wills between them and me; however, after the initial operations, the brigade started to function again.

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We were greatly affected by the criticism of us that appeared in the media, and the civilian population was against us.
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Objected to what?

The objections thus raised were that we should not launch proactive operations to protect the civilian population. They simply feared for their safety. So they were looking for positive arguments to convince me to cancel certain operations. They argued that the operation was too dangerous and the political problems with Rwanda might be exacerbated. They exaggerated the threat and suggested that the target area for the operation be moved to an area where none of our aims would be achieved. They argued that the operation involved an unacceptable risk for third parties (collateral damage).

How did you hear about these objections?

Primarily through the contingent commanders. The Kivu Brigade, with its South African staff, worked like a machine. I provided them with my intent and asked them to turn it into an order, which they did. On only one occasion did the South African Head of Operations present an order both to me and the contingent commanders and finish by saying that it was his duty as a South African officer to convey that he considered the operation to be too dangerous. For the battalion commander, who, during this period, always voiced opposition, this was grist to his mill.

Did he say this in front of everyone?

Yes.

What did you do then?

I decided on the operation and it was carried out in accordance with the staff plan. But I was a hair's breadth from giving up in the face of all counterarguments. It was necessary to deal with the militia to the south of Bukavu; this was a prerequisite for then being able to move more resources to North Kivu and subsequently to be able to hold elections. But now, as I mentioned, there were numerous objections from one of the contingent commanders. Finally, it was only the deputy brigade commander who took action so that his compatriots didn't have to. At that time, I said, 'I am just about to sign the order and if any contingent has further objections, you can notify your capitals, which, in turn, via your delegations in New York will have to visit UN headquarters. I will only take orders from them and MONUC HQ. If any battalion does not roll out tomorrow at the assigned time, the battalion commander will face a board of inquiry. The next day, the entire force rolled out and the helicopters were in the air.

"*If any battalion does not roll out tomorrow at the assigned time, the battalion commander will face a board of inquiry.*"

Could you do anything in the area?

Yes, we carried out several operations. Much good was done. However, from

a military standpoint, I was too weak, which I also stated. Nevertheless, we generally succeeded in destabilizing the militia to the benefit of the civilian population. The above operation was a proven success.

You mentioned the role of the media?

The Bukavu crisis and the period after this were awful. I had to show some kind of loyalty to the UN at the same time as I was bitter at having been stopped.

Did the media talk directly with you?

Of course. After the Bukavu crisis, all of East Africa's approximately thirty war correspondents came to Bukavu. Every day I had a microphone in my face. The UN in New York only issued a general statement declaring that 'we are not in Africa to wage war but to create peace'. This was done to take the media pressure off of us. It also alleviated some of the pressure on us.

. . .

If Bukavu was a (temporary) failure, is there any operation you would like to highlight as being exemplary?

Nyamamba. This was an operation that went very well.

I have a question about it: it says in the article you wrote for the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences Proceedings and Journal that 'the brigade commander led the operation from a command helicopter with liaison officers communicating with all deployed units?' Should the brigade commander do this?

Of course, this was a way of doing it. It worked very well here. After half the operation, we landed and continued control and command from the ground. At this time, the brigade was deployed all over Ituri [draws something] and the daily operations were run by the battalion staffs. When we were going to launch a strike on Nyamamba, we organized a so-called task group. All the battalions contributed with units forming a temporary battalion group. Its task was to disarm the militia, approximately 300 within the Nyamamba area. The militia's defence comprised three camps. On the ground, three company units, each of approximately 120–180 men, drove into the target area. A company was airdropped behind the militia. I led the operation there from a command helicopter. In the helicopter, there were representatives, senior officers, from the different contingents to which I was giving orders. Working like this was a way of creating local superiority by centralizing the units required for a specific task. When we were finished, the units returned to their normal deployment positions.

When you think of military professionalism, would you say that the Congo was a dream assignment with both a strong mandate and available resources?

Yes, you could say that, if you disregard Bukavu. The mandate was tailor-made for the operation. Together with our rules for the use of force, there was always a rule to ensure that our freedom of action was not limited.

According to the mandate, the population was to be protected. Consequently, the militia had to be disarmed. In addition, large areas were declared weapons-free zones by the UN. When we approached the militia's bases in order to disarm them, they usually began firing on us. So we returned fire under the respond-on-fire rule. When the fighting was over, which could take several hours, and the militia was disarmed, the keep-in-custody rule came into force. Consequently, prisoners were taken. Other rules allowed for the confiscation of, for example, weapons and other military equipment and supplies.

Do you make a practical assessment or who decides?

I took this up with the lawyers at MONUC. They didn't disagree.

It seems as if you see opportunities rather than limitations in rules and mandates?

Yes, that's absolutely correct. It is thus possible to examine mandates and *rules of engagement* from various viewpoints. There is always something that is suitable.

If you were to give advice to a younger colleague who is going down to do the same job, what advice would you give?

Operationally, the initial confrontation is absolutely crucial. Things will go wrong if you fail there. Continue training and pay attention to security and keeping your house in order. Be very consistent in making sure that the rules you have endorsed are adhered to. Personnel services must always come first. Get to know your officers and not just your senior officers. Devote a lot of time to the younger officers.

Why ally yourself with the younger officers? Is this a way of obtaining information from them? Earlier you said that it was important to give them your attention, but it cannot only be you who is doing the giving?

That's a lot of questions. Any alliance you make will be in the command group or strictly in the chain of command. The body of officers also consists of individual officers, all with fairly similar values. The role that is more important here is that of the older officer relative to the younger one. Advice on continuing; follow-up talks; where possible, it is about engendering mutual loyalty. The commanders of the younger officers must never be overlooked with regard to service. Shared values and mutual loyalty and trust will create a more successful unit.

So the time you spent out in the field is an investment on your part?

Absolutely. And there must also be a reward marker. They know that I will talk to their commanding officer about what I have seen, and so on.

How did you learn this?

During one of my first overseas postings, I had a commander who didn't have time for the infantry companies. Instead, he allied himself with his staff and the headquarters company and the supply company and he failed miserably. They had a quieter life and a cushy number, deployed by the shore of the Mediterranean. He didn't dictate any policy. Military capability and the levels of order, clarity, and confidence declined. I could not accept this way of working. I went there with my military ideals that I stuck to. I had my codes of conduct, and in my company, we still continued to train and exercise. That is where I learned that the commander must always set a good example. In the end, we became the best company; however, this wasn't because what I did was all that good, but it was due to the fact that the other commander had failed. I learned that the battalion commander must make exacting demands. These must be the same for everyone and they must be difficult to achieve. You must work hard to fulfil these demands. There must be orderliness and confidence all the way down through the ranks. While it should be difficult to achieve the demands, you should also be generous and acknowledge that you have noted their efforts. It should feel good to obtain a goal that one has had to work hard to achieve.

Congo

‘Difficult to prepare correctly’

Interview with Olof Granander

Interviewed by Lotta Victor Tillberg on 28 October 2010.
Location: The Swedish National Defence College

Can you tell me about any incident where you feel you have been tested in your professional role? Something that has presented an extraordinary challenge?

It kind of depends on what the starting point is. Shall we begin when I was serving overseas in 1999 and how this impacted my actions in FS 17 (the 17th Swedish rotation to ISAF PRT Mazar-e Sharif), the unit serving in northern Afghanistan? Or shall we look at FS 17 and see what consequences this will have in the future? Looking at your question, I think that inherent in the role of commander is the ability to create an overview and see common objectives. For me, that's military professionalism, where a number of minor incidents help accumulate a wealth of experience.

You mentioned that something took place in 1999–2000 that you had use of in 2008. Is there anything specific you have in mind?

What I had in mind then was the work we did in 1999–2000 to do with rules of engagement; when it is right to use force and all of that stuff.

I think I had benefited immensely from having worked my way through what the rules for the use of force mean in Kosovo when analysing which regulations would apply in Afghanistan. How should one react to the use of lethal force? It is the most difficult, yet the most important, discussion to have with the soldiers.

What was the process you had with rules of engagement during 1999–2000?

The situation in Kosovo was extreme as there was no infrastructure, no

police; in summary, there was nothing. We were everything, together with UNMIK (UN Mission in Kosovo), there was. We were the law and order in Kosovo. Our rules of engagement were formulated, but we had to interpret them. Once we had interpreted them, we conducted war games under the leadership of the battalion commander regarding how they would be used in the prevailing context at the time. I was very deeply involved, together with the legal advisor, and tried to see what room for interpretation existed.

Was fighting still taking place in Kosovo or had things calmed down?

No, there was no fighting; however, on the other hand, there were skirmishes between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. Initially, they often fired from one village to another and vice versa. They stopped that once we had established ourselves.

Can you give me any example of rules of engagement where you felt that this must be clarified, or where the significance of this must be made clearer?

The use of lethal force. We were stationed there to establish security, so we trained together with security personnel, for example. What we did then was to try to see how many of the police force's powers were linked to the rules of engagement. We only had Swedish law to start with; there was no law from Kosovo. We had to balance the Swedish legislation against the rules of engagement, which, in this case, were drawn up by NATO.

Were there situations where matters came to a head?

Yes, there were such situations. On one occasion, a patrol was tasked with protecting a packed bus and had to fire warning shots when stones were thrown at it. Was this right or wrong? What I learned was in such a situation, the commander must go in and take clear responsibility and make a clear statement regarding whether it was right or wrong with respect to both the soldier who has opened fire and the entire unit.

Why was this important?

Because it was the first time it had happened. Our mission was to protect someone else, but did we really have the right to use force in a situation like this? And to what extent did we have the right to use force? It is a learning process. I thought I had benefited considerably from such discussions. There were other occasions when we also opened fire. For example, when an APC (armoured personnel carrier) opened fire on a man firing at it. Subsequently, this turned out to be someone drunk doing the shooting. The soldier only fired a warning shot, but going from a threat of force to firing a warning shot is quite a large step. On that occasion, we also discussed if it was right or wrong. We learned a great deal from that discussion and all the ideas we got from it. I would try to

put this into practice when I then came to Afghanistan. When should we use the 90mm gun on a combat vehicle against a Kalashnikov? Where do you draw the line? I believe that soldiers are in great need of having rules in black and white. Soldiers need to be given as much direction as possible. In my experience, you can't be content with telling the soldier that 'the court will decide after the event' whether his or her actions were right or wrong.

In my experience, you can't be content with telling the soldier that "the court will decide after the event" whether his or her actions were right or wrong.

When you say the commander, like in Kosovo, was it you or the battalion commander who would decide this?

In Kosovo, it was the battalion commander who clearly called the shots. That taught me a great deal about how to act in such situations.

Could you see that this had any effect on how the soldiers subsequently coped with such situations?

