

Canadian Interpretation – Canadian Sources



Picture 17: Graphic map of the UNPA's - and Medak Pocket published in a book "Chances for Peace"

“The Second Battalion of the Princess Patricia Light Infantry/Battle group was being commended..()..for a heroic and professional mission during the Medak Pocket Operation in the former Yugoslavia in September 1993. In extreme peril and facing enemy artillery, small arms and heavy machinegun fire, as well as antitank and antipersonnel mines, members of the 2.PPCLI Battle group held their ground and drove the Croatian forces back. The exemplary actions of the battle group caused the Croatian Army to cease their ongoing tactics of “ethnic cleansing” in the Sector (South – author’s remark), without question saving many innocent civilian lives.” That is the quote from the citation the 2.PPCLI’s Lt. Colonel Jim Calvin and a few hundred present soldiers, protagonists of the Medak Pocket events, were awarded by the Governor General of Canada and the Canadian military forces Commander in Chief, Ms. Adrienne Clarkson, on December 1st 2002 in Winnipeg, Canada. That citation proves how to impose a historical “truth.” Croats attacked Canadian peacekeepers; a battle between them was waged, the Croats were defeated and forced to withdraw, and after their committed war crimes they became a nation with a tarnished reputation in the eyes of Canadians and the rest of the world. Was that really the historical truth? Or was that an adapted, new truth, in which the Canadian Army was embellishing something that did not take place and the Croatian Army, state and its people were condemned for actions they did not do perpetrate. Is that somewhat late citation awarded as a cover for the ugly incidents Canadian forces had been involved with in Somalia? Does that citation help the Canadian Army reclaim the position and privileges it had in Canadian society? Is the citation intended to boost the Army’s morale and effectiveness in a time that brings many uncertainties with it – even a proposal for the Canadian Army’s radical reform and a new approach to Canada’ involvement in the world’s peacekeeping, which has been Canada’s pride? I do not think that the Canadian Army, Canadians, or Canada are to be blamed for criminal acts in Somalia. In Somalia, the brunt of guilt should be put on specific Canadians involved, and they should be punished. The same should apply to guilty Croatian individuals in the Medak Pocket Operation. Much like Canadian soldiers in Somalia, the evidence needs to be examined, guilt proven and punishments should be passed without changing the events of history.

After a thorough investigation of the facts about the events of the Medak Pocket some half-truths could be revealed.

Point one - the citation the Governor General and Chief of Defence awarded to Canadian forces for the mission accomplished in the former Yugoslavia. At the end of 2002 the Defence Chief disclosed the name of state as Yugoslavia, in order to denote the place of the mission. According to international law,

UNPROFOR was a UN protection force with an initial mandate applied to Yugoslavia. However, in September 1993, Yugoslavia did not exist anymore. In its place, were the five states that had been formed; the last one tried to carry on with the name – the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It was not a UN member state. The four states created from the former Yugoslavia were all UN member states. If the unfortunate war had not been waged, the four states, apart from sharing the same neighbouring area, would not have any connection with the state that by that time had already changed its name and constitution.²⁴⁸ Therefore, in the citation, a much more adequate name to use would have been Croatia, where the Operations had taken place. When the citation was awarded, Croatia had already been a UN member state, a sovereign state, for ten years. In 1993, (one year after international, including Canadian recognition), one fourth of Croatia's territory had still been occupied by the aggressor (Serbia, Montenegro and Serb rebels). The aggressor had been organized, armed, and sent to occupy Croatia by that same former Yugoslavia. Today – twelve years after Croatia acquired its sovereignty, many a respectable historian and a journalist, state facts already known to us. One of these writers is the 2002 Pulitzer prize author Samantha Power. When writing about the Belgrade strategy towards Croatia during that period, Power calls it "the HYENA" strategy. This means "hyena"(the aggressor)" *refrains from its most aggressive actions when international condemnation or pressure is at its strongest. As soon as this ceases, the hyena continues nibbling its prey.*"²⁴⁹ The UN mandate was approved as long as the formal Yugoslav state existed.

Point two - The Canadian Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief never mentioned the name of the state that agreed on receiving help from the peacekeepers, in order to achieve those objectives – the full sovereignty and liberation of its territory. The citation never mentions Croatia as a country in which the heroic deeds of Canadian soldiers took place, but names its army, the Croatian army – sic – "ill reputed" because of its "constant ethnic cleansing". It also mentions the enemy, or, "Croatian artillery, heavy machineguns and minefields" which to uninformed Canadians would suggest that the enemies of Canada were the Croats and their "notorious" army. While describing the difficulties Canadian soldiers overcame in that unnamed country, whose army is called "Croatian", the Canadian Commander-in-Chief hasn't chosen the overstatements like "tanks, charges, heavy artillery fire"²⁵⁰, but all the same she speaks of attacks being repelled and positions that were kept under Croatian Army pressure, the later aim being, the citation suggests, to defeat Canadian soldiers.

Point three - The motive. Why did Croats make such an effort to overwhelm the Canadians? Did the Croatian forces try to overrun and defeat the Canadians (and French) and therefore start another war with Canada, France and the UN in general? That is hardly likely, when one knows that at that time (1993) Croatia was under adverse circumstances. It underwent constant attacks from its occupied territory, international community pressures (UN, EU), mistrust, and was considered equally at fault as the RSK. This meant an open undermining of Croatian sovereignty. Serbs were tacitly recognized, their right to form a state within a state and a future RSK secession from the Republic of Croatia was permitted, if that meant an achievement of peace in the former Yugoslavia. No, Croats were not up to opening a new front to wage a war with powerful forces such as Canada or France or with the UN. It is clear that one's army on one's territory would defend its sovereignty, but even UNPROFOR had sometimes behaved like an occupying force and not a UN protection force.

Point four - Croats were prepared to hold the ceasefire agreement. By forming buffer zones in the Medak Pocket they were up to reaching a compromise: allowing UNPROFOR to control the Croatian territory, because they knew that was the way to obtain their goal. The uncertainty and the slow pace of the path was reluctantly accepted by Croatian soldiers who were being killed or wounded in that area.²⁵¹

Point five - The Croats mistrusted the UN forces because until that time, their behaviour proved to be questionable. UNPROFOR has often shown sympathy for the Serbs, who were skilled in manipulating it. Under UNPROFOR's watch, the Serbs tried to regain their lost territory.²⁵² The Croats experienced that during the Maslenica Bridge Operation. Even UNPROFOR was afraid of a Serb military action – a counterattack – as was quoted by the Sector South UN Commander's assessment given on September 16th 1993.²⁵³

