

Peace in the Posavina, or Deal with Us!

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I HAVE SHAMELESSLY APPROPRIATED the title of this article on battle command at the brigade level in Bosnia from then-Lieutenant Colonel (now Brigadier General) Tony Cucolo, who commanded the 3d Battalion, 5th Cavalry (Black Knights), one of the battalions assigned to 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, in 1995-96. Painted on a sign prominently hung over the entrance to the largely destroyed communal farm just south of Brcko that the Black Knights called home, Cucolo's pithy phrase served as the battalion's informal motto. The Posavina is what the locals called the Sava River valley, the region in northeast Bosnia where the brigade served from December 1995 until November 1996. The motto described Cucolo's perception of what the Nation asked of him and his troops in Bosnia. It resonated with both his troops and me. Simply put, the mission in Bosnia in that first year of operations required the Implementation Force (IFOR) to compel peace if required to do so. IFOR did not deploy to Bosnia to monitor a peace agreed to by the warring parties, but to "implement" peace, by force if necessary. Cucolo had it dead right: peace in the Posavina or, by god, deal with all of us, including the Black Knights.

Prelude to the Mission

Even in the last months before troops deployed, the very idea of a NATO-led mission in Bosnia seemed improbable, but a series of events in 1995 ultimately made the improbable a fact. Richard Holbrooke's self-serving *To End a War* aside, the contesting parties—Milosevic and the Bosnian Serbs, in particular—agreed to the Dayton Accords for three reasons: force employed by the United Kingdom and France on the ground and NATO fighters in the air, the successful Bosnian Croat spring offensive, and exhaustion.¹ The embarrassment and outrage stemming from Srebrenica, where the Serbs humiliated UN troops and slaughtered Bosnian Muslims in a supposed UN safe haven, galvanized NATO. After more than three years of savage civil war, NATO, with UN approval, moved in to enforce the agreement Holbrooke and his team had negotiated.²

In today's "war on terrorism," it is sometimes hard to recall the sense of dread and uncertainty the mission to Bosnia called up in the minds of those

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PHOTO: Checkpoint 7, "Desolation Boulevard," on the Serb side of the zone of separation, spring 1996 (photo courtesy of the author).

who led the way in December 1995. United States Army Europe (USAREUR), which provided the vast majority of the U.S. troops assigned to IFOR, had long anticipated some kind of mission in Bosnia. Soon after Yugoslavia began to unravel in the early 1990s, USAREUR began nearly continuous preparations for various contingencies in the Balkans generally oriented toward rescuing UN troops assigned the impossible task of keeping a peace that never existed. To be fair, the Soldiers who worked in the Balkans in the various contingents assigned to the UN Protection Force and to smaller missions monitoring fighting elsewhere, including eastern Croatia, struggled with inadequate resources and equally inadequate mandates. From 1992 onward, the Army in Europe examined the means and practiced plans designed to either succor those forces or support various peace efforts.³

The focus of this article is command at the brigade level in a stability and support operation that constituted a major departure from the mistaken notion that U.S. Armed Forces should not be involved in these kinds of operations. This account is personal, anecdotal, and not intended as a template for others; rather, I offer it so that what we learned might be passed on for others to consider, and possibly to apply. There is more to say about this challenging and in some ways wonderful mission than space here allows. Accordingly, this discussion concentrates on the early days of the mission at the expense of attempting to address battle command over the long haul. Finally, these few pages reflect my personal judgment about what worked and what did not. It is also an attempt to describe the conditions in which the Ready First Combat Team (RFCT) (1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division) operated.

The mission to Bosnia evoked dread and uncertainty for several reasons. Partly this dread stemmed from the sheer difficulty of operating in the rugged terrain of Bosnia, but it was a difficulty much enhanced by the mythology that emerged from the World War II experience of German forces in Yugoslavia—the popular histories of that experience conjured images of Serbian Chetniks lurking behind every tree in the craggy, densely forested hills of Bosnia. Such worries blended seamlessly with the U.S. Army’s more recent, and equally unpleasant, experience in Somalia. “Mission creep,”

a term made famous by Mark Bowden in *Black Hawk Down* but little heard now, emerged from the Rangers’ fight in the streets of Mogadishu and had already become the “elephant in the room” for Soldiers from private to general.

As planners and commanders considered what to do if sent to Bosnia, they brooded over concerns that troops might be ordered into a maelstrom of fire from the ubiquitous and apparently savage militias indiscriminately killing each other and civilians. Ambiguity about what could happen, more than fear of the fighting capacity of the militias, stimulated unease. Despite more than a little healthy anxiety about the unknown, the Army in Europe planned and trained hard to fight, if necessary, and to transition rapidly to what in those days was called Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW).

It was in this context that I assumed command of 1st Brigade in June of 1995. Cucolo and Lieutenant Colonel Neal Anderson joined me as the other newcomers to the brigade command team. Anderson took command of the Bandits, the 4th Battalion, 67th Armor, the day before I assumed command. Cucolo took over the Black Knights a few days later. Lieutenant Colonel Mike Jones, who commanded the Iron Dukes of the 2d Battalion, 67th Armor, rounded out the maneuver force command team. The rest of our group included Lieutenant Colonel Pete Corpac, who commanded the Gunners of the 2d Battalion, 3d Field Artillery, in direct support of the brigade; Lieutenant Colonel Todd Semonite, who led the Ready Sappers of the 23d Engineer Battalion; and Lieutenant Colonel Tony Young, commander of the 501st Forward Support Battalion (FSB). Young’s battalion called themselves Pillars, as in “Pillars of the 1st Brigade.”

We came to know each other quickly because the brigade almost immediately headed off to Hohenfels to train for six weeks. Jones, the Iron Dukes, and most of the direct support troops went a day or two after I assumed command. The rest of us followed after participating in the division change of command (Major General Bill Nash taking over from Major General Bill Carter). Despite arriving in June, I soon became the dean of the commanders in the division, since every brigade changed commanders that summer. None of that mattered much to the Ready First or me though, because we spent most of the summer in the field.⁴



DOD

Lieutenant Colonel Anthony A. Cucolo III, Commander, 3d Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, briefs Secretary of Defense William J. Perry at the United States Base Camp, Multi-National Division North, during Operation Joint Endeavor, July 1996.

What I needed to think about was how to do this new and very different thing. Commanding a brigade is by no means the same as commanding a battalion. I knew because I had served as a brigade operations officer and executive officer and had had the opportunity to observe three very good brigade commanders, either by working directly for them or by serving in their brigades. In addition to two years working at the brigade level, I also served first as executive officer and later as commander of a tank battalion in the same brigade.