It did affect how we handled situations there, actually on the ground. However, what has also affected me and my thinking regarding the use of force is when I worked at JFLCC (Joint Forces Land Component Command). But, above all, I have learned a lot when I have had to be confronted with the soldiers in different examples and combat situations. We developed specific examples of when it was OK and when it wasn't OK to fire. Of course, it's not possible to describe all the situations that will occur. But just by providing this little guide meant that I took the responsibility away from the soldiers and showed them that it is the unit commander's responsibility to sort out these things. I believe it is extremely important to learn to cope with this as a commander. The main purpose was to ensure that the soldier in the field should not have to feel that he or she may have done something wrong and because of that to then begin to feel traumatized by an incident.

In that case, is there a risk that the soldier can also be uncertain in a situation when it's important that he doesn't think about things too much?

At the same time, it's quite simple to understand if you refer to the principle of self-defence. It's important that you have this clarity and shift responsibility for the use of force to some kind of commander. It is difficult to assess at which level the soldiers perceive this, but it is important just to have this kind of thinking.

In the cases you have been talking about, was the conclusion that they had done the right thing?

Yes. It is also important to say why it was right.

Did you have other examples where you had to go out and tell the soldiers that they had gone too far or not done enough?

Well, we did have a problem, primarily when we were preparing for a handover in 1999–2000. Our successors weren't really as driven or enterprising.

What do you mean? Were they not as familiar with the environment?

Exactly. They weren't familiar with the environment and they acted somewhat passively, and despite having trained, they were unsure when they came down. The difference becomes clear when you see a skilled outfit and then a timid lot arrives. This is only natural. Obviously, you are uncertain when arriving at a new place with a difficult mission.

You were able to see there that they were uncertain?

Yes, I saw that there was a difference between the soldiers.

What did you do then?

We tried talking to their commanders and explain that they needed to be tougher in these situations. This is a mindset that you must shape.

A part of it must be to do with the fact that they are unfamiliar with the environment or was it more than that? They weren't as keen?

"*You are expected to conduct yourself in a certain way there. This is not at all how you would act at home as a sentry or at your post.*"

No. What do you do to gain respect in the Serbian–Albanian environment? You are expected to conduct yourself in a certain way there. This is not at all how you would act at home as a sentry or at your post. If you don't have it, they will then ignore what you are saying to them. In this case, you really have to show that you mean business. It has to do with culture. It's the same in Afghanistan. I was involved in supporting our operations in Afghanistan for several years before becoming the FS 17 commander. There was a huge advantage in having been part of the build-up and in all the different tours during the mission there. When I became commander, a lot of my work involved talking to the soldiers here at home prior to the mission. We talked about what it meant to be in Afghanistan, what their culture was like, and all that kind of stuff. We also talked about soft values; take what was in *Svenska Dagbladet* [a Swedish daily newspaper] today, for example. There it stated that we take greater risks as Swedish tactics require when we take off our helmets entering a village. Yet, this is just normal human behaviour. Here at home, we almost talked too much about cultural awareness so it had the reverse reaction. The soldiers became overcautious, and it took a little extra time before they learnt how to act down there.

Do you have a specific example?

No, nothing specific. Or I have a specific example from when we were on a reconnaissance mission, which takes place before you have been posted overseas and had that first important contact there. At that time, you act really

ham-fisted, not knowing how to react. You've already been lectured so many times on how not to do things. 'Should you take off your shoes, or should you do this or that?' All of that kind of thing makes you feel a little awkward. I could see that they were acting unsure. That's not a good thing when you are there to solve a difficult task. Then it's quite a nice feeling when you've completed the first and second meeting or task; then you can act more relaxed. Therefore, it's very difficult to prepare correctly before a mission. At the same time, you can't help talking about the differences.

"*The difference becomes clear when you see a skilled outfit and then a timid lot arrives.*"

Would you say that in this kind of situation, it's not good to be uncertain and show that you are not in control?

You are required to have great respect for their culture, customs, religion, and so on. You know that this is sensitive; in any case, that's what they claim. At the same time, they are also forgiving in some way. We believe that it will end in a catastrophe if we make a mistake, but this is seldom the case. We have a tendency to scare our own soldiers.

But what you are now describing must imply that as an organization, you become weak when replacing personnel?

That's how it is.

Was there anything you noticed?

No. We didn't notice it in Afghanistan. I believe we noticed it in Kosovo; those around us were more active, testing what they could do. The soldiers were tested, but nothing was organized; it was just exposure to new and unknown things.

If I understand you correctly, you took the dialogue about the rules of engagement that you had in Kosovo with you to Afghanistan as a useful experience?

Yes. In particular, the bit about it being important that the commander makes the decisions; for or against; if something was right or wrong. Then the organization will learn, and you will take the responsibility away from the person who has done something. We had several soldiers who literally shot and killed several people from both twenty metres away and even further. How should I deal with them? My method was to tell them whether or not it was right or wrong. We created a document in which I decided whether or not it was correct.

Is what you are talking about now something that can be read in a command manual?

Not that I know of.

Was it after having experienced something on your own that you saw how important it was?

Yes, I think so. I had it in my mind that it is quite an important matter. I believe it will help the individual soldier to process how they have acted or what they have achieved. It is not the entire solution, for we will never know how a person will react, but I believe this interaction between preparations and follow-up work is extremely important for our commanders to know.

Did you think your rules of engagement were good? Were they clear and tailored to what you were faced with?

I had no problems with handling the operation that we were going to execute with the rules of engagement we had in Afghanistan, nor in Kosovo either. This was followed by a debate here in Sweden about expanding the *rules of engagement.* Personally, I haven't really understood this, for I thought that those bits were fairly well covered. In Sweden, we have rather a broad interpretation of the principle of self-defence. If we are to be judged according to Swedish law, there are many cases where the right of self-defence can be used. In many other countries, the right to self-defence is not as developed. This means that they must have a lot of detailed regulations while that suffices for us. We get pretty far with Swedish tradition and Swedish legislation when we are subjected to violence and retaliate with force. The problem I experienced was when to use preemptive force.

When you were threatened?

Yes. What is the dividing line for when I am threatened? There is a typical example in the book *Mission Abroad*.

Which one do you have in mind?

The one where the soldier is on guard in Afghanistan and this car comes towards him. When you're standing there, how can you know whether or not the driver is a suicide bomber? How close can the vehicle be allowed to come? Where is the dividing line? It's very difficult. And how do you have this discussion with the soldiers? So I can understand that there are reasons for needing offensive rules of engagement. At the same time, I don't believe shooting dead a family instead of a suicide bomber will ever be legalized.

But if we take the soldier at the check-point, for example. Is it really the rules of engagement that determine his actions, if he shoots or not, just at that moment? I imagine that perhaps it is more about his gut feeling or morals. If this is so, then perhaps the rules don't play a role. Then ultimately I or the prevailing praxis will determine what will happen when the threat approaches?

Yes, I think that's a good point. We had lots of discussions about how we could get the car to stop. Instead of shooting and killing a person, we could try to stop the car. There were instances where you were standing guard, and someone was approaching in a car and driving towards you. What do you do? You don't want him to get close enough to blow you up. We began discussing things in other terms, and the solution was that the weapons we have are too weak and that we must have more powerful ones. Not to shoot bigger holes in people but to shoot holes in car engines so that the vehicles come to a halt.

Do you mean not just shooting as a deterrent but actually to bring the vehicle to a halt?

Yes. Not enough will happen if you hit a car when firing at it with a 5.56 calibre weapon. If you have a more powerful weapon, you can open non-lethal fire but still stop the vehicle.

Are cars ever stopped in this way?

No, we never experienced this. On the other hand, we felt we would be powerless in such a situation. We are not allowed to open fire, but you can actually take a half step. We can find another rung on the escalation ladder by procuring a heavier weapon that penetrates so we can stop the vehicle. Then it will become even clearer for the person sitting in the vehicle that this is not the time to drive. In Afghanistan, vehicles are fired upon all the time and this is a problem. It was reported that the Germans often fired on approaching cars that didn't do what the crew member in the rear hatch of the APC wanted them to do. We never had an increase in the escalation of force. We certainly had similar situations where people in cars didn't do as they were told, but we have a different morality and a different inherent practice for how we react. I believe it is very dangerous to use excessive force in peace-stabilization situations for then it becomes a war situation, and that is really the difference.

"I believe it is very dangerous to use excessive force in peace-stabilization situations for then it becomes a war situation, and that is really the difference."

Might it also be the case that you will create counteractions, and if you employ more force, you will have more force in retaliation?

I believe it is important for commanders to have worked through this, both ethically and cognitively. And that they have gained their own experience of the use of force in the situations they encounter. At Norrbotten Regiment (I 19), we are now working on a programme about weapons and the soul. We go through and talk about such things as life and death and different values with the soldiers. This is part of basic training. I think this is just as important throughout the entire chain, but the foundations are laid there. Knowledge about this is created in the minds of future officers. It is an important path to professional skills.

In Afghanistan, there were many situations in which you received reports

from the field stating that now 'this group' is being fired upon or being ambushed. As a commander, you can't then do that much since geographically they are several hours away from you. Then it is important that you have a good idea of who are out there. We are not talking about platoon level as these are mostly groups. What groups are out there? Who is their commander? And then it's a good thing if you have trained together with this group. During the preparation phase, I spent a lot of time training with the soldiers. We say that it is to show leadership, but actually it is to get to know them. In training, it is a cliché to show leadership by being in the field. Not too much thought is given to what you actually do when you are in the field. I get to know the soldiers and find out about their ability, how they act, how they talk, and how the group functions. These are things I think are important to know when working in an area as large as Norrbotten [Sweden's northernmost province] and having groups carrying out missions all over the place. You must be able to rely on the commander on the ground being a good judge and having a good head on his shoulders; that he knows what it's all about.

Is this realistic? Will you really be able to get to know as many as you need to?

Yes, during the months we had for preparations, I was with all groups, all platoons. Rifle companies are a little trickier because they act more like platoons, so it is more at that level. However, I was able to get to know all combat units.

So when you are at the camp and receive a report about an ambush, are you able to picture a face?

Yes, I can. You must be able to do this. I think you will be a lot more insecure if you don't have this ability. In any case, it gave me strength to know who it was.

How did you use it? Did this mean that you could act differently depending on what you knew about the people out there or was it more a case of feeling reassured that you knew who they were?

It was, above all, reassuring to know which people were out there. It also made the discussion we are trying to have about the perception of the situation easier, despite great distances and a dodgy satellite line. That is the discussion that will determine whether we decide to pull out or remain down there. The difficult thing is if you are going to continue forcing people to remain working out there although they have just been ambushed and really need to return home and lick their wounds. In such cases, we have made decisions about pulling out and continuing, depending on how the discussion has gone.

Are you the one who talks to them then?

Yes.

Is that the usual procedure?

It is for me. The staff will prepare the material, but before I come to a decision, I will personally talk to the commander on the ground.

Actually, couldn't the chief of staff or the staff have talked to them?