Point six - The Canadians were in a rush to implement the Medak Pocket agreement because it was imperative that the international agency, UN peace forces retain a degree of credibility – and because they had proven many times to be inefficient.²⁵⁴ There were several more reasons UNPROFOR, especially CANBAT, had wanted the situation in the field to change and to impose the agreement without the Croatian side accepting it, all of that not within the designated time frame.²⁵⁵ On the ground the Canadians had tried to change what had previously been agreed upon between the UN and the Croatian side. General Cot and the Canadians had not been satisfied with such limitations, they considered the civilian bureaucracy governing the UN ineffective – the soldiers would do things better. That dissatisfaction (cost General Cot his position as the UN Forces Commander) and

transformed itself in the impatience and their own specific rules of engagement explanation. The stiff position UNPROFOR took versus Croatia and its Army led to tensions, which were easily turned into firefights, gun and heavy machinegun fire.²⁵⁶ On one side the Canadians intermingled with the Serbs, while on the other side, there were the Croats. In their reports, the Canadians allowed for the possibility that the Croats were correct in that the Croats could have mistakenly considered Serb provocations as Canadian ones, who fired from their positions and consequently returned fire.²⁵⁷ The night conditions could favour this, because in the dark most combatants are highly sensitive. In most armies in the world these types of fire exchanges would be called “scuffles”, “small scale incidents”, “small ceasefire violations” – but the Canadians turned them into a large-scale battle.²⁵⁸ This is how the non-existent battle²⁵⁹ took place. “Canada’s largest scale conflict since the Korean war”. Canada made that battle public and celebrated its outcome no sooner than the year 2002 (for reasons already explained), and the consequences of it are still felt in Croatia. (Canada’s frigid relations towards Croatia and a very strict visa regime imposed are a result)²⁶⁰ Emotional reactions of the Canadian soldiers, after finding and seeing people killed in the Medak Pocket perimeter are understandable, but it seems those emotions have clouded the soldiers witnessing of the events. The Canadian foot patrols were engaged in “hunting Croats down”.²⁶¹ What they went through had, after the fact, formed what they actually experienced. This was later given as the excuse for the “decisive”, “strong” and even arrogant Lt.Colonel Calvin and the Canadians’ behaviour, before facing death and destroyed buildings. Canadians wanted to force their way in the liberated areas of Divoselo, Počitelj and Čitluk, earlier than agreed upon, only because they had “a hunch ethnic cleansing was in progress”²⁶², and they expected “those bastards Croats”²⁶³ were up to some evil. They wanted to start a “peace imposing” mission, a humanitarian action, to save innocent civilian victims,²⁶⁴ although UNPROFOR had never decisively answered to the crimes committed by the other side. An example of this is the terrorist sabotage on the Kusunja victims September 8th 1993 day of remembrance – a day before the Medak Pocket operation started.

I do not question the existence of victims (and war crimes) in the Medak Pocket. They were committed by those irresponsible individuals who should have already been punished. About alleged crimes, (they are alleged until proven otherwise in a tribunal), the inquiry is ongoing. They are also alleged because there was never any identification of the victims to differentiate who were civilians and who were military victims of war. Like granny “Danica,” being glorified by Serb writer Momo Kapor.²⁶⁵

This granny had often been viewed on Krajina TV programs. She was a Serb heroine. A few days prior to the Medak Pocket Operation, Kapor described her in a Belgrade newspaper as manning the heavy machinegun and threatening the Croats. The old woman Danica had been killed in the action. She later became a civilian victim and proof for the committed Croatian war crime. In the official data on Serb victims killed in the RSK up until "Oluja", not a single person killed or missing in the Medak Operation had the exact location or the manner of death attached to his or her name. Their deaths are only listed as "killed during the Ustaša aggression". Why was such data concealed by the Serb military? In order for all killed to become civilian victims? In order to make the non-uniformed believe that in their ranks some military order prevailed; that no old men and women took part in fighting, or to make believe that in the Medak Pocket there were only 400 poorly armed territorial defence members, therefore civilians fighting.

So the data speaks about those killed in fighting on both sides, the pile of used confiscated arms, and facts about combat units. The crimes did happen. It is necessary to be exact in how many there were, who committed them, whether they were commanded, done out of the criminal whim or out of revenge. The indictments²⁶⁶ of General Janko Bobetko and Rahim Ademi, speak of the commanding responsibilities. The investigators have questioned Generals Markač, Stipetić, Norac, Admiral Domazet, and are looking for the perpetrators. It is only a question of time when the real culprits will be discovered. The subject of this study does not deal with why this was not done any sooner, and who the culprits are, this is for the ICTY in the Hague or relevant Croatian courts to decide.

Lt.Colonel Calvin has for years since the Medak Pocket Operation been active in achieving the citation for his troops. He gave interviews, lobbied, attended the Canadian Parliament sessions. In his thank you speech to MP's for the Governor General citation, Jim Calvin said: "...the citation is less than to cite that the battle never happened..."²⁶⁷ And so, the citation for something that did not happen, for the battle, for the "intended, planned Croatian Army attack on CANBAT", "for the intended purpose of Canadian soldiers to be killed and forced to retreat, their intended defeat and surrender" has become the main proof that the battle did exist, and that it "really happened". A lovely logical turn of words that served to soothe Canadian internal political problems and served its main purpose – to re-establish trust in the Canadian Armed Forces and to assure greater financial aid to its retired soldiers.²⁶⁸

Canada and UN Peacekeeping MISSIONS

Canada has a long peacekeeping tradition. The first mission was during the Korean war in Kapyong battle where 60 or so Canadians were killed. That same battalion had been deployed 40 years later in the Medak Pocket, under the code name CANBAT 1 / ROTO 2 / OPERATION HARMONY.²⁶⁹ The first Canadian contingent of the UN force peace mission in the former Yugoslavia – UNPROFOR – had been moved to Croatia from Germany. It consisted of a basic unit – 1st battalion “Le Royal 22e Regiment”, then the 3rd battalion “The Royal Canadian regiment”, and one engineer platoon (pioneers) of the First combat engineer regiment stationed in Lahr, Germany. Engineers were a must for an area filled with landmines (eastern Slavonia), where the Canadian contingent was stationed at first. Canadian “blue helmets” were deployed in Vukovar, later in Sarajevo, Visoko, Goražde and Srebrenica. In Croatia they were deployed in Sector West and South. The UN has required armoured transporter M-113’s, that completely mechanized the regiment, to be exchanged for trucks, for “blue helmets” to look as peaceful as possible. Brigadier General Clive Addy declined that request (advised by General Lewis MacKenzie) which later would prove to be a great advantage.²⁷⁰ Lee A. Windsor analyzed the CANBAT organization: *“...70 percent of soldiers in infantry companies were reservists, seven out of twelve platoon leaders came from the reserve, soldiers were prepared for deployment according to squadrons and platoons – that was enough for reconnaissance missions on observation posts, and for the role of peacekeeping, but nobody had the faintest idea that those platoons would have to join and later form the battalion to engage in a battle.”*²⁷¹ 2.PPCLI in the “Operation Harmony” were responsible for the UNPA Sector West, situated in Croatia’s north-west corner. There, Lt. Colonel Calvin and his soldiers had among the belligerent sides, but also among friendly UN troops, acquired respect for being honest, but hard soldiers.²⁷²