From those experiences and my understanding of Army doctrine, I believed two things unequivocally. The first was that brigade commanders own nothing. In those days, only the headquarters and headquarters company actually “belonged” to the brigade. All of the battalions that stood in formation the day I assumed command were “loaners” from the guy who did own them—the commanding general of 1st Armored Division. I forgot that occasionally, but when I did, someone always reminded me. Once when I used the term “my battalions” to describe units assigned to the brigade, Nash reminded me whose battalions they were. Another time occurred during our Battle Command Training Program Warfighter seminar, in February 1997. By then I knew whose battalions they were, but 1st Brigade called itself the Ready First Combat Team, as did Nash. When asked to brief my concept, I referred to a chart that bore the label “RFCT.” Our senior observer, retired General Dick Cavasos, who knew very well I commanded a brigade and not a regi-

ment, took a few minutes while assuming both a pained look and an exaggerated aura of patience, to remind me again that the brigade “owned” no battalions and so was not a combat team. Thereafter, our charts described the outfit as “the brigade formerly known as the Ready First Combat Team.” That, of course, has changed. Brigades now quite properly call themselves combat teams, to the everlasting satisfaction of many of us who served in the RFCT.

The second thing I believed is that brigades exist exclusively to assign resources and integrate combined arms to achieve missions assigned by the division commander. Specifically, a brigade commander’s task is to “accept, interpret, and decide, creatively, how to implement the intent of the division and perhaps the corps commander in order to accomplish the outcomes they intend when they assign missions.”⁵ Even with the move to a brigade-based Army, brigade commanders will continue to execute missions assigned by higher authority. To do this successfully, they have several overarching obligations. First, they must understand that they do not decide what to do so much as how to do it, and they have a legal and moral obligation to meet the intended outcomes inherent in their assigned missions. Second, they must accept and even embrace ambiguity. And finally, because long-duration deployments are characterized by dispersed and decentralized operations, they (as well as battalion and company commanders) must learn to think differently about time and link tactical operations differently than they do in conventional operations.

None of these ideas relieve brigade commanders of the other responsibilities inherent in command, such as the obligation to ensure that subordinate units meet the standards stipulated by regulation and by the brigade commanders themselves. In short, a brigade commander must be tactically competent, must understand how assigned units are designed to function, and must ensure that those units are trained to perform their missions. This means becoming familiar with, if not expert in, the disciplines and tasks of units assigned in direct support. It means knowing how to support their training as part of a combined arms team and

understanding how to integrate those capabilities as part of that same team.

Command is bound up inextricably with the ability to communicate clearly and effectively with Soldiers, subordinate commanders, peers, and superiors. For me, communicating with the troops was as important as communicating with their commanders, my colleagues, or my boss. Commanding at any level is both a team sport and very personal. In my case, this meant talking with and listening to those with whom I served. Sometimes that meant telling a commander something he did not want to hear. At Hohenfels that first summer in command, I had a chat with one of the commanders about shortcomings I perceived in his outfit. An effective but very new battalion commander, he rushed to the defense of his just-acquired command. I told him that while he looked at his battalion and saw a brand-new, high-speed, low-drag sports car, I saw a dented sedan that needed air in its tires. He got the message. In the end, and as a consequence of his leadership, I came to agree with him that, indeed, his battalion was a hot rod.

Identifying and ensuring that standards are met is also an essential component of command. No commander can be everywhere and do everything. The standards he sets (in accordance with Army doctrine) must be met so that he can control and command his unit. Enforcing standards is part observation and part communication. Soldiers need to know what their commander expects of them. Often, communicating the standard clearly is enough because most Soldiers want to do the right thing. They want to be challenged and expect that they will have to meet rigorous standards. A commander's job is to make the rigorous routine, so that even more difficult things can be done.

Communicating in a line unit, or any unit for that matter, entails more than just words. Actions communicate intent as well. Taking the time to drink coffee with the medics assigned to the forward support battalion or gathering troops informally in the field or in garrison is part of the job—and much more fun than reading email. One technique I employed was to have Soldiers show me they could do a challenging task. For example, early in my tenure I asked a combat lifesaver to start an IV on me while in the field. After that, I invited the battalion commanders to give up their own arms. Not

all took advantage of the invitation, but Lieutenant Colonel Jones did and continued to do so, even after one of his troops drew blood that jetted out of his arm as he lay patiently on the front slope of his tank. Equally important, word got around that Jones and I trusted our Soldiers with pointy objects.

Communicating effectively also meant hearing what I did not want to hear. Taking bad news well or accepting criticism is an essential part of communicating as a commander. Major Chris De Graff served with me during my entire tenure, first as my operations officer and then as my executive officer. De Graff exemplified the roles of alter ego and Greek muse brilliantly. He never let me off easy when he thought I was wrong or when he felt that I needed to do something I had not considered, or, even more important, when he felt that I should stop doing something I wanted to do.

Learning my role and getting to know the brigade proved to be a lot of fun. The summer of 1995 seemed idyllic for that reason. The brigade trained hard and did so with other units of the division, including 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry, and 4th Battalion, 12th Infantry. We worked doggedly on both combat and stability operations. Among other things, we practiced coping with recalcitrant factions, civilians, civilian authority, obscure treaty language, and a host of other issues related to Bosnia.

The brigade returned from a Hohenfels rotation at the end of July, and the headquarters immediately prepared for a second Partnership for Peace exercise in the Czech Republic. That exercise, Cooperative Challenge 95, featured a multinational brigade built on an amalgam of the 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, and 4th Parachute Brigade of the Czech Army.

Cooperative Challenge required the “combined” brigade to exercise command over 13 battalions from 11 countries, most of them non-NATO nations. The scenario featured a postwar stability operation in a country that bore a striking resemblance to Bosnia. Before we knew it, the summer was over, and we were being told by Brigadier General Pat O’Neal, then the acting chief of staff at V Corps, to plan on going to Bosnia—and soon.

Nearly from that moment in August 1995 until the last unit of the brigade returned from Bosnia on 8 December 1996, thinking about Bosnia, training to go to Bosnia, deploying to Bosnia, operating in Bosnia, or recovering from deploying to Bosnia

occupied virtually every moment of every day. Put another way, for 17 months Bosnia consumed the brigade's energy, time, and people (the latter including one killed and six wounded by mines or command-detonated explosions and another two who died accidentally). The time flew by. We never had enough time. All of us learned the hard lesson Napoleon taught when he told his generals they could ask for anything except time.

O'Neal's news put Cooperative Challenge in a new light. The brigade staff had learned how to get things done during the six weeks at Hohenfels, but Cooperative Challenge forced it to focus on developing standing operating procedures for working in a multinational stability operation. In short, the exercise served as a rehearsal for what followed. Toward its end, Major General Nash asked me to join him and Colonel John Brown, his chief of staff. He told me that my gunnery cycle scheduled for October would now become a mission rehearsal exercise to prepare the division for deployment to Bosnia. A few days later, the brigade headquarters returned to home station at Ayers Kaserne. We arrived home in the wee hours of the first Saturday in October and departed by convoy and rail for Grafenwoehr on Monday. That was the last "free" weekend at home for the entire 1st Brigade headquarters until Thanksgiving 1996.