Absolutely. They've also done this. However, it's my responsibility and I would want to talk to the commander on the ground in order to decide whether we should take another step, or if we should let it go.

They sound like imponderable situations?

Yes, it's really difficult, especially when you have injured people. Then it's very difficult to take another step. Receiving a report that cars have plunged down a precipice or the like are imponderable situations. Then I believe you must have prior knowledge of the unit, its technology, and how it performs, but primarily of the people who are its members.

Do you and those in the field ever have different opinions on whether or not you should remain there or pull out?

On one occasion. It was when we had a unit attacked by an IED (improvised explosive device). At that time, I felt that they probably really wanted to pull out.

Was anybody injured?

No, but one vehicle was damaged. They had been seated in the vehicle and the IED had exploded under the vehicle and they were lucky that it had not been completely destroyed. It was a faulty charge. They probably felt extremely insecure when they were out there. I also felt this when we were deliberating. We were required to keep the road where this had happened open for traffic. For this reason, I decided that they should remain there. I felt that if they were ambushed or fired upon, they would be so well prepared that they could cope with it.

"*We were required to keep the road where this had happened open for traffic. For this reason, I decided that they should remain there.*"

Was it a Swedish patrol that was out on its own or were several nationalities involved?

They were Swedes; two plus two; two groups, two in each. They had four vehicles, so it was quite a strong unit that was well armed and well protected with Galten mine-hardened armoured patrol vehicles. They could operate locally. They were down in a valley. I decided they should remain there and we should remove the suspected secondary charge that should be there. We had to do something there, and so I decided that they should remain out there. Seven hours passed before reinforcements with recovery and mine-clearing equipment

reached them at around midnight. They began their work by trying to see if there was a second IED which they suspected was in a culvert. When they started their work, they were ambushed from all high points around them. It was midnight at that time and pitch black and firing continued for approximately an hour. They defended themselves the best they could. There were about fifty Finns and Swedes involved in this battle. Perhaps the enemy ran out of ammo, or they incurred a few injuries.

It was the enemy who ran out of ammo?

Yes, that's exactly what happened. We managed to get ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) Close Air Support over the area and that was certainly instrumental in getting the enemy to disappear so we could clear, check, recover, and then get out of there. This was a situation where I felt we were on the verge of whether or not to stay. At the same time, the task was so clear that my decision was easy. Still, you felt that they would really have preferred to get out of there as it was a little spooky there.

They didn't actually request to pull out?

No, it was more a feeling I had. I have also been involved in other situations where it has been abundantly clear that they feel that things are fine and they want to continue. Then I know that things are OK and that they can continue. Having a means of communication between the commander on the ground and the other commander is extremely important. The staff prepare and draw up a proposal, but this can't be fully trusted as there can be a lot of misunderstandings along the way before it gets to me. Checking with the commander on the ground is something I want to be able to do.

"The staff prepare and draw up a proposal, but this can't be fully trusted as there can be a lot of misunderstandings along the way before it gets to me."

When it comes to new technology, could you see yourself texting him out there?

That's not the same thing. As a last resort, if we can't talk, that would be an option. But it is a last resort. That is how I have been taught and schooled; the result of many years' experience.

Where does your training and schooling come from?

From having trained as a company commander, having been a battalion commander, having had a command post at home, and through all the exercises.

So this does not come from a good book you've read, but it's more a conclusion based on everything you've experienced?

Yes, I think so. Without pointing to any actual incidents. It's a series of incidents, knowledge building, and training. As a commander, it's important to be able to train and have time to get to know your company.

Are there different ways of doing this? Is it up to each commander to determine how much he should train together with his men?

That's my opinion. As a commander of a multinational mission, there is no cue sheet for what should be done unless one has been created since I was last posted overseas. We had a lot of views on the fact that there wasn't one.

Could you also look upon it as if there was consequently quite a lot of room for manoeuvre? And that you aren't shackled by a mass of predetermined things that have to be carried out?

Having a lot of room for manoeuvre is a very positive thing. But you should also have a number of musts. I was not sure if I should pay a visit to the [Swedish] ministry of defence and get their view of the entire situation. This was never made clear. You have to find your own way and it's somewhat frustrating if you feel that this should be served up to you. Now, I didn't have that need. It was probably more frustrating for the staff that didn't know how to plan operations for the commander.

How was that done? Were you able to have a say regarding which people you could take with you?

Yes, normally I appoint my staff. This case was somewhat special because my personnel were actually assigned to me from the Nordic Battlegroup. The units already existed when I went to Afghanistan in 2009. The question was which tasks should I assign to the different units for the organization we would have down in Afghanistan? Would the commando platoon be a commando platoon? Could the organization established be used down there or would it have to be restructured?

So there was already an established organization?

That we were to step into, yes. My initial task was to take command of these existing companies, platoons. Then reorganize them and adapt them to their new task and train them for it. They were incredibly well-trained soldiers. They had been on duty for at least a year and had worked together before.

And quite keen to be on their way?

Quite keen to get going. In that way, it was an easy unit to manage. However, I couldn't choose the commanders but had to take those I had, and so I had to structure the team as best I could. The only thing I could have a say in was who was to be my chief of staff and second-in-command. (pause)

I was thinking about the lessons learned process. Was there a structured lessons learned process when you went down to Afghanistan? Anything that you did

before and after? Did you meet representatives who had been there before or was it left up to you to look for such information yourself?

As a result of working with the operation in Afghanistan at JFLCC, I have extensive experience of the Afghanistan mission. That is why I'm hesitating somewhat to give an answer. I have taken part in four or five lessons learned seminars on these operations. And unfortunately, we usually discuss the same issues that we already discussed at our lessons learned seminar after Kosovo in 2000, and which they have continued to discuss. The issues deal with what the Swedish Armed Forces must be better at and about it taking too long for equipment and supplies to travel a distance of 5000 km. Things change, but at the lessons learned seminars, the issues are still the same. I believe this is because we keep making greater demands. We are never satisfied. In some way, it is inherent in our Swedish way of doing things and at the same time this is what drives us forward. We are very good at looking backwards and criticizing what we have done, instead of being proud of it. This is what I think of the lessons learned seminars.

It's up to the unit returning home to arrange the lessons learned seminars. It is up to them to decide what we should discuss, what items they want to highlight and all of that stuff. There is some kind of standard principle with an introduction followed by seminar questions. We changed that slightly since there was so much interest when we came home. We talked a lot about things and then we concluded with a panel discussion. We did this instead of dividing up into seminar groups, which, in my opinion, only leads to focusing on looking for faults and errors.

Then there is written documentation. There are reports on each mission, but it is extremely difficult to study the contents of the information. Partly because it is usually classified and stored in a database that we do not have access to, but must order the material. It is also really difficult to learn anything by reading reports; it is extremely difficult. We need to do what you are doing now; sitting down talking to me in order to understand what is actually in them. How well I'll succeed in interviewing those I surround myself with is up to me and my staff aides. Unfortunately, I believe that we have put too much stock in the written lessons learned documents. They think it will be like opening a Pandora's box and suddenly all the lessons learned will be there and jump into my head. This is roughly how this lessons learned process is described. But for me, a lessons [*sic*] learned is that we now have mine-hardened vehicles instead of soft-skinned vehicles. For me, it means that we have adapted our conduct to an entirely new concept or a new task. For me, it means that we have developed our order methods so that they have become even more effective. These are lessons learned. Concrete measures must be introduced into the training; then they are lessons learned. That's the way I think.

“
They think it will be like opening a Pandora's box and suddenly all the lessons learned will be there and jump into my head.
”

Do lessons learned take up any of your time when you are in Afghanistan? Are you working on any type of lessons learned procedure?

Yes, all the time.

Lotta recounts that at a conference, she heard the US Air Force officers describe how they chose to recruit the military senior staff with extensive personal experience to work on the lessons learned concept. The senior staff were sent to Afghanistan or Iraq with admittedly structured question templates, but they could also function as trainers and as support for the local mission. And where necessary, if anything exceptional or dramatic took place, they could go in and carry out investigations or function as a coach for the commander on the ground.

I met a few such people down in Afghanistan who checked up on what we did and how we obtained information.

Were they Americans?

Yes. The instructors who had been down there were the people who provided our unit with the best help in preparing for the task. They were people with real first-hand knowledge who could train the next team that was going to leave. This is the actual real *lessons learned* process during which there is an incredible transfer of knowledge. The soldiers who were in Afghanistan with me were subsequently in the Life Guards regiment and trained the next rotation. In my opinion, all that document handling doesn't really achieve anything.

Is it built into the system that people from previous missions will train future teams?

That's the aim and it is a good system. It's certain to continue that way for there is a huge thirst for knowledge.

We talk about what kind of preparations are required for people to be able to successfully carry out their missions. Lotta recounts a text in the book Mission Abroad about a unit to be deployed in Liberia that fails to obtain good information about the situation in the country.

. . . We had a very clear and good analysis of what we should do. I have done something that no one else had done before. Before we started training and before we began to assemble the units, I was able to take my company commanders, my immediate subordinate commanders, down to Afghanistan. We did a recce together down there. This was almost a year prior to our mission. We came there when the climate was right, that is in the summer; there's a great difference in being there during the summer or winter. Since I knew quite a lot about the purpose of the mission, I took my commanders down with me almost a year before deployment. We then analysed not only what the mission was but

could also establish that this was not a peace-support mission but a counter-insurgency mission. We discussed everything about soft issues, about different dress codes, protection, etc., and everything you have to go through when creating a unit. We did all this together down there in Afghanistan. We had a week to work on those things, and so when we went home, we had analysed the mission. We had established a number of core values. I have recommended that everyone else does this; take their commanders down there and do things on the ground. But no one has done this. This is a lessons learned that the system has not wanted to take on board. However, all of us who did this agreed that this was a criterion for success.

When you say it like this, I imagine you also get to know each other better during such a trip?

Yes, and it's tremendously important.

Was this idea of travelling together in advance your initiative?

Yes. It ended with me not having to go down with them any more as I knew that they knew what to do. When they then went down to carry out reconnaissance, they could do this themselves and didn't need to have their commander accompany them. That was a good start to the preparations prior to the mission. If you look at the lessons learned structure and knowledge, I think it's the educational foundations acquired at the Swedish Armed Forces that have helped me.

When you say educational foundations, it makes me think of a book. But it doesn't sound like you mean a book?

Training leadership is what I mean; successfully completing the task. Once the shooting starts, it's important to know what our mission is. If, for example, it's to make sure that the police start to do their job, that will be the crutch we use and it will serve as support for soldiers, platoon commanders, and the commander. Everyone uses the same crutch. Then they understand why they have to go out to this mined area despite having to search with a mine detector along the road in order to find an IED. They understand why they have to take such enormous risks. It's easy to lose your way if you only focus on ending the fighting. I believe this holistic bit is very important. It has to do with motivation. Why does a unit lose its powers of motivation after a while?