CANBAT Armour

They had armoured personnel carrier M-113, like those of the American armoured cavalry. On the transporter a steel turret was added to protect the gunner who manned the Browning .50 caliber (12,7 millimetre) machinegun. Rifle companies were armed with medium machineguns C-6 (7.62 mm calibre) and man portable antitank weapons, 84 millimetre “Carl Gustav”. Infantry units carried C-7 machineguns and C-9 (5.56 mm) light

machineguns. The firepower of the infantry company was supported by heavy armour – 81 millimetre mortars and TOW missile launchers, mounted on armoured carrier's M-113 turrets. Canada was the first UN member to deploy such firepower in 1992 in Croatia. After first arriving, the Canadians executed a military exercise in Sector West, primarily to show the Croats they were decisive in repelling any attack on UNPA zones. Five months later the 2.PPCLI/Combat group had become the most efficient and esteemed UNPROFOR unit. This is why General Cot had chosen it for the Sector South mission.²⁷³ The armour on personnel carriers could protect Canadian soldiers in Sarajevo, Gorazde, Srebrenica, as well as in the Medak Pocket, and TOW antitank missiles would garner respect from all the belligerents. The 2.PPCLI Combat group consisted of 875 soldiers, sergeants and officers. Four hundred soldiers were reservists. The full name of the battalion under the auspices of Princess Patricia was the Second Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry or for short, the 2.PPCLI, or militarily even shorter the "Patricias". Under the Canadian Army code name "Operation Harmony" from April to September 1993 they formed a part of UNPROFOR for the former Yugoslavia. After the Erdut Agreement in June 1993 in which the two sides – the legitimate Croatian side and the self-proclaimed Serb rebel side agreed on separating their forces – the Canadian battle group under Lt. Colonel Jim Calvin's command and two motorized French infantry platoons started their deployment in Sector South in order "to prevent further Croat advancement, to oversee their retreat and to make a "buffer zone" under UN control."²⁷⁴ From the quote in which Lt. Colonel Calvin claims that "this (Medak Pocket Operation) was a unique action, similar to an offensive" it is possible to comprehend how he assessed the situation in the field and CANBAT's position. He obviously did not understand the political role peacekeepers had in Croatia²⁷⁵ and underlined its military character instead. Lt. Colonel Calvin thought as a soldier would, he wanted to prevail in the "offensive", impose on his enemy, attack it, defeat it, and if possible – to militarily excel. The war between the Croatian Army and the rebel Serbs - who were helped by volunteers and professional soldiers from the Yugoslav Army and the "Republika Srpska" Army - Lt. Colonel Calvin considered to be a conflict in which the Canadians were not deployed to separate the belligerents, but were to fight against one side, the side that undermined the shaky peace – and at that moment that side was the Croatian Army. "... We have found ourselves literally as participants of a small war and we were fighting for our lives... the battle group held its position and after three days of negotiations it repelled the Croatian forces and prevented the "ethnic cleansing" of that area to continue."²⁷⁶

The Canadian opposition, antipathy, even hostility against one side came as no surprise, because from earlier experiences in eastern and western Slavonia, the mistrust and lack of respect the Croats and Croatian Army had received was visible. Expressions like “fucking Croatia” and “bastards” used by Canadian soldiers were relevant to the Croats and to clashes Canadians had with Croats in Garešnica, Daruvar and later in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To illustrate this point: the part of the Ministry of Defence liaison office with the UN and EU (in the Short Analysis of the UNPROFOR engagement plan realization) under the title “UNPROFOR members misconduct” – on August 2nd/3rd 1992 members of CANBAT tore down and destroyed the flag of the Republic of Croatia; on August 4th 1992 two members of UNPROFOR belonging to the same unit had under the influence of alcohol tried to steal an official Ministry of the Interior vehicle; on September 20th 1992 at 13:00 hours in “Papiga” bar in Pakrac Canadian members of UNPROFOR started a fight with civilians; on the same day at 14:10 hours the members of CANBAT returned to the bar seeking revenge. They cocked their weapons and tried to take prisoner a reserve member of the Croatian police; on September 20th 1992 at 17:15 hours at a checkpoint, Canadians stopped civilian Josip Stvara, beat him, gagged him and locked him in a UNPROFOR bunker. The use of force and capture had taken place out of the UNPA perimeters; on September 22nd 1992 at 21:45 in Pakrac, two Canadians, slightly drunk, had insulted civilians and offered dollars to the girls calling them whores; on September 22nd at 23:00 hours in Pakrac, Canadians beat up Croatian citizen Robert Osterman a reserve policeman. The preconceptions with which Canadians first came to keep the peace – the negative ones about the Croats, “German allies”, and the positive ones about the Serbs “pro-Commonwealth - allies in two wars,” defined the relationship with the country they found themselves in.²⁷⁷

Applying the Agreement

“During the Medak Pocket Operation, heavy shelling occurred along the line, particularly in our area. We counted in one six-hour period about one thousand rounds of artillery on Donje Biljane and the company HQ area. They (Croats) used multiple rocket launchers, 120 mm mortars, 105 mm guns and lots of rockets. They used to use MRL’s against Benkovac a lot and the shelling was going both ways too. Somewhere around the middle of September we got word from General Cot, the force commander of UNPROFOR, to be prepared to go back and take over this area by force if necessary...”²⁷⁸ Describing the battle in which

Canadians found themselves (as the third party, in which as opposed to the French in the Maslenica Operation, they didn't have to remain neutral), this participant suggests that the Canadians were under a direct attack (as if they were a part of the Serb forces). It is to be understood from one of the Canadian reservists' statements also, who obviously didn't understand what was happening around him, or he has just repeated his superior's opinion. "We were sent there to stop an offensive operation, to repel the assailants and to create a "buffer zone". We were intercepted by the heavy machinegun fire and mortar shells, and that lasted for 36 (sic!) hours. "The peacekeepers" were forced to answer with firepower." The reserve soldier Marc Lundie brags that "when the battle ended the Croats officially reported 27 of their soldiers killed during the battle with the Canadian army (other sources quote that number as even higher – more than 100 Croats were wounded or killed) while some Canadians had shrapnel wounds."²⁷⁹ In that glorification, the praise of overpowering force of the Canadian armour, the bravery of Canadian soldiers and leadership is obvious; the much stronger Croatian enemy was made to retreat. If one would be more cynical, one would discover in that reservist's account his military machismo, his aversion toward one nation, and perhaps hatred against soldiers whom Canadians had eliminated in large numbers. In Bosnia and Herzegovina Canadians called Muslims, they did not like "wogs" while Croats, Lt.Colonel Jim Calvin he remarked in the book "Chances for peace." we did not like."²⁸⁰ It is possible Canadian soldiers were pleased that such a large number of Croat soldiers had been killed. Croats, who were guilty of a crime, were therefore worthy of such a punishment.