The Bosnia operation—Operation Joint Endeavor, as we soon learned to call it—would occur in several phases (some of which could not be identified in October 1995). These included:

- Training and deploying nearly simultaneously.
- Occupying the zone and separating the factions (December 1995–February 1996).
- Assuring the factions reached required military milestones and simultaneously establishing useful programs to support reconciliation (March–June 1996).
- Assuring steady-state compliance with the military requirements of the Dayton Accords while coping with the return of (primarily) Bosnians to contested regions in the Posavina (late June 1996 until the end of our deployment).

Several other tasks that constituted phases of the operation in their own right would overlap with these. Chief among them were preparation and execution of national elections (September 1996) and finding a group from among the factions and

the international community to take over leadership of the effort from IFOR. This was important because doing so would allow the much smaller forces that came to constitute the Stabilization Force to function effectively. From the start, the military organizations in Bosnia provided the bulk of the effort and, in many cases, the leadership to advance the civil side of the Accords.

Deployment to Bosnia

No one who has deployed on a military operation will ever subscribe to the notion that getting there is half the fun. Any deployment is fraught with frustration, confusion bordering on chaos, and marching and countermarching as the politicians haggle over the shape of the mission and how best to keep the number of deploying Soldiers low while asserting that the mission must be achieved at light speed without anyone getting hurt. For the commanders involved, there are many rules and constraints and few good options, but the most important rules are unofficial: be patient, exude calm, and make the best of whatever comes your way.

In the middle of frenetic planning, training, and preparing for deployment, I had to make one of many unpleasant choices: we would leave one battalion behind. I did not want to tell any of my commanders they would not come with the rest of us. At the same time, I knew from my experience in Operation Desert Storm that we needed a strong rear detachment to push the brigade out the door and to take care of families. I knew that I needed someone who could deal effectively with all of the detritus of deploying, from storing personal effects to coping with family problems that could develop into serious issues for Soldiers in the field.

Mission came first. Our mission would place us in the Posavina Corridor in northeast Bosnia. The only sure thing in my mind was that I needed the infantry battalion. The Black Knights had to go, and they had to be the main effort to deal with Brcko, which was at the top of nearly everyone's list of difficult places in a difficult country. Fundamentally, my choice came down to leaving either Anderson or Jones behind. I agonized about it, finally choosing to leave Jones and the Iron Dukes for two reasons: I needed a proven, able commander who would do what had to be done, and Jones had proven that he could operate at higher levels.

To my consternation, Nash knew a good thing when he saw it, and he subsequently chose Jones to run the division's deployment effort. The Iron Dukes not only deployed 1st Brigade, but just about everything that went from Germany to Bosnia. In order to reach Bosnia, Jones, 1st Armored Division, and the brigade had to defeat winter, the Alps, various diplomatic hassles over transiting countries with our tanks, rail strikes, holidays that proceeded whether we had to deploy or not, and rotten weather. We had to learn three different deployment planning tools, including the Joint Operation Planning and Execution System, which was not written for the faint of heart. Jones described the deployment as "a triumph of the human spirit over an insane system, one that narrowly averted catastrophe."⁶ Division units traveled to Bosnia by every possible means except by sea. In the brigade headquarters, one of my 18-year-old Soldiers drove a truck more than twice his age 1,056 miles from Kirchgoens, Germany, to Ravne Brcko. He did so in the middle of winter accompanied by other vintage vehicles and several hundred of his buddies.

Executing that deployment, getting into the zone, and getting the mission underway proved to be extremely tough. The weather and living conditions

in Bosnia were more than a little difficult, and to make matters worse, a thaw produced flooding on the Sava River. The 16th Engineers and supporting troops working on bridging the Sava had to evacuate so hastily that many got out with only the clothes on their backs. Through all of the setbacks and frustration, I tried to keep the brigade's leaders and Soldiers calm and unruffled.

One evening during the six weeks of hard training in weather that presaged what we would experience in Bosnia, I had gathered everyone together to do still another orders brief. I began by saying that despite the frustration and anxiety we all felt, we would accomplish our mission. However, to do so we had to accept some unpleasant truths. These included that we would be gone for more than a year. I asked that they consider each other—those who were going and those slated to stay—as family. To support that plea, I had already directed a task organization that substituted part of the Iron Dukes for Anderson's Bandits, so that every unit in the brigade would have at least some Soldiers on the mission to Bosnia and some who would remain in Germany.

The most important thing that night was to get the team past thinking about how miserable and frustrating the process of preparing to go had become. I asked the assembled body if any of them had ever read any military history. They all had. I then asked if they had ever seen maps depicting the American Army's movement into battle. They all had. I reminded them that the maps always had a big blue arrow leading to the battlefield, but no discussion of what went on inside the big blue arrow. I told them that our mission would be no different, and that when someone wrote the history of the operation, there would be a big blue arrow, but only a footnote citing the date we crossed the Sava River. I concluded by telling them that all of this misery was "just a footnote." I shared this thinking with the troops as well. We had a mission; anything else would be just a footnote. Later, I often found that I could bring someone back on track by saying "just a footnote."⁷

Operating in Bosnia

My claim notwithstanding, deploying and crossing the Sava River proved to be a hell of a footnote, one made even more interesting by the fact we could do nothing until (and if) the warring



U.S. Army

A Seabee at work building Camp Kime, January 1996.



DOD

The first U.S. checkpoint on MSR Arizona, December 1995.

factions signed the Accords. That occurred on 15 December and put us in real difficulty because we had to have the factions separated exactly 30 days later. In short, we had to deploy, get into Bosnia, and get the main feature of the military side of the treaty completed in one (very short) month. Alpha Troop, 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry, led by Captain Tom Dorame, duly arrived by rail on 17 December 1995 at Vrepolje, Croatia. They managed to download themselves in absolute defiance of USAREUR safety regulations—but in accordance with the best traditions of the service—and made their way some 60 miles to Zupanja, Croatia. The division's advance party—me and 13 other Soldiers, including Lieutenant Colonel Greg Stone, who commanded 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, arrived a day later. We flew in by C-17 to Kaposvar, Hungary, with seven HMMWVs, and drove from there to Zupanja. A few days later O'Neal joined us. On 22 December, a platoon from A Troop established our first checkpoint in Bosnia. On the 31st, despite the flood and miserable weather, the brigade started crossing the Sava over the longest tactical bridge emplaced since World War II. All of the engineers involved did a great job, but laying a bridge is a standard task, so their achievement, like many more to come, was “just a footnote.”⁸

Because things happen fast during any operation, calm and clear communications are essential. On 30 December, several things that required calmness and clear communication happened almost simultaneously. That morning, a detachment from a Military Police (MP) platoon had crossed the Sava

by barge and moved north to mark the route for 1-1 CAV. Ordered to go straight up the hard-surfaced main supply route (MSR), remain on the lateral MSRs, and return the same way they came, they nonetheless got into trouble. For reasons that even he could not explain, the NCO leading the team decided to take a shortcut on an unpaved route through the confrontation lines, and at about 1300 hours the MPs struck a land mine, badly injuring a Soldier. Although ordered not to leave hard-surfaced roads, to make frequent radio checks, and to return immediately to the last

point where they could communicate if a radio check proved unsuccessful, the team not only left the hard-surfaced road but also moved to where they could not communicate.