Because they can't see any meaning in what they're doing?

Exactly. Seeing meaning in what you're doing is also one reason why we were successful throughout even though we had casualties. We had ten to fifteen wounded soldiers, depending on whether you are counting Finns and Swedes

or only Swedes. That's quite a high number in total if you are looking at a force of five hundred men. Thank God none of them died except the interpreter, which naturally was a loss for the unit. Several of them who were there are still on crutches and are in pain. The interesting thing is that they do not regret what they did. Why don't they? Well, because they really believe in what we are doing there. I think that is an example of how important that is. Why do the Danes have a suicide problem? Why do American soldiers have a suicide problem? Somehow, they haven't processed things and haven't believed in what they are doing.

"*The interesting thing is that they do not regret what they did. Why don't they?*"

They have probably faced quite different situations?

Possibly. That might be the case. I don't know. I don't know how hard it is for a Danish soldier. It's the same feeling. You roll out; you don't know if anything's going to explode under the vehicle; the same thing every day.

Did you hold a lessons learned seminar when you came home?

Yes.

Who else has been interested in your experiences from Afghanistan?

There is an interest from many quarters, but it is fairly diffuse. It pops up a little here and there. Sometimes it's the media, sometimes it's a service club that wants to hear about it, and sometimes it's the Swedish National Defence College. This is also true for platoon commanders and group commanders; they are asked to recount, if they want to, what they have experienced. The lessons learned seminar and the report we submit constitute a document that describes many things. When we were in Afghanistan, we sent seventy-five lessons learned reports home based on an established template. The Life Guards regiment did not have a single one a year later. Although we sent them home whilst we were there, they were not there when the soldiers who were going down there to relieve us were training. This is because of our classification system and that it may not be disseminated. Slowly but surely, this is becoming better, but it is depressing that we are doing this in 2010.

How much would have had to be classified?

That's difficult to say. Generally speaking, I think everything could be kept in the public domain. At the same time, the problem is that when everything is compiled, it's generally difficult to see if it should be classified. I think the Armed Forces Command has shown very little interest in our lessons learned. They were there following up what we were doing down there but afterwards there have not been any questions, reflections, or ideas. Yet these are the people making the decisions.

Why is that? Do they have too much to do?

Yes, that's why. Everyone is on a never-ending treadmill. I believe no one has time to stop and allocate time. When we were at JFLCC, we overlooked those guys who were fighting in Maimane. It was in the Norwegian PRT (Provisional Reconstruction Team) a couple of years ago, in 2007 or 2008. Some Swedish soldiers and an officer were on a visit there. They experienced quite a disturbing incident where an entire village stormed the PRT compound. They [the villagers] were firing their weapons and torching the place, so they [the PRT] had to defend themselves with handguns. The Swedes did a good job, but when they came home, the armed forces failed to collect their experiences and tap into them. Someone should have at least listened to them and given them feedback that they had done a good job. We failed to do that when I worked at JFLCC and this was because things happen too quickly. To keep up with the times, history is somehow quickly forgotten.

I also think we are somewhat trapped in planning systems, but perhaps that doesn't have anything to do with the subject. It's more 'Soviet-like' than creative. I have several examples of where the planning in our matrices becomes the governing factor, instead of listening to what is happening on the ground. Things happen much quicker on the ground. Things develop much faster there than the plans you envisage and then add on top of that money and budgets and everything else. Unfortunately, it is the plans that dictate. Decisions are made using out-of-date information. If you give an administrator an assignment and this person is going to investigate how something should be done, he will come back with a proposal in about a year. This is roughly how long it takes to investigate everything and collect facts, etc. He has then gathered facts there and he has processed, studied, and fed them into the system. When the results are presented, they will already have become outdated; that's how fast international operations are. You only have to replace a commander who is in charge in Afghanistan in order for everything to have been changed, resulting in new concepts and new tasks. The Swedish planning system is not dimensioned for this. It becomes frustrating and difficult to handle.

> *"When the results are presented, they will already have become outdated; that's how fast international operations are."*

At the same time, I am noticing that those who have worked with units are coming to their senses. They realize that if they are to solve their task, they must train together with their soldiers.

One thing that has been of great help to me in both Afghanistan and Kosovo is the total defence system we have had and trained with in Sweden.

What do you mean then?

This cooperation we had. Practising cooperation and meeting different kinds of people and creating an understanding of the fact that there are different needs and different systems. Normally, I always say that the only training I have

benefited from when carrying out international operations is the total defence training. That's because we talked so much about cooperation. A peace-support operation involves a lot of cooperation and trying to get many forces to pull in the same direction. It is the principle of total defence in all its glory, and I think this is the reason why all our commanders have succeeded so well in all the overseas missions they have been involved in. It is the realization that it is important to train. Today it is no longer incorporated into the officer programme.

How come you have taken it with you then?

In recent years, we have completely dismantled this principle of total defence. Those of us who are a little older have grown up with the Swedish total defence system. But today we don't talk about it and there is no longer any textbook describing the total defence system.

Do you mean that experience of actually working together with the civilian population is no longer acquired?

No. This is included in a comprehensive approach, so it is beginning to make a comeback, but there will be a large gap for a number of years as a lot of this has actually been lost.

Do all of you who have been commanders in Afghanistan belong to a slightly older generation?

Well, perhaps compared with those who are new. All the commanders who have been down there belong to my generation.

I can give an example to show the difference between a Swedish and a Western or other officer. I was on a PRT course in Germany. In NATO, the generals sit right at the front, then the colonels and then everyone sits in descending order; that's orderliness. I ended up next to a Hungarian colonel. You should bear in mind that the PRT course was designed to create an understanding of the need for cooperation between the military component and the civilian component. When we were then filling out our questionnaires about how we felt the course could be improved, I saw the Hungarian next to me write: 'Too many civilians on this course'. This shows that there are really huge differences in how we perceive our task.

I could see there is a conflict. Sometimes it seemed that the military thought that if the civilians stayed out of things and didn't disturb us when we are doing our job, everything would go much smoother. If that conflict was so obvious at the conference, what's it really like then?

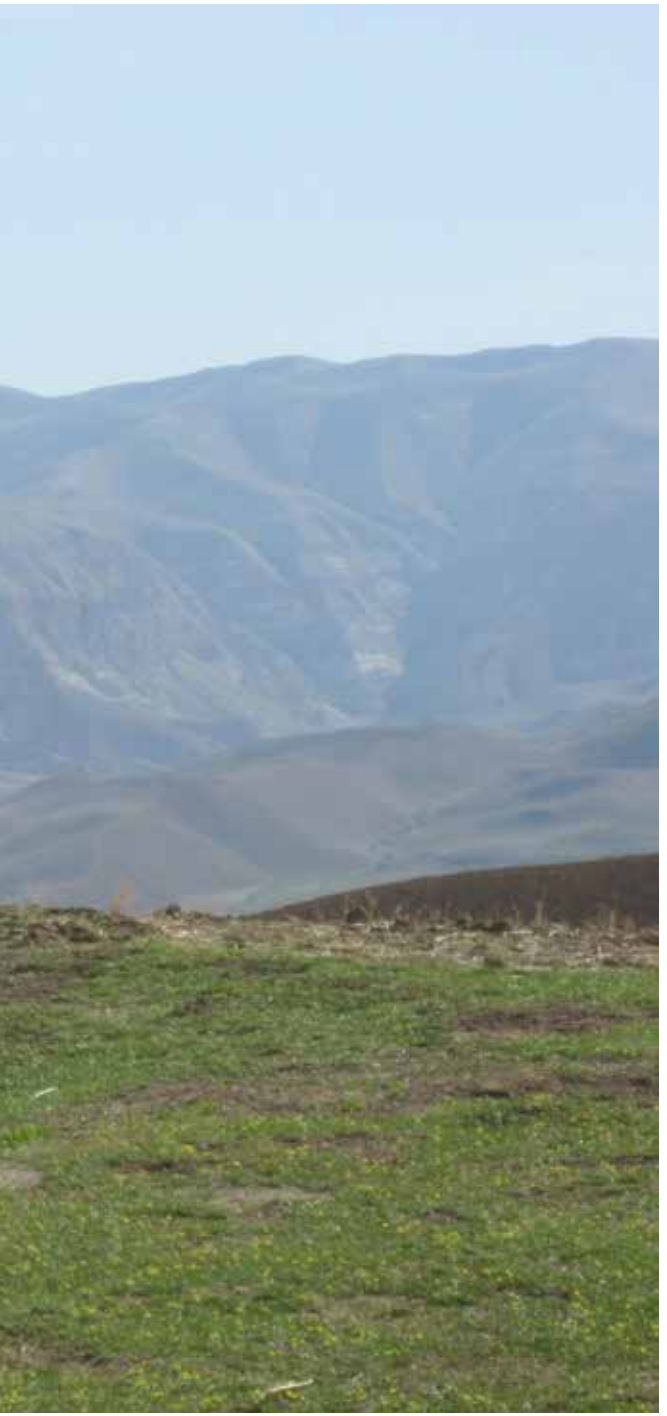
There are also conflicts between interested parties out in the field, between civilians and the military, between generations with different values and between

We Swedes are not perfect and easy to work with, even if we think so.

different cultures, between European values and American values. We Swedes are not perfect and easy to work with, even if we think so. However, based on the values that we take with us from home, we humans find it more or less easy to cooperate with each other. As a PRT commander, getting SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) to work alongside American aid workers is not simply a foregone conclusion. Neither is getting Swedish aid workers to work together with the Swedish military a foregone conclusion, even if the mission is obviously to work towards a common goal by cooperating. For example, you will have to accept that the American contribution is necessary and must have a major influence; this was not always welcomed by the PRT.

Afghanistan


TOYOTA



Gaining Experience from the Examples of Others

Military Skills in International Operations. Lotta Victor Tillberg, PhD

In this book, we have seen seven military officers talk about challenging situations when they served overseas. What can we do with another person's experience? When will another person's experience be more than just an interesting story? Is it possible to become more proficient using someone else's experience? And if so, how?

Today, few organizations or corporations can afford to repeatedly make the same mistake. Nor can anybody afford to waste their resources. Thus, an organization's ability to translate its employees' experiences into useful knowledge is perhaps the most important thing an organization can attend to. The transformation the Swedish defence has undergone in recent years, resulting in a transition from invasion to operational defence, has brought the issue of how the Swedish Armed Forces uses the experiences of soldiers and officers to a head. How we effectively transform experiences from soldiers and officers who have served overseas into knowledge will be crucial to the success of future international missions. It is no exaggeration to say that lives are at stake.[1]

A common problem when it comes to learning from experiences is that knowledge and information are often mixed up. Many lessons learned concepts deal mainly with the latter, even if the terminology appears to also develop know-how. Allan Janik argue that the starting point for discussing professional knowledge reflectively in any profession is epistemological, you need to establish the distinction between formal or explicit knowledge and practical or

1 The chapter is an adaptation of the lecture given by the author at the 6th International Lessons Learned Conference, arranged by the Swedish Armed Forces and the Folke Bernadotte Academy, at Military Academy Karlberg on 24 June 2010.

tacit knowledge (Janik 2008). The later is implicit in actions and needs another form of analysis than the formal, explicit knowledge. This final chapter deals with how an organization like the Swedish Armed Forces can work with lessons learned, with focus on developing practical and experience based knowledge. By lessons learned, we mean here methods for transforming employees' experiences into skill and know-how that is useful for the organization.