"At 12:00 noon (September 15th 1993) approximately 250 Canadian and 500 French soldiers started rolling in between Serb and Croat forces near the city of Medak. Croats opened a hail out of 20 millimetre anti-aircraft guns, mortars and machineguns." The rest of the day (September 15th), during the night and next morning (September 16th) Canadians engaged in 20 separate fights using infantry arms...the Croats retreated with 30 dead in the morning of September 16th...Canadians heard the burst of gunfire. Fires were visible across the valley (coming from Serb villages) behind Croatian lines. They were sure that the Croats were killing Serb civilians and armoured transporters platoon under Major Dan Drew's command had rolled towards the burning villages. The heavily armed Croat company stopped the Canadian column...and there was a 90-minute long tense pause ("Mexican standoff")²⁸¹. Such a dramatic description could suggest to the reader that the Canadian soldiers, like the knights in white armour, like the blue blouse cavalry from Westerns, without being given the command, at their own initiative, rushed to help Serb

soldiers and civilians in the Medak quagmire, while the role of the “bad guys”, Indians, not organized and volatile fighters was given to the Croatian army. But that moment did not look as in the Canadian reservist’s disposition. The Canadians moved as it was agreed upon (the agreement being discussed on various diplomatic, political and military levels for a couple of days). When they were stopped in front of Croat positions – one might speculate why – because the Croats were not informed, because the order to let Canadians through did not come in time, because of the 24-hour extension of a withdrawal, stalling. According to seized Serb documents, the Serb side also agreed in order not to disrupt the UN agreement. Lt. Colonel Jim Calvin had organized a press conference for some foreign TV correspondents and a couple of Serb journalists in front of the Croatian barrier. He immediately accused Croats of stalling in order to be able to finish “ethnic cleansing” of the occupied area. “A Croatian General who was quick to grasp the political danger”, let the Canadians through the blockade into the Medak Pocket. In Lički Čitluk, the Canadians and French found 16 bodies, 312 houses and farm buildings destroyed, and 130 livestock killed. In a nearby field a 70-year old woman’s body was found, as well as burned remnants of girls in their teens.”²⁸² Several witness accounts given by higher-ranking Canadian officers that held high commanding posts in the UN mission, described the events before they faced the consequences of the battle. Therefore Lt. Colonel Jim Calvin’s need to describe the events in such a picturesque and dramatic manner is understandable. “...The 2.PPCLI soldiers were overpowered three to one, they boldly faced tanks and artillery, and against all odds they succeeded in repelling the Croats. The Canadians had one soldier killed and four wounded.”²⁸³ This dramatic description of the battle gives Calvin and his unit a greater role than it played. General Lewis MacKenzie states that “in the morning of September 9th Canadians came under heavy Croat artillery fire. On 2.PPCLI positions more than 500 shells were fired.”²⁸⁴ MacKenzie does not differentiate between the Canadian and the Serb positions. They were positioned together on the opposite side, and shelling directed at these positions had the Canadians considering it to be an attack directed at them. From the book “Tested Mettle” it is clear that the Canadians were in Medak, that their position was near the Serb HQ, and that the primary shelling from the Croatian side was the HQ and that important road junction. The Canadian Lieutenant would, during that morning of September 9th re-deploy part of his platoon at a new position, in a new building, further away from the Serb positions. That was an indirect admission that the Canadians had chosen an unfavourable position and became a Croat artillery target. Part of the blame should be put on the previously stationed French con-

tingent. The French had been using the building in the vicinity of the Serb HQ, in the cellar they had a nice quantity of original French wine cases.²⁸⁵ It is understandable that many witnesses, describing the events, overlooked their own mistakes. An example of this is the exact date when the ceasefire agreement was signed. If the agreement was signed on September 13th as stated by General MacKenzie, then the impatience of Canadians to enter the area Croats had to leave on September 14th and 15th should be understandable. Croatian President Tudman had on September 12th already ordered a unilateral 24-hour ceasefire, for September 13th. All sides verbally agreed to a ceasefire and for talks to commence. On September 15th the agreement was signed. The agreement's exact timetable was set – how it would proceed, at what time, its plan and schedule was set. Various sources bring different data on how long the firefights between the Canadians and Croats lasted – from three or four days, 36 hours, 16 hours or 15 hours. The evaluation about the number of shells fired differs – several thousand, a thousand, five hundred. The data about the type of weapons Croats used in their attack also differs– heavy artillery, tanks, multiple rocket launchers. The number of combatants is also at odds – 2500 Croatian soldiers, the entire 9th guard brigade. By magnifying the danger, Canadians obviously wanted to embellish the drama that did not exist. From UNPROFOR documents it was noted that “the Croats showed co-operation and posed no obstacle to the agreement’s implementation”²⁸⁶

After Swedish General Wahlgren’s departure from the UN forces command position (because of his disagreement with international powers meddling in peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia)²⁸⁷, French Army General Jean Cot took command. This was an indirect rebuke that Wahlgren’s reproach of the powers who had large contingents of peacekeepers in the former Yugoslavia (France and Great Britain) for having separate politics in guiding political events accordingly – had been justified. The Serbs had fiercely accused the French behaviour during the Maslenica Operation; there were some conflicts about taking heavy artillery from the depots secured by the “double key”. That French “blue helmets” passive attitude (the French had an hour before the attack been informed about it by the Croats) was the Serb reasoning for their defeat. The French, traditional Serb allies, socialized, drank and played football matches, with them up until the Maslenica Operation. The Canadians accepted the Serb arguments for being defeated in the Maslenica Operation, and they used the same argument for the Medak Pocket defeat. The weak, unarmed Serbs, had been prevented by the French to arm themselves; therefore hundreds of them had been killed during an unequal fight with the Croats.²⁸⁸ It was now Cot’s time to give the

French and UNPROFOR back its credibility. Now was the time to enforce the international community's plans about Bosnia and Herzegovina (the VOPP²⁸⁹) and to achieve an agreement in Croatia. UNPROFOR was to retain its credibility and show Cot's personal ability and efficiency. As soon as the Medak Pocket crisis started, Cot used all his energy to stop the armed conflict and return to the "status quo ante" the pre-existing state, and to achieve the return of the Serbs to their land. General Cot had personally come to the Canadian Battle group HQ²⁹⁰ to remind Lt. Colonel Calvin of the "blue helmets" right to return fire if in danger²⁹¹. *"During the early hours of the afternoon of September 15th UN forces started moving to their positions from the position of the Croatian 9th mobile brigade a sporadic rifle fire was opened. When the armoured column continued to move, they were met with a real cannonade (?!). The Croatian Army would not allow them through. The battle raged during the next 15 hours²⁹². Canadians were using old Serb trenches near the Lički Čitluk village. They entered in order to stand in between the two sides, and the 9th mobile brigade was stationed less than 100 metres away. Some soldiers first hand accounts, as quoted by authors describing the event ("Tested Mettle", "Chances for Peace"), were filled with the event's excitement. The reports of battles being waged are contradicted by the nature of the firefights. The "baptism by fire", "the soldiers initiation", "soldiers' bragging", the excitement of experience re-lived (the experience of live ammunition fire or the experience of the battle being waged between the Croats and the Serbs) where Canadians were by-standers – is to be recognized in their overstatements. It is difficult therefore, to conclude from these "soldiers' accounts" that a real battle had been waged in which the Croats undertook several offensives, used 20 millimetre cannons, larger calibre guns and mortars, with which they plowed Canadian positions (Rod Dearing, 7th platoon)²⁹³. "Tracer fire lit the sky" or "Scott LeBlanc woke with the start, then himself cocked his C-9, fired short bursts at the base of the tracer arching over his trench...which made the Croats flee..." (?!)²⁹⁴. This account comes from someone who puts on a brave face, it does not speak of a witnessed event. It comes from someone who would humiliate his adversary, paints the events in black and white, makes his judgement who the courageous and who the cowardly side was ("...cocked his C-9...fired a short burst" versus "Croats who started fleeing"). Only by bragging, could that "scuffle" turn into a fierce, dramatic battle in which "everything depended on Canadian courage and military capability. Even an anonymous officer of the Yugoslav Army admitted, "...this was not a conflict according to Western standards." He could not refrain from adding that: "in terms of the Yugoslav wars, it represented extraordinarily large fighting..."²⁹⁵ As evidence, he listed the num-*