Unaware of any of this, I returned across the Sava by barge and went to the brigade command post. I entered just as a call came in describing a unit reporting a mine strike from within no-man's-land. The call was nearly inaudible, and we could not understand what they needed until Major General Nash, flying up from Tuzla to visit the brigade, relayed the message from the troops on site. We learned that they were trying to treat a badly injured driver. The tactical operations center went into full crisis mode. As the battle captain tried to apprise me of the situation, two more urgent calls came in back-to-back. Helicopters from 1-1 CAV



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The lead tank of 1-1 Cavalry crosses the Sava River, December 1995.

reported being painted by SA 6 radar, and then 2-3 Field Artillery reported that counter-fire radar had identified several rounds impacting near our only checkpoint. Everyone was in an uproar. I coached the battle captain on questions to ask. First: "Can the cavalry identify the approximate locations of the SA 6 radar?" They could: "Croatia near Vukovar." "O.K., they are unlikely to shoot, so continue the mission." Second: "Can the cavalry with the platoon on the checkpoint ask whether the Soldiers on the scene had experienced any impacts?" They could, and the answer was "no." "O.K., no threat." All of this took a minute or so and gave all of us a chance to calm down. Then we turned our full attention to the real problem: we had a Soldier wounded, and we did not know where he was.

Nash and I spoke several times as he searched for the injured Soldier and his unit. When he found them, he personally led the medical evacuation effort. Nash and the troops on the ground got the wounded Soldier on the general's helicopter and flew north to a combat surgical hospital that had moved into position near Zupanja. Meanwhile, the remaining MPs backtracked to the hard-surfaced road and returned to the brigade area.

Not every day in Bosnia was like this, but many of them were. We found mines the hard way 13 times. We had shooting incidents, civilians killed or injured in minefields, national elections, visitors up to and including the secretary of state and the secretary of defense, and a host of problems that always seemed to happen simultaneously. Our leaders and Soldiers learned a lot that day about each other, about their general, and about thinking and communicating clearly under stress. We also relearned what we already knew: a brigade headquarters has to manage more than one event at a time, and the events will likely be dissimilar.

To add to our challenges, brigades then were normally not expected to run complex civil-military operations, but that is what all the brigades assigned to Multi-National Division-North (MND-North) did nearly every day in Bosnia. Moreover, each did so in trace with units they had never operated with and until 1995 had no reason to believe they ever would. MND-North controlled 1st and 2d Brigades of the 1st Armored Division as well as a Nordic-Polish brigade, a Russian parachute brigade, and a Turkish brigade. None of this would have worked well with-

out the Partnership for Peace program or without great effort on all sides. The command and control arrangements would have seemed murky even to bureaucrats in the Byzantine Empire. Major General Nash commanded only the American units. He had NATO tactical control of NATO units. For the other units, including those provided by Sweden, Poland, Russia, and several Baltic countries, the rules varied according to specific agreements reached by NATO and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, who had "ultimate" authority for IFOR.

These arcane relationships mattered to all of us because we shared unit boundaries, conducted joint patrols, and provided support to each other as required. The Nordic-Polish brigade, for example, deployed without artillery, so a battery from 2-3 Field Artillery supported them. First Brigade conducted joint patrols with the Russians on our right and collaborated with the Nordic-Polish brigade to clear mines from roads. In April, a Hungarian snow plow platoon arrived. At various times French and British units supported the brigade as well. Italian rail troops proofed the rail line used to transport bulk fuel from storage areas established in the brigade's sector, and everyone who needed to get into northeastern Bosnia via the Sava River bridge used MSR Arizona, which transited 1st Brigade's area of operations.

First Brigade learned to accommodate differences in perceptions among each of these units. Sometimes our insights amounted to epiphanies. For example, my colleague from the Russian brigade and I worked hard to get to know each other and to learn how to operate with each other. We began on 15 November 1995, when I briefed him my concept for the mission at my headquarters in Kirchgoens. I had a moment of incredible disorientation when the first chart came up on the screen. In the lower left corner the classification read, *Secret U.S.-Russian Eyes Only*. It hit me then that those of us in the room were participating in a historic moment: the first meeting since 1945 of regimental-level commanders from the United States and Russia to coordinate a real-world mission. However surreal things seemed then and later in Bosnia, all of us worked through it by seeking common ground and seeing past our personal and professional histories. The Russian brigade commander, "Sasha" Lentsov, always proved to be as good as his word, and his brigade's soldiers worked well with mine.

Although in the early days we performed mostly military tasks, we also had to undertake important civil-military missions, including the mundane business of coordinating with the mayor and local military authorities in Zupanja, dealing with Croatian railroad officials to download trains, and contracting with businesses for services. Among the first meetings we had on the south side of the Sava were conferences with the mayors of some of the towns in the brigade's area of responsibility (AOR). We also socialized with our counterparts. For example, on Christmas Day 1995, Lieutenant Colonel Stone had dinner with the Croat mayor of Ravne Brcko, on whose turf we expected to site the brigade headquarters.

To cope with the civil-military linkages essential to success, the division assigned civil affairs, psychological operations, and public affairs detachments to the brigade. The brigade legal team helped us understand what the Dayton Accords required of the factions, the various international agencies, and us, and what we could and could not do. The Accords provided detailed guidance concerning military tasks, but they were less explicit for the nonmilitary aspects of the treaty. In the beginning, most of us assumed that the International Police Task Force, the Office of the High Representative, various UN organizations, and others would arrive soon after we did to begin the much more difficult task of restoring civil order, getting the economy moving, and developing systems to restore trust and confidence.

In retrospect, it is difficult to plumb the depths of our naiveté. To begin with, few of the organizations we would come to work with closely had even hired the staff they required. The Office of the High Representative, led by Carl Bildt, who had the lead for the entire effort, lacked even a roof under which to operate. In fact, the international community built its teams on the fly. Consequently, the heart of the effort to execute the Accords' intent lagged behind the military effort by months.