An experience is what you acquire from having personally encountered or undergone a situation or a course of events. The experience has involved your senses: your eyes and ears, smell, taste, and touch. You can reconstruct the situation or the course of events afterwards by describing it for someone else. You recount what you have experienced in an earnest and reflective way. Another person's experience can be accessed using descriptions of something encountered or undergone. The collective experiences of an organization are expressed in practice, in the form of institutionalized procedures for acting, assessing situations, and taking decisions. These patterns of behaviour can be both pronounced and implicit.

If you are interested in a phenomenon like *the exchange of experience*, this is roughly where the problems begin. In itself, experience is not transferred as soon as something encountered or undergone is described to us. Consequently, this raises a number of significant questions: what importance can we attach to a person's subjective description of a course of events? What conclusions can be drawn? In the name of science, shouldn't an experience be assessed and evaluated? And how can we work with experiences and avoid arbitrariness and incorrect conclusions? These are a number of important starting points that by way of introduction deserve to be developed; the first one is experience as a flexible and open concept.

> *What importance can we attach to a person's subjective description of a course of events?*

An Example from the First Gulf War

In 1991, John Brasfield finds himself in the first Gulf War in Iraq. He is a scout in the American army. He has a tape recorder with him that he turns on in critical situations in order to send, if necessary and possible, a final greeting home.

'And I had made the tapes in case I was killed, that my family might know what happened to me in those last few moments, what actually took place. Maybe if I didn't die instantly, I'd be able to say goodbye to them'.

On 27 February 1991, Brasfield is in a light-armoured Humvee on a motorway between Basra and Baghdad. His reconnaissance patrol has been ordered to wait for the American tanks that had stopped to refuel. Brasfield's reconnaissance patrol, acting as an advance party, is now the closest to the Iraqi forces without any protection. Whilst parked on the road, they are caught off-guard

by retreating Iraqi forces who are now fleeing from Basra in the direction of Baghdad.

'And what was happening is the Iraqi forces were retreating out of Basra to Baghdad. And we just happened to be right in the middle of it at that point in time. And these were vehicles. They were buses, trucks, what we would call light-skinned vehicles, or vehicles that we could engage and destroy very easily. So we could actually stop these vehicles on the road. And that is what we started doing. And we got to a point of about 200 plus prisoners that we are taking'.

When the American tanks have refuelled, Brasfield and his group are ordered to continue. They have now disarmed the Iraqi prisoners, leaving them sitting along the side of the road. Before leaving the place, they radio the position of the prisoners to the battalion staff. Then they continue on their way. When they had driven a few kilometres along the road, Brasfield discovers that the American tanks behind them are shooting at the prisoners instead of attending to them. Brasfield's patrol experiences the firing at such close range that they are afraid of being hit by friendly fire themselves.

'Vehicles continue to come down the road. And instead of processing prisoners – the Bradleys have quite a bit of range on them – they were engaging these vehicles and destroying them. It was not a fair fight '.

Brasfield has his tape recorder turned on and on the tape, you can hear firing and radio traffic.

'Why, why are we shooting at these people, when they are not shooting at us?'

'I know. They want to surrender. [BLEEP] armored vehicles. And they don't have to blow them apart'.

Nineteen years after the incident on the motorway between Basra and Bagdad, John Brasfield (JB) is interviewed in 2010 on the radio programme *This American Life* by the journalist Ira Glass (IG). In one interview segment, they specifically talk about Brasfield's experience on 27 February 1991. The interview is interspersed with the tape recordings Brasfield made in 1991.

IG: 'Now that's you? '

JB: 'That was me speaking there. And I was agreeing with the platoon sergeant, Sergeant Mulek, about these guys want to surrender, we've got armor going up against light-skinned vehicles – trucks, buses, whatever – that were carrying people back and forth. I didn't feel that there was any need to be killing these people, because they didn't have any fight left in them. All we had to do was take prisoners. . . . I felt that, at that point in time, if we would have set up a roadblock, that we could have processed Iraqi prisoners all day. And there was no need for the unnecessary taking of human life'.

More radio traffic from the incident is reproduced from the tape recording. The voices are agitated and are interrupted by continual gunfire. *'[T]hese guys don't want to fight. You saw the equipment we blew up. They could have wasted*

us', then you hear someone saying, *'Don't shoot'* and then somebody else says, *'engage'*, then, '*Why don't you tell them, sir, they they are willing to surrender? Tell him that. Why don't you tell the commander that?!'* whereupon someone replies, *'I told them that'*. Directly afterwards someone says, '*It's murder'*.

IG: 'You're on here saying, it's murder. Tell the commander that they are willing to surrender. Did anyone tell the commanders that these guys were probably willing to surrender?'

JB: 'I can't recall if we did or not. I'm sure that the platoon leader did make some reference that these guys didn't have any fight left in them. But I couldn't tell you if that was actually said or not. It just felt like we were doing the wrong thing'.

On 28 February 1991, a ceasefire was announced and the Iraqi forces surrendered. Many questions were left unanswered regarding what happened that day on the motorway between Basra and Baghdad.

IG: 'Now since then, you have had a lot more combat experience. This is still pretty early in your combat career. Just explain briefly where else you served and where else you saw combat'.

JB: 'Well, I was in the Gulf War. I finished that out. And I've also spent time in the Bosnia Kosovo conflict. With the Kosovo conflict, flying military intelligence missions for that'.

IG: 'And with more combat experience, do you feel the same way, that it was wrong for the commanders to just fire on these guys and not try to get them to surrender?'

> *"We were soldiers, they were soldiers. There is risk. They knew what the risk is."*

JB: 'No, actually my view has changed quite a bit. It has done almost a 180. And I feel now that what we did was right, that we were not actually murdering people unnecessarily. We were soldiers, they were soldiers. There is risk. They knew what the risk is. People that haven't been exposed, they may listen to those tapes and still feel like it was murder. As I grew a little bit more battle hardened, I realized there are risks. And they were risks that those soldiers were willing to take. They were risks I was taking at the same time. It could have been me that was killed'.

Brasfield recounts that he has friends who were involved in the same event and they still feel, twenty years later, that what took place was an unjustified and improper use of force.

JB: '. . . They feel like they have killed people unnecessarily, or were part of a team that killed people unnecessarily, and some of what we did was wrong. I've struggled through that myself. And I feel what we did was right, and what we did was just, and we did what we had to do. And I've moved on with my life. I was able to do that because I came to that conclusion. If I had felt like I had murdered people on the battlefield, I don't think I could live with myself. I think I would have a lot of stress and grief, and not be able to deal with a lot of issues.

I think that's basically what it comes down to. You've got to either rationalize what you did, or you're going to live with a lot of guilt'.

IG: 'When you take a moment and you reflect on it, do you feel like there's a part of you that's rationalizing?'

JB: 'I did my rationalization some time ago. And I've made my decision on what I did was right. And I stick with it. And I've rationalized at that point. I think you've got to do that so you can live with yourself'.

The soldier must live with their experience, regardless of what form it takes. What Brasfield's answer shows is how the significance and meaning of an experience change over time. When the event takes place, his immediate reaction is that it is unprovoked violence; that the American forces are, without justification, firing at Iraqi soldiers who had surrendered. After more years in the profession ('As I grew a little bit more battle hardened'), his viewpoint has changed. Now his argument is about risk taking: 'We were soldiers, they were soldiers. There is risk. They knew what the risk is'.

The point of highlighting and reproducing the interview with Brasfield and the recordings made in 1991 is that together they illustrate the problems with gathering experiences and learning from them. Experiences are not static and cannot easily be generalized; rather they are associated with an individual and, as shown in the example, they change over time. As a method of capturing experiences, the interview should be seen as a necessary first step towards a deeper understanding. The interview can be a way of describing a course of events – a method for obtaining someone's description of how a particular situation was experienced. Only when there is a description can it be critically reflected upon; only then can it be contrasted with other people's experiences and be tested against other information.

The aforementioned Gulf War example also shows how the concept of experience must be regarded as an open one. This means that it embodies a variety of different interpretations and meanings and is in contrast to a *closed concept*, which is defined by specifying the necessary and sufficient conditions 'if and only if' (Nordenstam, 2009). The course of events have a specific meaning for Brasfield, but his colleagues who were involved in the same events interpret things differently and draw other conclusions regarding what took place.

If we choose to view experiences as a closed concept, in the sense that we believe we will be able to seal and predict the concept's meaningful content, this proves, time and time again, to be too narrow a perspective with regard to military professional practice. Reality, with all its complicated factors and unpredictable friction, requires a broader understanding of what is hidden behind the linguistic façades of the concepts. What *imminent threat* means in a textbook or in a fictitious scenario and what it means in reality may be completely different. From a practical epistemological perspective the focus is on

"*What imminent threat means in a textbook or in a fictitious scenario and what it means in reality may be completely different.*"

how professionalism is expressed in action. These are the conditions of practice: being able to manage what is possible, feasible, and desirable in the situation and at the same time (preferably) being proven right after the event.

Knowledge of Familiarity: Acting in Unpredictable Situations

An activity comprising stages that can be fully formulated using instructions, namely do it this way, can be called *routine practice.* The rules here are closed, i.e. a certain task can only be solved using specific rules that can be predicted, and these can be formulated in instructions. When working in environments characterized by uncertain conditions, unpredictability, and contradictory contexts, the term *development practice* is more relevant. The rules that constitute a development practice cannot be predicted or fully formulated in instructions (Göranzon, 2009). In a development practice, the degree of complexity is so huge that you must be able to act independently and under circumstances not covered by any rules and regulations. For example, Ulf Henricsson's mission in Bosnia involved continual negotiations with the different parties in the conflict. A recurring feature of these negotiations was that what had been said or promised the one minute didn't apply the next. Issued passes still weren't enough to get through roadblocks despite promises from senior officers. In October 1993, the massacre at Stupni Do took place. For two days, Henricsson unsuccessfully negotiated with Ivica Rajic, the commander of the Bobovac Brigade, to be allowed to enter the village. In his interview, Henricsson says the following:

> "We had decided that we were now going to go into Stupni Do regardless of whether or not we had permission. We gave them an ultimatum: "We're going in at 13.00". As usual, they tried to bullshit us; they didn't want to let us in and there was a lot of toing and froing. They had a new excuse when it was 13.00. By then, I had issued an order that we would go in regardless of whether or not we had permission."