ber of Croatian soldiers being killed as between 20 and 50. The data itself makes us conclude he referred to the Croat and the Serb forces conflict. According to official Croatian data which the Canadian and Serb side would question, 10 Croatian soldiers were killed, which is half of the lesser number listed. According to the Serb officer's characterization of the ferocity of the conflict, it had not applied to the alleged Canadian/Croatian clash, but to the fight of the Croats against the Serbs. The only trustworthy Serb source, General Milisav Sekulić of the Srpska Krajina Army, does not play the numbers game. He considered them untrustworthy, but that does not prevent him from demonizing the Croats and accusing them of the crime of genocide.

In "the Canadian Military history: from 1945 to present – Peacekeeping: Yugoslavia" the explanation of the Medak Pocket events is put into a wider context in which the battles between the Croatian and Serb forces have taken place. The Canadian – Croatian clash in that interpretation is even longer in terms of time period - "...Croatian forces attacked Canadian soldiers for four days..." It is unclear when the period of four days started, before September 16th/17th or after. If it includes the period after the Canadian and French "blue helmets" were deployed, then those 4 days include the incidents that happened after the Croatian Army withdrew and the UN took control over the area. Incidents when UNPROFOR entered the minefields and there were warning night shootings, were interpreted as a new Croatian attack on UN forces. It is visible from UNPROFOR press releases dated September 19th and September 26th, about Canadian and French soldiers being wounded in a minefield in front of Croatian positions. In those releases, without inquiry proof, the Croats stand accused of shooting and not allowing help to the wounded Canadian and French soldiers²⁹⁶.

After General Bobetko's letter, in which he denied such accusations, General Cot apologized. But the notoriety of "the bad Croats" in future Canadian history books persisted. If the four days of warfare applied to the period before September 15th, from September 9th to 12th, it really had been a period of the fiercest fighting – but fighting between Croatian and Serbian forces. Apart from being in the way, or exposed to indirect artillery fire, Canadians dug themselves in, militarily protected themselves as any professional army would do. During those first four days of fighting they did not have any seriously wounded soldiers. UNPROFOR documents do not prove that the Canadian forces had been directly attacked by the Croats. The Canadians themselves, admit their positions were too close to Serb ones, allowing their soldiers to intermingle. Serb mortars and machinegun nests were some ²⁹⁷ metres away from Canadian trenches and the Canadians asked the Serbs to refrain from firing on Croat posi-

tions⁵⁰. In the UNPROFOR SITREPORT of September 15th 1993, there is a note about undertaking an attack on the UN forces: “...Two incursions or assaults against UN personnel... both the Croats and Serbs fired. Small arms fire at CANBAT forward positions. Fire was returned and the aggressors stopped their fire. No more casualties...” Canadian official military history continues with mentioning that 875 soldiers – 375 from 2.PPCLI and the reservists – 385 militia soldiers and 165 from other regular forces mounted a general attack in order to take control of the “buffer zone” (zone of separation). Although the first objective was realized without a single shot being fired, what followed was the tense standoff between Croatian tanks and TOW armed Canadian APC’s²⁹⁸. It is understandable that a military historian would often use such expressions as “the general assault” or “to take control of” in order to present the military position as a serious one, and to make the role of the Canadian forces more prominent. But in the very next sentence it states that the first objective was accomplished without a single bullet being fired. The tense standoff followed, but firearms were obviously not used. There was pressure, the writer of the chronicle does not deny that Croatian soldiers were reluctant to accept the fact they had to retreat, but they did not use their artillery nor their tanks. In several instances soldiers mention the “new tanks Croats were given by the Germans” (sic).²⁹⁹ The question arises, why haven’t the Croats used them during the artillery barrage against the Canadians? They had not been used and it would have been easy to use tanks in order to drive the UN peacekeeping forces out of the area. “The Croats threatened to use anti-tank missiles” or the “Croats avoided using new tanks for fear of them being damaged” aren’t sufficient reasons preventing the Croat forces from using all the armaments they had at their disposal, if they truly wanted to attain the goal Canadians claimed Croats had wanted to achieve – to make the UN forces flee and consequently defeat them. Historians have stated that in that first phase of the Operation, not a single bullet was fired. Where and when had the battle between the Croats and Canadians taken place then? Not during the first four days, as writers claim, because in that time frame Croatian and Serb forces were belligerent. Many historians, journalists and politicians write about the events that Canadian military history hushed up. Sean M. Maloney had, in his analysis: “Canadian national values and national security policy/policy options” been more direct in naming the Canadian adversary at that time, and who was to be punished for it. He writes: “...in the Balkans the Croats surely remembered us, because of our readiness to, in the Medak Pocket in 1993, use force against them... the Canadian flag flapping over our soldiers shoulders must have discouraged them...” Member of Parliament Ms. Bonnie

Korzeniowski taking part in the Parliamentary debate in Manitoba repeats what she had read in the Canadian press, or officially attained from the Canadian military brass: "...Canadian peacekeepers were ordered on September 15th 1993 to make a "buffer zone"... when they were taking their positions between the two belligerent sides they came under Croatian fire. The battle lasted for fifteen hours...they eventually forced the attacking Croat forces to surrender..."³⁰⁰ The MP assigns one of the belligerents to be the aggressor which should be forced to surrender. The MP does not question how you could force a legitimate military power on its sovereign territory to surrender. Hasn't the force which in this case "forced the Croats to surrender" on their own territory also been an aggressor? Was it not also helping the aggressor Serb forces? Or was the Croatian attack on Serb terrorists in the "Pink Zone" - which by all relevant UN Resolutions was a part of the Republic of Croatia, and at a time when Serbs realized their greatest territorial gains in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina- not been the disruption of peace and an aggression itself? Forcing the Croats to accept the status quo meant the acceptance and legitimization of RSK or a Greater Serbia. The question remains whose interests would be served by "making the Croat forces surrender?" These were surely not Croatian interests. It's interests had been legitimate, supported by every UN Resolution, and by the international community's assurances. When the citation for the Medak Pocket battle was met by the Croatian press immediate negative reactions followed.³⁰¹ The Canadian press tried to deny Croat claims at once. "...The Croat weekly writes that the battle at the Medak Pocket in 1993, known to be Canada's largest scale conflict since the Korean War - was a myth."³⁰² The strongest Canadian argument was the numbers killed: "...27 to 31 Croats had been killed in it, and only four Canadians were wounded." The already quoted official Croatian figures stated that ten Croatian soldiers were killed.³⁰³ The Rijeka Hospital pathology report³⁰⁴ found there were no wounds on the dead which were caused by 5.56mm NATO calibre bullets. (This was the same calibre used by the Canadian soldiers).