It seems obvious now, though it wasn't then, that we would be on our own for some time. In practice, this meant that we moved from crisis to crisis, struggling to stay ahead and to anticipate what the next crisis might be. Although the division managed to get to Bosnia more rapidly than the civilians with whom (and in many cases, for whom) we worked,

we, too, arrived incrementally. First Armored Division entered Bosnia at a rate that could be sustained across a single lane bridge that required daily maintenance.⁹ The brigade started crossing by barge on 19 December, but the final units—the long-awaited and eagerly anticipated support units of the 501st FSB—did not close until the end of February.

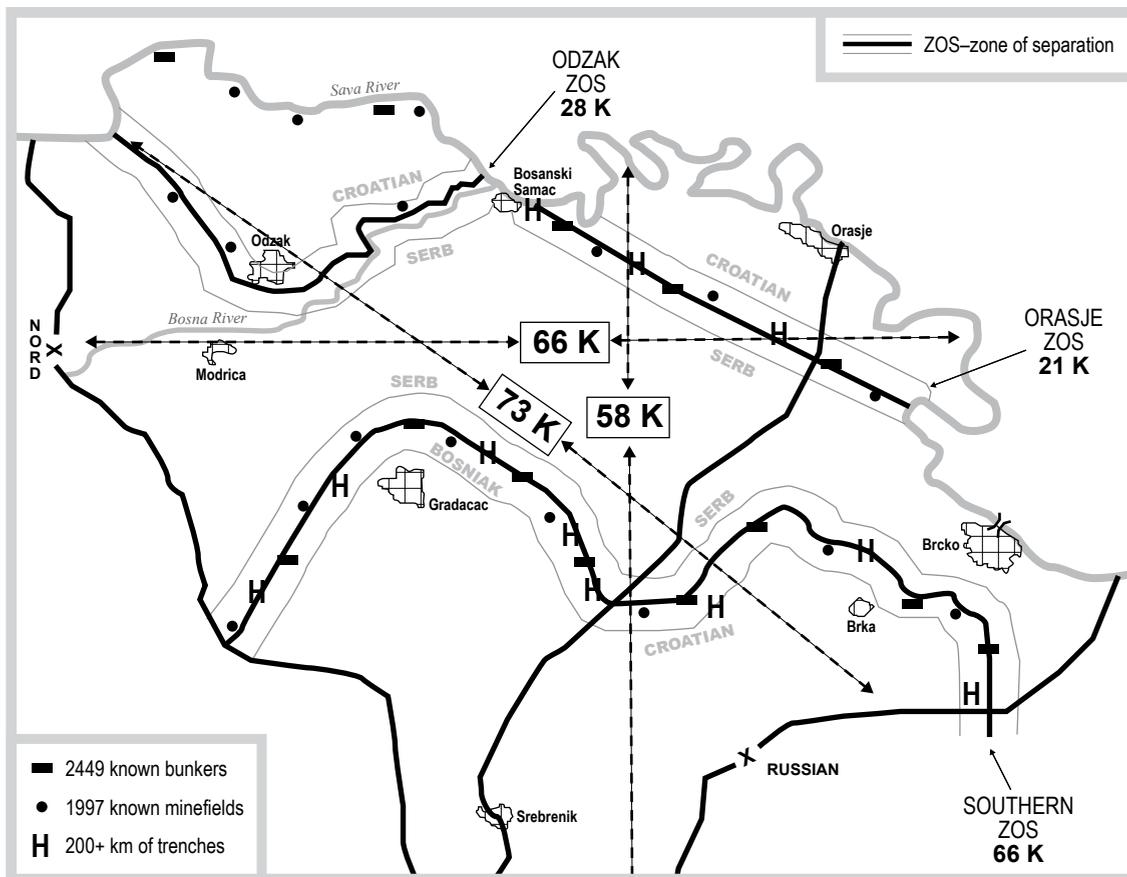
Consequently, the brigade (and for that matter, the division) had too few troops to execute required missions. Although it is fashionable now to claim that noncontiguous, nonlinear operations offer the best of all possible worlds, this claim does not consider fully the term's implications.

In Bosnia, the division and brigade support areas lay at the center of a circle, with the combat formations in wedge-shaped areas assigned to the brigades. Just getting established proved difficult. The conditions on the ground further exacerbated these problems: Bosnia is a beautiful country, but it is mostly rugged hills cut by streams, and in 1995, very few of the bridges over these streams remained intact. The roads, too, were few; almost all of them had only two lanes; and near the confrontation lines, the faction armies had mined, cut, or barricaded them. The weather compounded our problems. Rain or snow bounded by short periods of hard freeze characterized the first three months of 1995. To make it even more interesting, the factions had laid millions of mines in thousands of minefields, most of them unmarked. In many of the fields that were marked, the opposition had laid mines inside the lanes the owners had left open.

By the end of our nearly 12 months in Bosnia, 1st Brigade had identified or stumbled into some 1,800 minefields along and outside 200 kilometers of trenches and field fortifications. Although the largest field had fewer than 100 mines, and most had fewer than 50, that still meant we faced about one million mines, ranging from antipersonnel mines to large (1,000-pound) maritime mines.¹⁰

Finally, getting into our AOR and operating within it required us to establish facilities and communications. Obviously, we needed to be as close to the confrontation lines as possible, and we needed to be on all sides of the lines.

To understand what Bosnia was like in 1995, imagine West Virginia with minefields, many of its towns reduced to rubble, and refugees living under horrendous conditions in the midst of a brutal civil



1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, area of responsibility.