Henricsson personally accompanied the Swedish platoon that, in order to get to Stupni Do, was going to get through the roadblocks set up by the Bobovac Brigade.

> "As usual, they stopped us by using mines again. . . . After some discussion, the soldiers at the roadblock said that only I would be allowed to go into Stupni Do, but not the platoon. . . . I then issued an order to the platoon commander, "When my SISU leaves, follow close behind me. Keep the vehicles close together; no more than a metre between them". . . . "[I]t shouldn't be possible to get a single mine between the vehicles". We drove straight through. That's how we got into Stupni Do."

Most military activities can be regarded as development practice. In the complicated reality of a development practice, having the skills and being able to use the technology are not enough, nor is knowing the rules and regulations and (in theory), for example, the mandate under which you are operating. This kind of professionalism is dependent on a form of analogical thinking, a mental ability to establish connections between memories and experience of earlier events. This kind of thinking is what you have to rely on in when decisions must be made quickly and based on unreliable facts.

This epistemological perspective corresponds to how the interviewed military commanders talk about military professionalism. Anders Brännström expresses this as follows:

> "If we are talking about military professionalism and making decisions, then we can compare it to a puzzle with hundreds of different pieces. Only when all the hundreds of pieces have been put together will you be able to say that you know what it looks like. However, as commander you can never wait until you have all the pieces of the puzzle. You have to act on what you have. . . . What I mean is that you must be able to make decisions based on unreliable data, on very unreliable data. You have to be able to make decisions based on your *gut feeling*. You have to get a sense of where things are going. You can't wait until the staff have finished thinking. You must have an idea before then. You have to choose the direction. And you have to also be lucky."

This quotation appears to be consistent with what have here been termed development practice and knowledge of familiarity. The interviewed Mats Ström chooses to talk about proven experience in similar terms:

> "For me, proven experience is having been exposed to a lot of different situations. None of this can be found in books. And when a new situation arises that you have not previously experienced, you're able to act because you recognize situations you've been involved in before."

Problems with Follow-up Methods

Often the methods that companies and organizations normally use in their follow-up processes focus on visible and measurable forms of knowledge, referred to here as theoretical knowledge. Other common terms are bookish knowledge or factual knowledge. Financial control systems, quality assurance methods, and methods for performance monitoring almost always focus on indicators, i.e. quantifiable measurements. This also applies to many of the lessons learned concepts. As for understanding and following up the role of knowledge of familiarity in organizations, there are major shortcomings in both the development of

knowledge and methods. In many respects, there is a lack of effective methods for using forms of knowledge that cannot be expressed exactly in language or by a number in a questionnaire. Categories of knowledge, such as judgement, risk taking, imagination, courage, responsibility, guile, resourcefulness, etc., are not dealt with since established research traditions focus elsewhere (see, for example Alvesson 2013, Isberg & Victor Tillberg 2012). The lack of methods for using knowledge of familiarity leads to many organizations unilaterally engaging in developing and following up the formal theoretical knowledge. When personnel and economic resources are channelled to these activities, this is often at the expense of knowledge of familiarity, which tends to be forgotten or misunderstood.

For example, in the mid-1980s, international work–life research highlighted a phenomenon called 'functional autism'. Researchers saw that the introduction of expert systems (computers) and technological development had an unexpected side effect, namely that judgement was less certain. People could not do operations that they had previously been able to do; professional skills had thus been eroded (Göranzon, 2009).

When attention and energy are concentrated on what can be measured, in research there is a well-documented risk of the deciding factor in skilled professionalism, namely judgement, eroding and ultimately ceasing to exist.

In her book *Utvärderingsmonstret: kvalitets- och resultatmätning i den offentliga sektorn* [The Evaluation Monster: Quality and Result Measurement in the Public Sector], political scientist Lena Lindgren (2008) describes how, with the best of intentions, the desire of decision makers to follow up and streamline organizations leads to an enormous overproduction of evaluation information. Lindgren presents research showing that this comprehensive documentation is produced without any obvious uses and, furthermore, what is documented does not form the basis for decision making. Even other organizational researchers point to risks with the follow-up trend. The literature describes how follow-up activities create perverse side effects in the form of strategic behaviour, for example activities are controlled to obtain good results in quality measurements, but the task is not completed. Other documented effects are defensive routines, namely tasks or actions that yield documented negative results are avoided. In addition, there is a description of how organizations 'stagnate' as innovation is no longer worthwhile when ambition is penalized and mediocrity is rewarded. Following up and evaluating activities can also lead to shop-window behaviour, where the formal structure becomes a façade that is displayed, disconnected from the actual activities (Ydén, 2008).

Within work–life research, there are descriptions of how there is a risk of professionalism deteriorating when professional competence can no longer be relied on – you lose the ability to make judgements (Alvesson 2013, Göranzon 2009).

In the ESO (Swedish Expert Group for Public Economics) report on the

future skills supply of the Swedish Armed Forces, the authors note how established structures counteract the development of what they term expert knowledge based on experiences:

> In today's Swedish Armed Forces, there are permanent, established standards for how competence is regarded and produced at both the individual and collective levels. The education and socialization of officers have aimed to create compliance with pre-defined criteria. Furthermore, Swedish officers' career development has been systematically developed in a way that has standardized them and has meant an easy and diligent handover of duties and extensive internal education. Both these factors hamper the development of experience-based expert knowledge when serving with troops, working at headquarters, and conducting administrative work (Ydén & Hasselbladh, 2010).

When soldiers and officers describe what is required of them when serving overseas, they often talk about situations involving difficult assessments, unpredictability, and adverse conditions. The missions they faced are frequently described as a number of tasks they have to be able to master simultaneously. They describe situations that require professionalism at the proficient or expert stage, where knowledge of familiarity is particularly prominent and crucial. Thus, given what has just been described, there is a need for knowledge and methods that build up and develop knowledge of familiarity.

Why We Need Examples

When a professional practice is subjected to strong forces of change, the concrete examples of what professionalism is vis-à-vis the operation's core tasks are of particular importance. Working with actual examples has many advantages. For instance, new management concepts and the relevance of change tools should be assessed in relation to how concrete examples from a professional practice describe the nature of the missions and their challenges. Examples of actual situations in military professional practice make it possible to discern how different forms of knowledge are active and what role they play in various contexts. This enables the creation of support structures for the skills you want to develop, and avoid the opposite, that is developing structures that hamper or counteract the development of the desired professionalism.

By reflecting on examples, different experiences can be put in a broader context. This can be seen as a kind of knowledge development helping to increase understanding of the professional practice within which you are expected to operate.

Basically, all understanding of professional practice is based on examples; one could say that examples are the language of experience.

Basically, all understanding of professional practice is based on examples; one could say that examples are the language of experience (Nordenstam, 2009). By examples, we mean defined situations in a profession. Naturally, an important point here is that examples themselves do not transfer knowledge. For instance, you do not become more experienced or skilled simply by reading about the events at Stupni Do. It is through reflection and systematic dialogue about several examples, placed side by side, that knowledge is developed. And in particular, the role of knowledge of familiarity is clarified by using many different examples. This is something traditional methods, such as questionnaires and external observations, cannot achieve.

For example, Hans Håkansson was deputy battalion commander when the riots unexpectedly erupted in Kosovo in 2004. In less than twenty-four hours, four and a half years of peacekeeping efforts came to nothing. More than 700 houses were burnt to the ground, 30 or so churches were destroyed, and thousands of people from the ethnic minorities were forced to flee. Outside the village of Caglavica, Swedish soldiers and officers distinguished themselves when, in contrast to the peacekeeping units of other nations, they prevented a confrontation between the Serbian minority in Caglavica and Albanian demonstrators. Håkansson, the commander on the ground, describes the situation:

> "We were in open terrain, with an unpredictable crowd, without tools. Normally, when you are carrying out exercises, you have a toolbox; you have access to alternatives. If this happens, then I have these alternatives to resort to. But there was nothing like this in Caglavica. No functioning command and control organization (because it wasn't needed since we were not supposed to display any leadership). I didn't even have a map with me. It was as far away from NCW (Network Centric Warfare) as you could get. I have worked for seven years on the Attle Project, developing computerized control and command systems for combat. And here I was without paper and pen. Marko had to draw what was going on in the dust on the car."

When reflecting afterwards on what enabled him to deal with the mission while under great pressure, he expresses himself as follows:

> "I had benefited from having been exposed to so many stressful situations, so I had confidence. . . . [S]tanding there, I felt that I had been under so much pressure before that I could manage this. And I knew that I would be able to keep a cool head. I would not panic. The command and leadership training I have received was really good."

What do you mean then? Are you referring to courses, books, or something else?

> "Practical experience. What I benefited from when I was there was all the practical training that I have been fortunate enough to take part in, for

example after having been a platoon commander, a company commander, and a battalion commander of troops at the large exercises down in Skåne [a province in southern Sweden]. Practical experience – this is something you can't learn from reading. It gave me confidence when I was there in Caglavica."

At the time, Håkansson had no training in how to handle riots. Nevertheless, he was able to carry out the mission. Håkansson is careful to stress the efforts of others who took part in the battle. In the same interview, when asked why they were able to stop the confrontation at Caglavica, he says this was due to:

"The efforts of the company commanders; that they succeeded in staying together and that the soldiers were so persevering. They remained there and took a battering hour after hour after hour. A terrible amount of force was used. Another success factor was that everyone was so controlled; no one began firing indiscriminately. If a single soldier panics and starts firing, or if one of the gunners operating the heavy machine guns had gone off the rails, twenty or so people could have been shot to death in the blink of an eye. The situation might have got out of hand if he had simply seen his mate fall to the ground in a bloody heap and be dragged away. However, the soldiers were so extremely controlled and I believe that since we did not fire indiscriminately, the demonstrators did not return fire on us either. It would have resulted in a bloodbath if they had started shooting. Another alternative had been if the soldiers hadn't stood firm because they couldn't take any more punishment. Then there would also have been a bloodbath in the village. But the soldiers stood their ground.

"*The situation might have got out of hand if he had simply seen his mate fall to the ground in a bloody heap and be dragged away.*"

Håkansson's own explanation for his actions is that he had previously trained at being in command of troops while under great pressure. In a perspective of experience-based knowledge, it can be said that he had, at one time, faced examples of similar situations during training activities and was familiar with what enormous pressure entailed. This knowledge of familiarity was critical in completing the mission to protect the village.

Qualified Examples

The events at the aforementioned Stupni Do or Caglavica are examples of military challenges that anyone wanting to serve overseas should be able to deal with. As documented qualified examples, they can serve as a starting-point for learning processes. By using examples, you can find out something about rule following in practice. A characteristic of well-developed skill is that we use it in situations that are impossible to fully predict; where rules have exceptions. The

fact that a rule is documented does not necessarily mean it must always be followed. The relationship between rules and how rules are followed, i.e. rule following, is a central starting point. Being part of professional practice means that you, more or less unconsciously, keep to the existing rules within the practice you conduct (see, for example, Johannessen 2006).