After the September 15th Canadian advancement commenced and after the Croats fired a few warning shots, the Canadian attached the largest possible UN flags on their APC antennas, and took care that their white painted vehicles came out and were visible. The Canadian and French had started their advancement which was followed by: "Croat rounds of gunfire... the battle lasted for 15 hours with fire exchanges lasting from five minutes to one hour at the longest, after which the Croatians finally surrendered. Only then the Canadian troops agreed on a ceasefire with the Croatian army."³⁰⁵ Such an interpretation of the events at the Medak Pocket painted a excellent picture about what

the Canadian Army had done. The Canadian Army imposed a peace in Croatia (which was broken by the Croats), the Canadian Army forced the Croatian Army to surrender and negotiated a ceasefire with the Croatian military, and not with Croatian politicians. Uninformed persons might think that Croatia in 1993 was a military dictatorship, when such important issues were decided by its soldiers. Part of the Medak Pocket misunderstanding is derived from the procedure known to all democratic countries – but unknown to many on the ground – politicians would negotiate the conditions for a ceasefire, and demilitarization of the area, and the military would execute what was agreed upon. In the situation where the army had to comply to a 24-hour gridlock, the timeframe in which to pull out, the command was sometimes too late to reach all the units in time. This was quoted by UNPROFOR; in the last minute details of the agreement discussed at the Gospić meeting that finished at 22:30 hours on September 15th 1993. There was some Croat resistance to accept the agreement on retreating and pulling forces out. This was admitted in both Croatian and Canadian sources. *“It is hard to give up the ground you have just taken over at a price...”*³⁰⁶

It is important to point out that the Croatian Army did not attack but warn the Canadians, it did not surrender, but retreated to their designated positions in an orderly manner. The soldiers might not have been prepared to retreat in such a quick manner – because of their bitter disappointment. There were some rounds shot on the Gospić HQ building, verbal threats were uttered to General Stipetić and Admiral Domazet, the high brass from Zagreb who had come to oversee the retreat³⁰⁷, but that dissatisfaction cannot be compared to the panic, the anarchy and the armed conflict among Serbs themselves that have taken place in Medak during the night of September 9th. The Serbs fired on each other. One Serb used a rifle grenade on his fellow fighters, after which Serb soldiers attacked Canadians in the buildings they were positioned in.³⁰⁸ The Lapac Brigade left its positions in disarray, the Serb authorities arrested and allegedly executed some of these deserters by firing squad or by hanging. The data about court-martial executions was furnished by Brigadier Krpina, but we could not find mention of this from Serb General Sekulić.³⁰⁹ This information was mentioned by Jurendić in an interview given to the daily “Jutarnji List.” The attack on the 2nd mobile brigade HQ is also mentioned in the “RSK” special commissions report to the Serbian Krajina Army HQ. The disciplinary measures were taken to get the paramilitary (Četniks) in line.

The Croatian demand for a 24-hour extension of the Croatian forces retreat had been agreed upon. The new withdrawal date was moved from September 16th to September 17th at 18:00 hours.³¹⁰ Lt. Colonel Bryan Bailey, who commanded a company of

more than 100 soldiers in the Medak Pocket used more plausible terms when he spoke about the Croatian Army. This might have been to underline the bravery of the Canadians. Lt. Colonel Bailey pointed out: *"We went up against a modern, well-equipped force and were successful..."*³¹¹ He is more objective than others when describing the military operation that took place between Serb and Croat forces. (I repeat that in that operation, the Canadians were by-standers). *"On September 9th, after the artillery shelling, a pincer-like movement commenced in which the Croats encompassed the Serb defenders, throwing them off their heights, while in the valley Croatian tank columns soon took four Serb villages."*³¹² The new data about Canadian – Croatian clashes during the next three days followed. According to an account, this happened on September 10th, 11th and 12th. This data is not even mentioned in Croatian and UN documents, and is also non-existent in Serb sources. In these documents what is mentioned is: the mass bombardment along the entire frontline, the mobilization of Serb forces, the regrouping of the RSK Army, heavy artillery from the "Pocket" towards Knin³¹³, the air force and rocket attacks.³¹⁴ Not a word is said about the Croatian clashes with Canadian forces. It is clear why the Croats would not dare to take such a venture – they feared UN retaliatory measures, international community pressure and accusations. But why did the "blue helmets" not report such a fictional story, which would suit them well? Or did such an attack never happen, or the author just embellished his story. Documents warn about Serb forces regrouping, about an imminent Serb counteroffensive. The only documented fire from Croatian positions on CANBAT positions was on September 16th at 22:15 hours, and it soon ceased. At 23:45 everything was quiet in that area (Medak Pocket – author's remark).³¹⁵

Serb sources mention Croatian forces in firefights with UNPROFOR without any detailed evidence. In his book author Ozren Žunec mentions the confrontation between Croatian and Canadian forces. He claims that data on the Medak Pocket losses were embargoed³¹⁶ - such a claim is mentioned nowhere else.

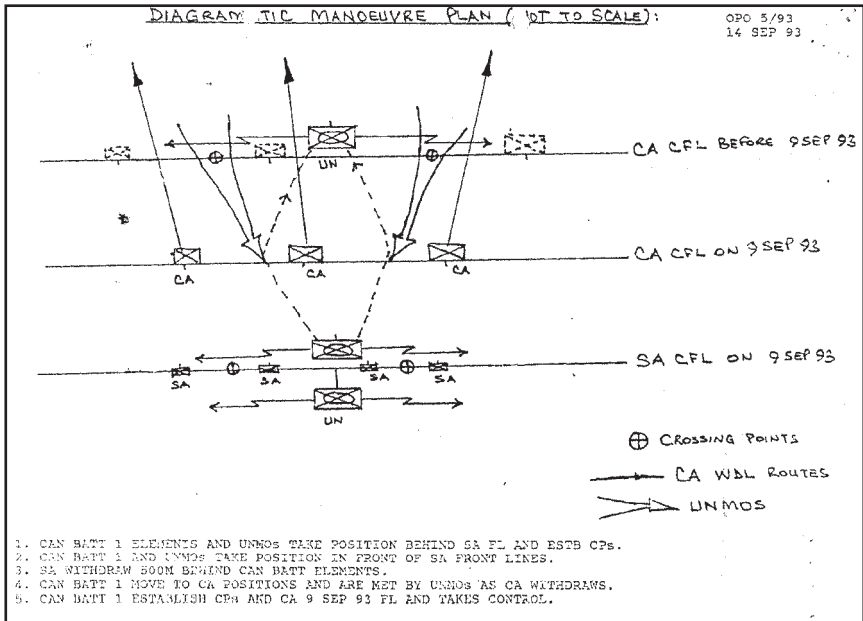
*"During the next three days, in order to fulfill their protective mandate, 2.PPCLI Canadian soldiers had engaged in large number of fire exchanges with the Croatian special police... the 2.PPCLI commander had without unnecessary emotion made the Croatian commander withdraw his forces. Before pulling out, the Croats slaughtered all the remaining Serbs."*³¹⁷ Calvin and Cot did not make the Croats withdraw. The Croats withdrew because of UN Security Council pressure and the guarantee given to Croatia that the Serbs would not return to the liberated area under UNPROFOR control. The risky stake in the Operation were all the trumps were played out as Cot said: *"the imperative return of*