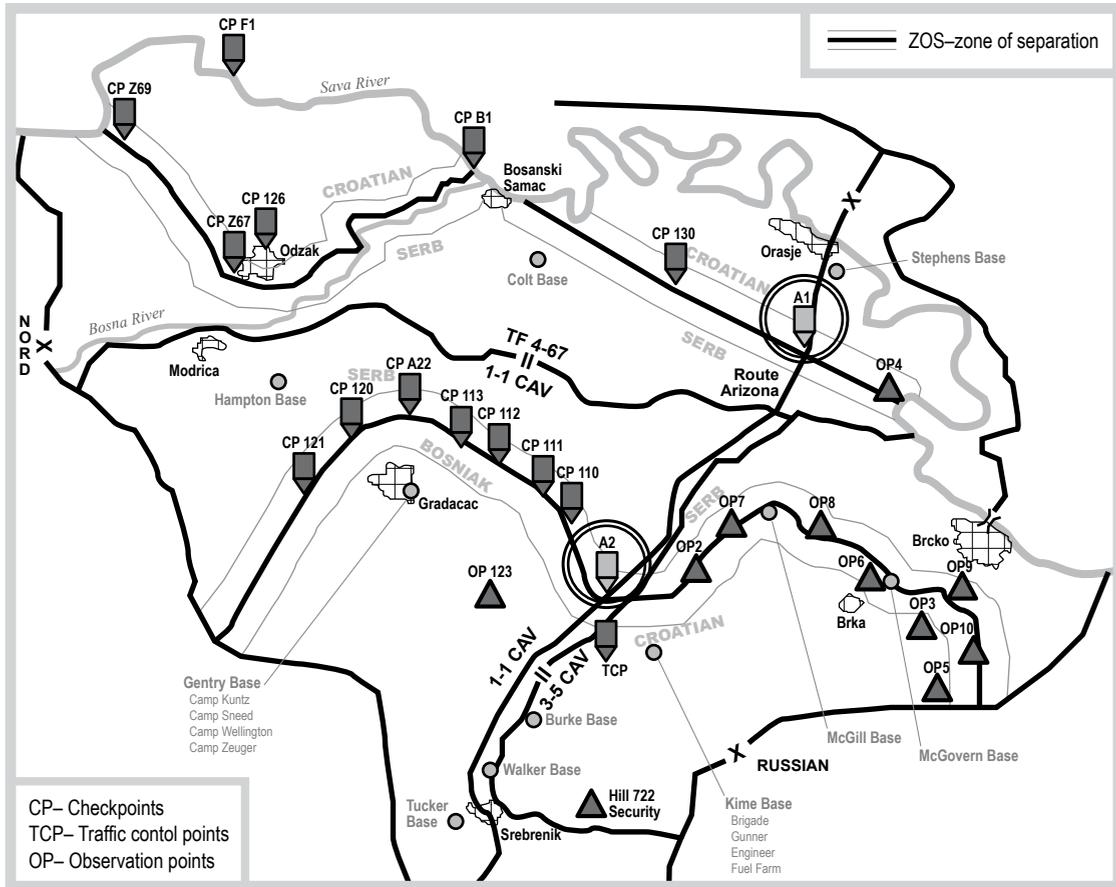
war. Finding places to operate and establishing communications required imagination, persistence, and hard work. We strove to meet the guidelines stipulated by V Corps: a few large base camps. In practice, however we couldn't do that and get the mission done. At one point, we had 16 base camps or operating sites, some as small as a single platoon perched on a hilltop to defend a communications site, and 5 large base camps of 800 to 1,000 Soldiers and a few civilians.

We sited our base camps in accordance with a few simple guidelines. They should—

- Be astride a main avenue of approach that had been tactically or operationally significant during the war.
- Be as close as possible to the confrontation lines.
- Ensure a presence among all the factions (to show impartiality).
- Avoid occupying private residences to minimize disruption for returning inhabitants.

- Involve land with clear legal title that we could place under contract.

In choosing our sites, we sought the advice and support of both the civilian and military leaders in the area. Some of the sites did not look at all promising when we moved in. In January 1996, I met Lieutenant Colonel Cucolo to see the site he proposed for his base camp. He had chosen an abandoned collective farm that lay astride the main avenue of approach from Brcko to Brka over which some of the fiercest fighting in the Posavina had occurred. The site lay literally across the zone of separation, among mines and unexploded ordnance. The ground was marshy and only five kilometers from the Sava River, just south of Brcko. Frankly, I could see no advantage in it, except that it met all the criteria laid out in the guidance. I told Cucolo to go ahead because, despite my misgivings, I could see he was right. The Black Knights, supported by the 23d Engineers, Seabees from the 130th Naval Mobile Construction Battalion, and a host of local



1st Brigade checkpoint and observation point original locations.

contractors, cleared the mines and built Camp McGovern, named for a Black Knight who had won the Medal of Honor in Korea.

As all of this proceeded apace, we worked to separate the combatants. Almost from the beginning, the solution to “how to do” this seemed best arrived at in collaboration with the combatants. On my first crossing of the Sava, I had accompanied Brigadier General O’Neal to the headquarters of the Orasje Corps, in Orasje. There we met with the Croatian Defense Force commander in the so-called Orasje pocket. He claimed that he would meet his obligations and introduced me to the officer who would serve as his liaison to 1st Brigade. In the next few days, I met the commanders of all of the other factions, including all nine brigade commanders of the Bosnian-Serb East Bosnia Corps. At that session, I suggested that the smart way to separate forces was for them to develop the solution. In the end, with some coaching, all three factions agreed to a simultaneous relief in sector of their positions by 1st Brigade units.

We hammered out the details while shivering in a poorly heated tent set up in the ruins of a restaurant in the middle of the planned zone of separation alongside MSR Arizona. Each of the brigade’s battalions marshaled units from the factions and, in a matter of days, cleared 42 routes through the zone of separation. To do this, the battalions organized mine-proofing teams built around mine-roller tanks and combat engineer vehicles, with medics in support. The factions, each on their side, cleared out mines until they reached each other. We then proofed the routes. Subsequently, we established checkpoints in stages and assumed responsibility for the zone. Together, 1st Brigade and the factions established the zone of separation by 16 January, as the Accords stipulated. Although conceived at the top and organized using the Joint Military Commission process established by the Accords, this operation depended on company commanders, usually paired with faction brigade commanders.

By the end of February 1996, the factions had learned to stay out of the zone of separation at the



Tough conditions: snow and ice cover a 1-1 CAV M3 Bradley manning a checkpoint during Operation Joint Endeavor, February 1996. SSG Ron Clendenen is in the turret.

cost of several hundred confiscated weapons and a number of incidents. However, the pace of operations did not slow down; in fact, in some ways it picked up, as we turned to destroying bunkers and burying trenches based on the theory that if we did so we made it very hard for the factions to become bellicose. The absence of fighting positions coupled with the combatants' obvious exhaustion would, I believed, make it hard for them to fight each other—or us. It also became apparent to me that the brigade needed to effect the next transition. In the early stages, I directed operations from the top with the battalions executing as they saw fit within the parameters of my guidance. I had always planned to move from centrally directing operations to affording my talented battalion commanders far greater leeway to decide for themselves what they needed to do and how to do it.

Some of them might argue that I waited too long. What I can say for sure is that sometime in February, I realized it was time to turn over daily operations to the battalion commanders and begin thinking further ahead—they knew what to do and didn't need me looking over their shoulders. Instead, I would focus on setting conditions for their success and considering what our future requirements would be.

I also felt that I needed to look at how we operated to ensure it made sense. We had not developed standard operating procedures for doing tasks that had become routine. For example, in conventional operations, units are tracked on maps using icons. That approach made little sense when executing

stability operations. Stone's staff developed a mission tracking system for 1-1 CAV that we applied throughout the brigade. It was a matrix that listed every departure from base camps, its tasks, its routes, and its estimated times of return. With it, the brigade and subordinate units could effectively track all activities in their sectors using a uniform approach that everyone understood. Since we routinely had as many as 120 separate activities going on outside the wire, a standardized system for tracking them made sense.