In the development of skills, the encounter with practical, concrete examples is crucial. By encounter, we mean not only the personal encounter with the type of situation you are expected to deal with, but also the reflection, both before and after, on the challenges of professional practice and demanding situations. Here, we do not mean general reflection, but a structured and supervised activity focusing on the knowledge content in the examples.

> *Examples should be based on authentic experiences learned from a professional practice and not fictitious scenarios.*

Which examples are of interest? Can any type of example be used? No. To be validated and universal, the examples referred to in this context must undergo a qualification process. Examples should be based on authentic experiences learned from a professional practice and not fictitious scenarios. It should also be possible to check them against other known facts about the circumstances. Collegial reflection on practical, concrete examples, meaning, in the case of the Swedish Armed Forces, that officers and soldiers involved in similar situations themselves assess and problematize the credibility of an example, is included in the qualification process. Given the reasoning that just have been put forward there is every reason to examine alternative methods to support the development of practical and experience based forms of knowledge, especially on the proficient and expert stages.

The following section describes, in general terms, one scientifically proven method that can be used to develop skills using experiences (see the source citations for further references).

Transferring Experiences into Knowledge Using an Example-Based Method

The Department of Skill and Technology at the Royal Institute of Technology has developed the dialogue seminar method to describe and convey aspects of practical experience-based knowledge (Ratkic 2006). The method's design means that knowledge development (education) and scientific work (the production of empirical materials) can be carried out concurrently. The work on producing and reflecting on well-described actual examples from a specific professional practice serves as the starting point. The method has been tested within the Swedish Armed Forces to map overseas experiences and disseminate them among different positions and various levels in the armed forces organization. The method has also been employed to examine officers' encounters

with and experience of new technology. In a collaboration between the Swedish Armed Forces and the Royal Institute of Technology, a series of dialogue seminars have been held involving soldiers and officers. This was a continuation of the research and development projects started in the mid-1990s by researchers with a military background.

The projects have, for instance, been documented in the anthology *Dialoger om yrkeskunnande och teknologi* [Dialogues on Skill and Technology] (2002), as well as in the aforementioned anthologies *Mission Abroad: Military Experience from International Operations* (2008), *Spelplats: Yrkeskunnandets praktik och IT* [The Setting: Practical Skills and IT] (2002), and *Exempel: Yrkeskunnandets praktik och IT 2002* [Examples: Practical Skills and IT 2002] (2003). One session of the dialogue seminars for soldiers and officers was concluded in 2007, resulting, among other things, in the international conference 'Mission Abroad: Military Experience from Serving Overseas' that was held at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm in December 2008. In 2012 the 'Mission Abroad' conference was held at The Royal Institute of Technology, in Stockholm, with the Swedish edition of this book as a theme. In 2012 the dialogue seminar method is used in a research project gathering Swedish soldiers and officers with experiences from military operations in Afghanistan.

The method of working is based on a small group (eight to twelve people); they regularly meet over a period of time (which has been agreed upon in advance). During this period, they take part in writing seminars supervised by a discussion leader. The method is based on the personal reflections of the participants, who begin by reading a short, thought-provoking text. (Such texts could be the aforementioned descriptions of Stupni Do or Caglavica or other sections from this book.) The participants are instructed to read the text slowly and note down their associations. They are encouraged to reflect on how the text relates to their own professional experience, questions, and observations. Often the thought-provoking text encourages reflections on subjects, such as creativity, improvisation, tacit knowledge, risk taking, decision making, and responsibility, i.e. subjects that are relevant to understanding a specific professional practice. There now follows a brief general description of how the dialogue seminar method is utilized:

- By way of preparation, the invited participants each read a selected text and are encouraged to spot connections between the text and their personal experience.
- The participants write a text about their own reflection, preferably a concrete example, of no more than two sides of A4.
- The group assembles for a writing seminar, often for a whole day. A discussion leader acts as a chairman linking practical experiences to theoretical

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They are encouraged to reflect on how the text relates to their own professional experience, questions, and observations.
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models of understanding knowledge and skills. There is also someone to keep the minutes of the discussion.
- After each reading, everyone present – all with a copy of the text and a pen at the ready – is given the opportunity to comment on the text.
- Each writing seminar begins or concludes by going through the comments on the notes from the previous meeting. These have been sent out in advance to everyone.
- When a series of writing seminars is completed, the work is documented, preferably as an anthology, thus enabling others to study experiences and the discussion (see, for example, *Mission Abroad* 2008).

“The method is a way of working with and developing experiences by reading, writing, and reflecting on professional practice, both collectively and individually.”

The dialogue seminar method can be used for research, educational, and development purposes. The method is a way of working with and developing experiences by reading, writing, and reflecting on professional practice, both collectively and individually. The dialogue seminar method has been employed within different professional practices and had various aims. A common denominator for the users is the need to exchange experiences in order to build and develop knowledge and skills within an organization or workplace. The dialogue seminar method differs from other research (questionnaires, interviews, and observations), in that its purpose and problem area are formulated in a professional practice together with the professionals based on their needs. Knowledge of familiarity, which is central to military professional practice, is made the focal point, thus enabling the necessary knowledge building. To provide maximum output of the method it should be implemented in an early stage of an organizational development process. A recommendation is to introduce the method into the training of military commanders before and after they have served overseas.

Summary

- Skilled professionalism manifests itself in action. This is done by way of the practitioner using their judgement and dealing with 'unexpected' events under adverse conditions.
- The proficient and expert stages (according to Dreyfus & Dreyfus) presuppose knowledge of familiarity, a form of knowledge overlooked in many lessons learned concepts.
- Concrete examples based on professional practice are an effective way of creating a better understanding of how knowledge of familiarity is developed. (But it is not enough to simply tell a story.)
- The dialogue seminar method is a way of systematically working with concrete examples, the aim of which is to develop a specific professional practice.
- The method is instrumental in the effective use of resources as it also functions as an educational activity and research project.
- The purpose and objective can be determined by an organization's specific needs or fields of interest, for example the need to develop the military profession in demanding situations.
- The findings can be used for the production of teaching materials as well as for course and educational activities, both in the short and long term. This depends on the needs and interests of the organization.
- The dialogue seminar method supports knowledge development at the proficient and expert stages.
- The method can be used to initiate and carry on development work whilst supporting skills development and the exchange of experience.

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Skilled professionalism manifests itself in action. This is done by way of the practitioner using their judgement and dealing with 'unexpected' events under adverse conditions.
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REPORTAGE

Kan polisen från diktaturer lära ut lag och ordning? Det gör de i Kosovo. Kan en rättsstat byggas av vikarier? I sista delen av reportageserien Koloni Kosovo söker Maciej Zaremba en sann FN-anda och hittar Micke från Gotland.

Mandom, mod och landstingstossor

KOLONI KOSOVO

Sergeant Micke utrustad med landstingets tystnad.

Noter och vidareläsning

See following pages for translation of the article.

‘Prowess, courage, and disposable shoe covers’

By Maciej Zaremba
Published in Dagens Nyheter (Swedish daily newspaper) on 15 June 2007

Can the police from dictatorships teach law and order? They do that in Kosovo. Can a constitutional state be built by stand-ins? In the final part of his Colony Kosovo series of reports, Maciej Zaremba is looking for a true UN spirit and finds Micke from Gotland.

After the debacle in 2004, most of the national caveats for KFOR troops were done away with. Hans Håkansson and a dozen soldiers were awarded the [Swedish] Armed Forces’ gold medal for their actions in Caglavica.

‘It became hard to focus’, says Micke. But what did he feel? ‘It’s a terrible thing to say–but there were no positive thoughts’.

Not until he starts describing how he and the other soldiers started thanking each other for what they had been through did I realize what he was trying to say. Any negative thoughts by this sergeant from Gotland would mean that they would not survive the night. ‘Hard to focus’ means ‘scared to death’. But he does not express himself in that way. In Micke’s vocabulary, you don’t even walk. You regroup.

Micke had taken part in the battle of Caglavica, which took place on 17 March 2004. I’m guessing that the reader has never heard of this. Nor had I until I came to Kosovo. Very strange, because realizing what was at stake, this must have been Sweden’s most important armed intervention for maybe a hundred years. And even more remarkable since it was carried out by bakers, carpenters, and other volunteers that day under the command of an officer who did not obey orders.

That itself is reason enough to tell this story. There are more reasons. On that same day, the UN-led peacekeeping forces suffered their biggest defeat since Srebrenica. In the presence of 17,000 KFOR soldiers and 4,000 UN

police, Albanian hooligans laid into their minorities: 900 hundred people were wounded, 19 died, some 30 churches were destroyed, 700 houses were burned down, 4,500 people were put to flight.

'I don't understand this', says Hans Håkansson, lieutenant colonel from Gotland. 'Defending the monastery in Prizren – that must be a soldier's wet dream! Ravines on all sides, a river, and a single narrow bridge. Give me twenty men and I'll hold it against a thousand. So what happened?'

Yes, what happened? When two hundred Albanian extremists, armed with Molotov cocktails, reached the sixteenth-century monastery, they sent out a negotiator holding a white flag. He informed the German KFOR soldiers that they would not harm a hair on their helmets if they just moved aside and let them go about their burning in peace. However, if they remained there, they would face death. So the Germans rolled aside their armoured vehicles and then watched the monastery burning from afar.

'They obeyed their orders', explained their general, Holger Kammerhoff. According to the rules of engagement which everyone carried a copy of in his pocket, they were supposed to protect lives. But there was no mention of their using force to protect a building. Result: When that day was over, no German soldier had suffered a scratch. But most of what they were supposed to protect was burned to the ground. The same thing happened to what was under French protection: the monastery in Drenica and all the Serbian houses in Svinjare.

That day Hans Håkansson had 700 men under his command, mostly Swedes, but also Czechs, Finns, Slovaks, and Irish. They had to mobilize in such a hurry that they had neither maps nor water with them. Thousands of Albanians were on the march towards the Serbian enclaves of Caglavica and Gracanica with its famous monastery. They were carrying iron bars, stones, some guns, and blankets drenched in petrol wrapped around long poles. (That's the way you burn down houses in Kosovo. Smash the window and set on fire.)

Håkansson lined up his men outside the village; there was little else he could do. They got the same proposal as the Germans. 'Get out of our way'. They answered, 'No'. Then they stood in a line and resisted. 'It was a medieval battle', one observer noted: truncheon against pole and shield against steel chain, seven hundred against ten thousand attacking in waves. How long would they be able to stand their ground?