UNPROFOR's credibility if the Medak Pocket mission was accomplished". He relied mostly on the possibility that his (Calvin's) troops might have to forcibly oust the Croat forces, and Calvin was awed by the magnitude of responsibility that had just been thrust upon his shoulders. For Croatia, the guarantee Serbs would not be back meant a success and gaining time in which it could slowly regroup its military and economic strength to prepare for the final rebel Serbs defeat. A military conflict was imminent. It was not only foreseen by UN representatives who advocated the Serb local officials and the Republic of Croatia's government to be treated equally when negotiating. They believed that peace would prevail with the Serbs. To the Croats, the historical experience clearly spoke of Serbs believing only in the argument of arms. It was no sooner than in 1995 that the official policy of the U.S., Great Britain and France came to the same conclusion. Today, the Croatian warnings from the early 1990s are confirmed by Slobodan Milošević's trial in the Hague – more than ten years later.³¹⁸

In the Canadian parliament, Lt. Colonel Jim Calvin described how his battalion, reinforced with two French armoured infantry companies, had forced the Croatian Army to agree to a ceasefire. *"The conflict appeared when a Croatian renegade general defied the withdrawal agreement achieved by politicians in Zagreb and tried to "face down" the Canadians and the UN."* Calvin involved himself at that point into interpreting Croatian politicians and their military relationship. Something he was not familiar with. There were no "renegades" there, and no one rebelled against the political decisions from Zagreb. Though the situation was tense, the Defense Minister and the Chief-of-Staff, did everything in their power to make the agreement work. There were some dissatisfied soldiers. That dissatisfaction probably served as the motive for some wrongful acts committed during the retreat. But there was no rebellion. Calvin and his soldiers *"endured the heavy bombardment and mortar fire they had been subject to and managed to pass through minefields. When the Croats finally retreated, they left a scorched earth behind them."*³¹⁹ The Canadian Minister of Defence was impressed by Calvin's deposition. In his response to Calvin's address to Parliament and while addressing the Medak Pocket veterans the Minister promised: *"One of underlying messages of this is to understand the courage they provide, to make sure they get the kind of support they need from us, here, in the political world, in everything, from questions of payment to make sure they have a life with dignity."*³²⁰ What has become clear is that Calvin may have wanted to achieve – better veteran soldier status, better pensions and higher danger pay for Canadian soldiers. But isn't it any government's duty to take care of those who give their life and health in order to defend their society's values? Was

Croatia and the fabrication of what happened there only a tool serving to achieve higher pensions, better healthcare and life insurance for Canadian soldiers, while in peacekeeping missions around the world, something that has been denied to them by the Canadian government and its politicians? This could be concluded from a statement given by an anonymous witness working with the Croatian Ministry of Defence. He claims that the Canadian Ambassador asked that reparations be paid to Canadian soldiers who became ill after returning from Croatia.³²¹ He added that after the reparation payment was refused the Ambassador then "threatened" "Croatia would suffer serious consequences. Some could argue that those consequences are the Visa regime with questionnaires listing questions to those of military age, asking detailed information what they did during the Homeland war (which each sovereign state would consider a military secret). Those consequences could also be viewed as cold diplomatic relations between Canada and Croatia. Whether this is true or not, Canadian soldiers have their Medak Pocket case capitalized in the public eye, and their government has agreed to back their danger pay.³²² Calvin received a firm promise from the Minister: *"We should give a clear message for future behaviour towards soldiers and their families, especially when their wages and danger pay for stressful conditions they were deployed in, are concerned."*³²³ A journalist reporting from the Canadian parliament had taken various pieces of a puzzle and tried to complete a picture to comprehend what really took place in Croatia – that a fierce battle had taken place but between the Serb and the Croat forces. *"The battle they had waged"* (not the battle between Croatians and Canadians, but between Serbs and Croatians) *"had lasted for three days. Serbs and Croats brought military reinforcements and tanks. The Croats had advanced and thus pushed forward the new frontline."*³²⁴ "On September 14th, Lt. Colonel Calvin had received a command to enforce the agreement by entering "the killing zone" in-between the two belligerent sides."³²⁵ The journalist further explains why the Canadian commander had shown so much impatience while encountering his Croatian counterpart. He had not attended the meetings where the exact demarcation line between Canadian and Croatian forces had been decided. He ordered his bulldozers forcing back the Croatian positions. He accused the Croats of attacking the wounded French and Canadian soldiers in a minefield.³²⁶ Calvin found the excuse for his demeanour towards the Croats regarding crimes they had allegedly committed. *"He had not liked them."* His superior Cot ordered him to be extremely decisive and strong. The peace was to be enforced this time. Not only was UN credibility at stake, but also the political interests of France and Great Britain, which were represented by both contingents in the Medak

Pocket. These two countries threatened enforcement of their interests with air strikes from their aircraft carriers in the Adriatic Sea. Was that the reason for a British SAS member found in a Medak Bunker – to laser-guide aircrafts to Croatian positions if such an air strike would occur? To General Cot this was a known fact. Lt. Colonel Calvin knew he could count on air strike support in case an eventual open conflict with the Croats occurred. This had been the reason for his arrogant and hard behaviour. Behind that decisiveness stood General Cot's military vanity. He wanted to show those bureaucrats in New York that their reluctance and lenience served to the Croats advantage and therefore disrupted already achieved Serb territorial gains and the peace offered by the Vance-Owen Peace Plan. Because of the misunderstandings and his avoidance to contact the UN, because of his conflict with the UN Security Council Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali, Cot was forced to step down.³²⁷ He was replaced by French General de La Presle.³²⁸ The UN forces commander French General Jean Cot said to Calvin that "the UN with its constant retreat had achieved nothing but minor failures (whenever someone opens fire, we'd retreat). This time it is very important to have a successful outcome and to impose will... (Cot) brought the unpleasant news about the possibility the Croatian forces in Medak were probably not aware of the political settlement in Zagreb."³²⁹ Calvin was worried: "You can imagine what that meant for us. We had to cross Serb lines and advance to another belligerent side which didn't yet know that its high command had



Picture 18: UNPROFOR manouvre plan for implementation of the Medak Pocket agreement

ordered them to relinquish their positions, taken at a price during fierce battle."³³⁰