To acquire an understanding of long-term issues, I asked De Graff to develop a campaign plan focused on the brigade's main effort, Brcko. In about two weeks, he and his staff produced a plan based on several "engagements" designed to establish conditions that would enable the brigade to meet the Dayton Accords' military requirements and to anticipate the kind of support we would have to provide to civilian agencies. We also needed some useful means to gauge progress toward our goals. Assessing military operations proved easy, because the specified military tasks could be assessed objectively, mostly in terms of yes or no. For example, all faction troops in cantonments by such-and-such a day—yes or no. On the civil side, however, we had no set date for the return of those who had fled the killing and no means of identifying rightful owners of property. On the other hand, we could see that each of the factions had housed people in homes they freely admitted belonged to someone else—specifically, to someone else from a rival ethnic group.

De Graff's campaign planning led us to conclude that the economy and reconciliation (or at least accommodation) would prove decisive in making things work in Bosnia. The plan envisioned building where we could on the connections the leaders of the factions had between them. For example, all three of the protagonists who claimed to be "the" mayor of Brcko knew each other. Two had served on the faculty of the local college and the third had served in what amounted to the city council. The



Courtesy of author

A U.S. convoy clears a checkpoint, February 1996.

soldiers all knew each other as well. In practice, this meant that despite three years of bitter civil war, there were informal relationships to exploit. As a practical matter, finding ways to make the roads safe, promoting economic ties, and determining how we would deal with the planned arbitration of Brcko's future loomed among the most important intermediate objectives of our campaign. Necessarily, how we made decisions at and within the brigade would change fundamentally, from addressing immediate tactical requirements to developing long-term approaches or lines of operation (although we did not use this term) to guide decentralized decision making down to the companies and often to the platoons.

To get at these two objectives, we attempted to advance on several lines of operation. These included holding police forces responsible for the safety of "everyone's" citizens, working with the local military to return detained motorists, working with the civil authorities on possible means of cooperation, and assessing the economic needs of the communities in our AOR. Writing about this is much easier than doing it. To make any headway at all, the brigade had to work with three different police forces: the International Police Task Force (IPTF) when it arrived in sufficient numbers, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and UN Civil Affairs (UN CIV A). There were others, but these were the ones we coordinated or collaborated with most often.

All of our efforts assumed some risk. For example, at one point the police forces of the factions became such a problem that the commander of the Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps forbade the police forces to leave their barracks until

the IPTF had trained and certified them to assume their duties. First Brigade had to force the closure of one police station, an action that included confiscating some 48 automatic weapons. Taking weapons from people who do not wish to give them up is an exciting proposition. To do so without loss of life, we most often employed surprise and overwhelming force. In time, all of the units of 1st Armored Division developed and refined similar techniques. Almost from the beginning of our tour in Bosnia, our tactics for managing everything from weapons seizures to ugly crowds included isolating the site as soon as possible.

In late summer of 1996, the division formalized the tactical process. The resulting mantra included "isolate, dominate, attack at all echelons, and mass." Isolating a problem speaks for itself. "Dominate" and "mass" are about retaining the initiative and bringing more than adequate forces to bear. "Attack at all echelons" meant just that. The moment an incident developed, units reported left, right, and higher so that everyone knew what was happening. This enabled every echelon, up to and including IFOR headquarters, to call military and/or civilian faction leaders, to marshal resources, and to head off other problems. Very few things happened in Bosnia by accident. Nearly every incident either stemmed from an effort to make political capital or provided an opportunity for a faction to make political capital. Responding energetically and assuring rapid and accurate reporting enabled us to minimize or prevent problems.

There is much more to say (on supporting elections, working to clear mines, restoring some commercial enterprise, and spontaneously developing the "Arizona Market"), but these tales will have to

be told elsewhere. Instead, one final vignette must serve to illustrate the essence of command during stability operations. Arguably, the essence of command in any environment is creativity coupled with the ability to envision an end state, communicate that vision clearly, assign resources, and supervise execution. For me and for the 1st Brigade generally, that essence was the formation of an informal organization we called the Posavina Working Group.

By the spring of 1996, each of the three maneuver battalions had established close ties with community leaders and found ways to help them begin to restore “normal” conditions. Cucolo met on a regular basis with the political and military leaders of the Bosnians, Serbs, and Croats. Stone (and his successor, Lieutenant Colonel Tim Cherry) chaired meetings in Gradacac, at his base, or in Modrica, where the local Serb and Bosnian leadership met. Lieutenant Colonel Anderson held meetings in the northern part of the brigade’s area, where Croatian civil and military leaders from Orasje and Odzak met with their Serb counterparts from Bosanki Samac. All of this proved useful and resulted in small steps, including Serbs providing water to Bosnians in or near Brcko (for a fee). Similarly, the power plant in Modrica sold electricity to Croats in Odzak.

None of this enabled the Posavina to compete effectively for the resources required to get things

moving and to sustain progress. Equally important, none of the organizations from the international community, to include the World Bank and our own U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), had the means or the staff to assess projects and assign priorities. In some cases, important projects were overlooked while others had more than one sponsor. In July 1996, after having survived several ugly moments in and around Brcko when Bosnians returned to the area to rebuild their homes, the brigade was drifting a bit. In the wake of my conscious choice to decentralize operations, the efforts we were making lacked overarching coherence. In short, we had outrun our headlights and, despite planning for a transition, we had missed one.

Anderson made all of this apparent in a discussion following a meeting with one of the factions. Anderson (who essentially outlined the thoughts in the preceding two paragraphs) observed that someone needed to “bring it together.” Without explicitly naming me as the culprit, he led me to the conclusion that if I waited any longer for someone else to take the reins for the Posavina, it would be too late. I was dumbfounded. He was absolutely right. He had seen what I had not seen, but should have: If not the brigade, then who? If not now, then when? This seemed obvious—after he made the case.

Based on Anderson’s polite but firm boot in the backside, De Graff and I planned and coordinated a meeting for the key players in the international community organizations who operated in the Posavina. Ultimately, we met in July or August of 1996 at our semipermanent Joint Military Commission site (a tent with a floor astride MSR Arizona). We had a very good turnout, including representatives from the IPTF, UNHCR, UN CIV A, USAID, the European Union Customs Monitors, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the World Bank, and several others. Most important, the regional Office of the High Representative (OHR) attended and represented Carl Bildt. We did not



U.S. forces removing debris in Brcko, spring 1996.

U.S. Army

invite any of the factions to this session, but brought them in subsequently. Together, we hammered out a vision for what we called the Posavina Working Group. The vision was straightforward:

- Continued progress toward full implementation of the Dayton Accords, including full compliance with the military annex of the treaty and impartial support for reconstruction of the infrastructure and the integrated economic development underway.

- Right of return respected by all parties.

- Economic and social integration of the Brcko arbitration results.

- Use of the Posavina Corridor as a model for the rest of the country and as a tool for joining entities with each other and neighboring countries in accordance with West European standards.

To this vision, we added subordinate directions or categories addressing compliance, infrastructure, and reconciliation. Where possible, the group agreed to assign responsibility or a lead agency.