An hour or so, Håkansson thought. You could forget about reinforcements, because that day the whole of Kosovo was on fire. Very soon, the whole of the Swedish camp was empty. 'Everybody who could walk or crawl, people from the kitchen and from the repair shop who had never handled a truncheon before'. No one gave them orders; they came of their own accord. They fought for two hours, for four, for six . . . they couldn't drink, they fainted from dehydration, they wet themselves, they got arms and legs broken and they heard bullets

whistling above their heads. But they fought for eleven hours non-stop, until darkness fell and the aggressors grew tired.

Thirty-five soldiers were wounded; however, Caglavica was not burned down, and the monastery in Gracanica is still standing. When Håkansson realized that they risked being surrounded, he called on his radio: 'Defend monastery . . . use deadly force if necessary'. Still, he had the same manual in his pocket as the Germans had in Prizren. Why did he do that?

Before Håkansson was sent to Kosovo, he thought the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs would teach him about the history of the country. When this did not happen, he bought books himself. So he knew, he says, that the monastery in Gracanica was a cultural symbol for the Serbs. If that was destroyed, the whole of Serbia might rise up. And besides, says Håkansson, 'every order has its "best-before date". Then you are left to make your own decisions'.

'That day it was Håkansson personally and his men who made the difference between right and wrong', says General Anders Brännström, who has been Håkansson's superior in Kosovo. 'If he had put the safety of his soldiers first, as so many others did, Sweden would have had a new Srebrenica on its conscience'.

I am describing all this in such detail because in the domestic press, the Swedish efforts received less space than the naked behind of 'Robinson Robban' [a reality show contestant]. I find this to be symptomatic of our times. Håkansson just thinks it's strange. Maybe people in Sweden believe is that 'UN soldiers hand out dolls to children and otherwise support gender equality. People are probably embarrassed when they see us carrying weapons'.

When NATO and independent institutes analysed the 17 March debacle, it became clear that the most responsible thing an officer could do was to break the rules; however, only the Swedes and Italians did so.

All over Kosovo on this day, military officers discovered that they were not commanding an army but something more resembling a lunatics' day out. Each group of patients had its own guidelines. The Americans were not allowed to fight against civilians. The Slovaks were not allowed to use truncheons. The Germans were forbidden to cross the street, for that's where their section ended. And so on.

These were caveats, provisions each nation had stipulated as a condition for their participation in the mission. As a result of this, most of the KFOR forces were ineffective when needed. Only seventeen of the fifty-five units were allowed to intervene in the event of riots. And there was not a single general in all of Kosovo who could keep track of what the others were forbidden to do. 'Some were probably not allowed to stay out after five', a Swedish officer guesses.

You would like to believe that a UN mission is like a polar expedition: distinct goal, decisive leadership, adequate equipment, the most sought-after specialists dedicated to the task. You are within your rights to expect this considering the

huge salaries and the fact that there are 229 applicants to each UN post. However, the UN mission in Kosovo has very little of this. It cannot be compared to any other known phenomenon, but there is some resemblance to the health care centre in Sveg.

They change doctors once a week in Sveg. In Kosovo, soldiers are sent home once they have learned their way around. Six months is the rotation period and the same goes for the UN police. The governor [i.e. the special representative of the secretary general] is replaced once a year and most of the UN authorities about as often, but there the resemblance with Sveg ends. Because if a locum prescribes the wrong treatment, he will be accountable to the National Board of Health and Welfare, but a UN policeman throwing crime reports on the rubbish heap has nothing to fear. The UN has no sanctions against a breach of duty. The worst thing that can happen is that the contract isn't extended.

A British source tells me about a closet at UN police headquarters filled to the ceiling with crime reports nobody has ever read. It sounds believable; most crimes in Kosovo are never investigated. But then again, why would the police investigate when they don't feel like it? Actually, it's not such a stupid question. Like this one:

What is Mr Bangura doing in Pristina? He's teaching the Kosovars how to run a railway and is paid around SEK 80,000 a month. Local railwaymen, who are supposed to live on 150, feel a bit humiliated by the project, especially since Mr Bangura knows nothing about railways. How could he? He comes from Sierra Leone, where the last train stopped in 1975. He's an expert in harbours.

Mr Bhattacharya from Bangladesh, on the other hand, isn't an expert in anything. He's a car park attendant, doesn't have a driver's license, and only speaks Bengali, but he must be paid handsomely in Dhaka, because he's now a UN policeman. There are hundreds of them, incompetent people, within the UN police, within finance and even within the judicial system. (How about an expert in riparian rights assigned to try murder cases). Often they are from 'non-skiing nations', which is UN slang for Africa and Asia.

No, there's no mystery as to how they have ended up in Kosovo. It's the UN system. 'It is important to show that the whole world is taking responsibility', a diplomat clarifies. To be sure, some of them are useless, 'but having quotas that include them is the price we have to pay for legitimacy'.

Who are we? Kosovo was made to pay. Who seriously believes that a police force from forty-four nations, of which half are from semi-democratic nations, of which one half are from dictatorships, of which one half do not understand what the others are saying, of which one half are not even policemen, will risk their lives to enforce law and order in a country that has never had it?

They didn't. They looked on as mafia gangs first infiltrated the Kosovo institutions and then the UN mission. (If there is an obvious conclusion that can be

drawn from this story, it is that the UN needs its own police force, preferably with high-paid crime experts from EU countries, who could step in at short notice – and for which we would have to pay.)

If the reader feels that this article is about problems far away, problems that do not concern them, then I have news for them: it is the Kosovo mafia who are now dealing heroin in Kalmar and controlling the sex slaves in Oslo, and who will probably sponsor the government in Pristina the day the province gains its independence. And Kosovo is not to blame for this, we are; we let it happen.

None of the seven Kosovo UN governors have even tried to tackle the bands of gangsters in the province. The most powerful among them, with roots in the Kosovo Liberation Army, a guerrilla movement, enjoyed virtual immunity from the UN, who feared that they otherwise would cause unrest, or even hurt UN personnel. For the same reason, the UN avoided looking for the perpetrators of hundreds of murders of Serbs, Roma, (and suspected collaborators), that took place in 1999.

It was a fateful policy of appeasement, but not entirely incomprehensible once you understood how the UN mission is designed. Combating organized crime would have required strategy, perseverance, courage, and a spirit of self-sacrifice. That's right, a mission, and an inspired task. But the world community, in spite of its name, has no mission in Kosovo. It mostly has substitute UN loafers, extremely well-paid but without any responsibility except their own careers and to whom Kosovo is simply just an episode. And their careers are furthered if they can report stability and progress, not gunfights with the mafia or other turmoil (not to mention wounded UN policemen).

This is how it came about that seven different UN governors reported stability and nothing but progress, only to leave behind a mafia-ridden province eight years later. (Which the EU will now take over.) And the ordinary Kosovars just watched and learned. Yes, the UN principles were certainly fine but nobody dared to come to their defence when things were too trying. So much for the value of principles.

Why do the Swedish efforts shine so differently in light of this? Is it because of the auditor Inga-Britt Ahlenius, who doesn't pretend that she is in the Balkans? Who says no, the same demands must apply here as in Stockholm. Tank soldier Håkansson, who fights for the Serbs as if they were from Slite in Gotland. And the Ombudsman, admittedly a Pole, but so typically Swedish, who stubbornly upholds the law.

The Victoria military camp outside Pristina is a mini Sweden. It has a church, a gym, a post office, waffles with jam, and it sorts its waste. Outside, Albanians throw most things in the ditch, but in here composting, recycling, and ISO 14000 are practised. 'Unfortunately', says Lieutenant Colonel Håkansson (the hero of Caglavica), 'there is no approved tire recycling in the whole

of Kosovo'. So what do you do with these things? 'Er . . . we transport them to Sweden'.

The image of a truck passing by thousands of rubbish heaps in Kosovo on its way to an authorized one 2,000 kilometres away is so bizarre that you probably can't help but poke fun. But I have to. That is because of Ahlenius, and Håkansson, and even Micke from Gotland, the guy, at the beginning of this article, who was prepared to die at Caglavica. He's back in Kosovo now as the head of a search team looking for explosives and weapons. Now and then, his group makes a hard entry. This means that during the night they rush into a house through closed doors and windows. But if there is no danger lurking there, then it means de-escalation. 'We apologize, put down our weapons, put on our shoe protectors, and take photos of everything we've damaged so people can claim compensation at Camp Victoria'.

'Shoe protectors? You're kidding'.

'Not at all. So we don't dirty the carpets. Like these . . .' He empties the pockets of his combat jacket. Out come a torch, a compass, something lethal, and some blue plastic shoe protectors right at the bottom.

Sergeant Micke tells me that there have been incidents when people have had their doors kicked in and then invited them to have coffee. Because of the plastic shoe protectors?

'Yes, we showed respect'.

At the one extreme, 'use deadly force', at the other, blue plastic shoe protectors. Respect. Dare it be said that the UN has a lot to learn from these soldiers from Gotland? There is much to be said about these peculiar people in the Balkans, but they display an endearing medieval trait. They despise protectors who do not take themselves seriously, like UNMIK [United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo], for example. But they respect adversaries who stand up for what they believe in, like Micke, for example.

/ Maciej Zaremba

‘Perhaps it’s too early, but tomorrow it will be too late’

After the March riots, Anders Brännström wrote a text that he read out on Swedish Radio’s P1’s ‘Thoughts for the Day’ on 27 March 2006.

‘Perhaps it’s too early, but tomorrow it will be too late’.

The words are by a twentieth-century French philosopher. I think she superbly highlights the word balance, which is important for us human beings. Balance is vital for figure skaters and tightrope walkers, but also for everyone else.

In this respect, I do not mean physical balance, but the balance between different choices that we human beings have to make. Often they can be expressed as pairs of opposites between which we have to achieve a balance.

Now or later.
Intervene or not intervene.
Accept or not accept.
Listen or talk.
Consider or decide.
Complete or abort.

Human beings only have to do three things. We have to be born. We have to die. And we have to choose. Someone told me that a human being makes more than ten thousand conscious or instinctive choices every day, choices that often illustrate the balance between extremes. These extremes are in shades of grey, where black and white only exist in theory, and in classrooms and laboratories, where reality must be simplified in order for us to understand the contexts.

When I was being trained as an officer, the teachers often propounded the hypothesis that ’no situation is the other alike’. Each situation only occurs once in

world history. Naturally, there are similarities with other events and, of course, you can learn something from these. However, my teachers emphasized that no two situations were exactly the same. Every situation is unique. Therefore, there are no universal standards and models that can be applied to all situations.

Sometimes I get the impression from other people that if you simply read a lot of books on leadership and management, you will become a better leader and human being. My experience of this is different. It is being out in the real world and learning from encounters and working with others that lead to success. In other words, having to make choices and constantly learning, not only from your own triumphs and failures but even from those of others.

That's life: a tightrope walk between extremes where there is never a rewind button. What was said was said; what was done was done; what was not done was not done; and what was not said was not said.

During a conversation many years ago, a good friend of mine put it like this: 'Life is not a rehearsal; it's the actual show'.

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