The Posavina Working Group provided coherence and direction to the efforts of all. Although none of the group's nonmilitary members had the luxury of focusing exclusively on the Posavina, we in the 1st Brigade could. For that reason alone, the group paid dividends to those who lived there. They had an advocate—1st Brigade—and we had a lever to use with our colleagues elsewhere. We also benefited from the issues and ideas that others broached in the working group. For example, the UNHCR pointed out that although Brcko remained bifurcated by overlapping factional entities, the records of everyone who had lived there remained in the city. This allowed us to obtain and use the personal records that regular people needed to get on with their lives. I also believe that our working group enabled the Posavina to compete successfully for important projects, including a power transformer and several other works that helped restore basic infrastructure.

In the months after forming the working group, the brigade undertook several important tasks and endured more than one crisis. We supported national elections and the safe return of more than 300 families to their homes, enabled cooperation between police forces, found the means to support many small projects under U.S.-sponsored aid programs, supported nongovernmental organizations where able, survived an accidental bombing by a Navy

F-14, and dealt with small incidents too numerous to mention. Finally, we redeployed while supporting the units that relieved us in place. Among other things, we gave our relief training and a graduation “exercise.”

We all came to understand that when the scenario makes it impossible to win, you've got to change the rules. We adapted daily as the situation changed, and it changed daily. As I believe many of the Soldiers did, I came away from the experience with the view that serving in Bosnia was difficult but rewarding. For me, it was easily the best year of more than 28 in uniform.

What I learned in Bosnia seemed to me, at the time at least, to validate the Army's view of how to equip, train, and man the U.S. Army. The 1993 edition of FM 100-5, *Operations*, specified quite clearly that Army units had to be able to move up and down the continuum of operations, from full-fledged combat to MOOTW. Consistent with that view, the Army continued to focus on “general purpose” forces which, although optimized for combat operations, could, with training specific to the environment, operate anywhere along the continuum on short notice—like the interval between August and December 1995.

That made sense to me then, and it still does now. In December 1995, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, entered Bosnia with a tank task force, a mechanized task force, a cavalry squadron, and combat support and service support units. By the time the brigade redeployed, it had gone through several task organizations, adding and dropping units as diverse as Seabee battalions and U.S. Marine Corps unmanned-aerial-vehicle ground-station detachments. In the fall of 1996, the Bandits redeployed home. In their stead, the brigade received the 519th MP battalion, which gave up one company to the Black Knights and received a mechanized company team in direct support. This is what brigades do: they receive and give up units based on mission analysis as conditions and missions change.

Brigades exist to devise solutions to problems assigned by higher headquarters. This requires the capability to plan and execute operations by integrating and combining arms. That was so in Bosnia, and it remains so today. To be effective, officers who command brigades must be tactically

and technically proficient, but they must also be able to tolerate and even thrive in conditions of uncertainty or when the benefits of effective solutions are more than a little ambiguous. They must be able to communicate in both the send and receive modes. They must be amenable, too, to taking risks along the way with the expectation that sometimes they will fail. Mitigating risk is sound; avoiding risk is not.

Finally, above all else, the brigade and its units must be able to adapt. This trait stems from con-

fidence, tolerance of ambiguity, and hard training. Brigades must be able to reequip and retrain according to missions they are assigned. Indeed, that is just what we did in Bosnia—including reequipping tank and infantry platoons with HMMWVs when it made sense to do so.

On the other hand, adaptable units and commanders find ways to do what they must with the equipment at hand and in the conditions in which they find themselves. That, to me, is the moral of this story. **MR**

NOTES

1. Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Random House, 1999). Ambassador Holbrooke's account of the road to peace, however self-serving, is the standard for understanding how peace did come to the Posavina. His achievement is real; however, his criticism of those of us in IFOR who carried the ball for the country is unsupported, unfair, and unreasonable.

2. There are two very good narratives on this topic that consider the Army in Europe. Richard M. Swain's *Army Command in Europe During the Time of Peace Operations: Tasks Confronting USAREUR Commanders, 1994-2000* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2003) tells the story from the perspective of the Army's senior headquarters for Europe. Swain's account is concise and fast-paced, despite having to address esoteric staffing issues and the challenges of operating in Europe at the service component command level, where the commander wore at least three hats at all times, including service component commander; commander in chief and commanding general of U.S. Army Europe; NATO commander as commanding general of Allied Forces Central Europe; and theater Army commander as commanding general of 7th U.S. Army.

3. See Charles E. Kirkpatrick, *Ruck It Up* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2006), 463-70.

4. Since the Black Knights had just returned from supporting the UN mission in Macedonia, they did not deploy to Bosnia that summer. Instead, they rested, retrained, and prepared for a Partnership for Peace mission, which they executed in early August.

5. This definition reflects my interpretation of doctrine and stems directly from a discussion with the V Corps historian and my very good friend, Charles E. Kirkpatrick. Sadly, Dr. Kirkpatrick passed away in October 2005.

6. See Mike Jones, "The 'Iron Dukes' Supporting Operation Joint Endeavor," (Monograph, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College [USAWC], 1999), 18.

7. Lieutenant Colonel Tony Cucolo was so taken with the implicit cynicism in the idea that it was "just a footnote" that he used it as the title of his U.S. Army War College paper on his experience leading the Black Knights in Bosnia. See Tony Cucolo, "Just a Footnote: Task Force 3-5 Goes to Bosnia," (Monograph, Carlisle Barracks, PA: USAWC, 1998).

8. For an excellent account of the great work done by the engineers, see Don C. Young, "The Sava River Bridge Mission: The Opening Mission for Operation Joint Endeavor in Bosnia," (Monograph, Carlisle Barracks, PA: USAWC, undated).

9. This is not literally the whole truth, since Colonel (later Major General) John Batiste brought his headquarters in via Belgrade, then moved into Bosnia without having to transit the bridgehead, as did the Russian brigade. The Nordic-Polish brigade formed around units already in country as part of UN-mandated forces. The Turks also transitioned from UN troops to IFOR troops. Some troops arrived via air through Tuzla and Sarajevo, and some came overland from the Adriatic coast, but most came across the bridge over the Sava River.

10. I took this data from my operations map. MND-North established an office, the sole function of which was to track minefields and mine-clearing operations. This function proved very difficult to do, since various nongovernmental organizations came in and cleared mines without even reporting what they were doing to MND-North. Similarly, the factions often claimed to have cleared mines, but their activities weren't verified by MND-North or its assigned units. Farmers also burned their fields in the spring with the result that some mines detonated. We could never verify where these mines had been. In 1st Brigade, we reported only those mines cleared that we had verified and counted. We could verify just over 3,200 mines removed from nearly a million. When I left Bosnia, I had no idea how many minefields were actually cleared to the standard of the time: 99 percent.



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