Quite the opposite of Calvin's surmising about Croatian lower-ranking officers not being informed about their higher command's decisions was occurring. The Chief of Staff, General Bobetko had, in order to make the withdrawal agreement workable, sent to Gospić General Stipetić, the Zagreb commanding area commander, Admiral Domazet, the Croatian army main staff's intelligence department chief, and liaison officer with the UN Colonel Pleština. Defence Minister Gojko Šušak had, after the Commander in Chief ordered an investigation of the Medak Pocket events, sent military police there. In Zagreb, they were aware of how serious the situation was – international community pressure, the Serb threats and Serb shelling of a large number of cities. Croatian soldiers were dissatisfied because they had to retreat, the strategic position of Gospić and Lika was left in a risky position. It was all highly-sensitive before the UN 871 Resolution was expected, which Croatia demanded for the unequivocal sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia over its entire state territory. All the responsible levels of command were engaged in order to avoid any misunderstanding with the UN, but also the return of Serb forces to the liberated area and subsequent peaceful withdrawal followed, and UNPROFOR was allowed to control the area. An Ottawa Citizen journalist found in "the ROE (Rules of Engagement) valid for the former Yugoslavia, the right to use fire when under threat." According to his description "...the armed conflict (between Croats and Canadians) lasted for 15 hours. That evening Lt. Colonel Calvin asked for a meeting with the Croat commander and passed the "no-man's land" on foot. After a lengthy, tense meeting, they agreed to a ceasefire. Croats promised to withdraw from the problem area until noon."³³¹ "Although they had seen smoke and heard detonations behind the Croat lines, the Canadians kept to their part of the agreement. They moved at 12:00 hours exactly, but were met with the heavily armed Croatian company. The road was mined and Croatian soldiers had tank reinforcements."³³² The journalist again described the situation in which Lt. Colonel Calvin held his press conference and accused Croatian commanders of "ethnic cleansing" and for being responsible for crimes committed in the Medak Pocket. He had not seen those crimes yet, but reacted on a hunch. For such decisiveness, Lt. Colonel Calvin was awarded the "Meritorious service cross" and 2.PPCLI General Cot's citation, one of three in all given during a long peacekeeping mission in the former Yugoslavia.³³³ In "The Sunday (Toronto) Star"³³⁴ the most important parts of Scott Taylor/Brian Nolan's book "Tested Mettle" were retold, in which a detailed description of Canadian peacekeepers from Somalia, Cambodia, Nigeria, Croatia and Bosnia and

Herzegovina was given. The authors of this book use those peacekeeping missions to analyse and fiercely criticize the Canadian military establishment, which had led some of these missions (because of some high ranking commanders' and politicians' goals, ambitions and vanity) almost to the brink of disaster. In the last chapter of their book, the authors propose a radical re-organization of the Canadian Army in the new millennium. We were on our part mostly interested in the chapter of the dealing with the Medak Pocket analysis. Here are some of the accents from the review the book received in "The Sunday (Toronto) Star": *"On September 9th 1993 the Croatian artillery bombardment rolled into the Medak Pocket like a wave of thunder. All along a 25 kilometre valley, geysers of earth and flames shot skyward. Lieutenant Tyrone Greene (2.PPCLI) was just heading out of the door on his way to the morning orders group, when he observed a shell explode about 5 kilometres away. He thought he had best report the shot to Gračac HQ and turned to go back inside. At that instant a 152mm mortar round impacted just 20 metres behind him."* Again an overstatement. In the Croatian Army's armour there were (and still are) only 152mm Howitzers, but that calibre was not used by the Croatian side during that action. The Croats used 105mm Howitzers, and 130mm cannons. It is possible that Lt. Green had mistaken the 120mm shell for a mortar grenade, because in the very next sentence he speaks of the "mortar battery". The overstatement prone Canadians would make some more mistakes with the facts. *"Seconds later Green knew this wasn't just a couple of stray rounds, when the rest of the Croat mortar battery opened fire in earnest. Green's platoon was to become witnesses to the devastating barrage of the Serb forces."*³³⁵ In the battalion command post in Gračac, Lt. Colonel Calvin didn't exactly know what was happening. As the day passed, Calvin was more and more under the UN New York officials' pressure; they asked what was the exact assessment of the situation that was obviously worsening. Using an APC, he reached Lt. Green and ordered *"they needed to establish an observation post quickly to keep track of the battle's progression. For the next three days the men of Green's platoon were relied upon as the sole eyes and ears of the international community. Despite the dangers, it was imperative that they hold (do not leave – author's remark) the ground."*³³⁶ Calvin had, on Cot's initiative, firmly decided that his battle group would not leave the battleground, would not retreat like the French had done during the Maslenica Operations. However, the pressure exerted on the young, inexperienced Canadian reserve soldiers, the stressful artillery barrage on Serb positions, though the barrage was not directed at them (Canadians), and the discipline of some lower ranking officers' ambitions were so strong that some soldiers, after re-

deployment and while preparing to return to Canada, tried to “poison” their overzealous warrant officer Matt Stopford. The inquiry about several discipline breaches, later led by an independent Canadian Ministry of Defence commission, dedicated the majority of its report to that attempted poisoning.³³⁷ The commission concluded that Medak had been a stressful experience, influencing soldier’s health (PTSP), it had questioned the core of the military discipline and the Canadian Army’s Code (of behaviour), which put the individual soldier’s security after the objective (accomplishing the mission first, and soldiers’ security second). It was concluded that in future, Canadian soldiers’ security should come first in Canadian military doctrine.

*“Although they weren’t immediately aware of it, this shift in the fire plan heralded the next phase of the Croat attack. Atop the ridges, Croat Special Forces and dismounted infantry launched a lightning pincer advance, rolling up the surprised Serb pickets in a series of deadly, one-sided firefights. The Croatian armoured columns then commenced their advance down the valley.”*³³⁸ The Croatian and the Canadian interpretation of that event differ; for Croats the attack to take their designated area had finished soon after midday (13:05 hours), while Canadian onlookers noticed the Croat attack later in the afternoon. According to Croatian sources, the action commenced in the morning of September 9th – the pincer movement and planned taking of three villages. It is unclear why the Canadians reported that action took place by the end of the day, at dusk. Somebody was seeing dusk in the morning, someone was reporting and making incorrect notes for reasons yet to be established. However, in the CANBAT situation report (SITREP) such data is listed, in the Croatian liaison with the UN officer’s documents that “Canadian” observation is non-existent. “Lt. Col. Calvin was constantly calling Green for updates on the fluid situation, as New York and Zagreb, tried to plot the political ramifications of the offensive. Throughout the morning, Green had regularly sent back his reports – only to have his position immediately shelled by the Croat mortars. It dawned on the young Lieutenant, that Croats were using their radio-direction finding equipment to zero in on his broadcast. Obviously, they had mistaken his signals from those of the Serbian brigade HQ (which was, in fact, using land-line field telephones to communicate messages). From that point on, Greene used his radio only in emergencies and tried to switch locations to do so.”³³⁹

On the evening on September 11th *“the tide of battle was shifting and there was a major Serbian counter-attack underway.”* For the next 72 hours, the Serbs and Croats fought a pitched battle – the three days that were mentioned in the earlier Canadian interpretation, in “Tested Mettle” are correct in calling it the battle between the Croat and the Serb forces.³⁴⁰ The “gaggle” of soldiers

and fleeing citizens along the main Medak road were soon replaced by the determined Serb reinforcement troops pushing forward into the "Pocket". Buses, tanks, and even armoured train cars were rushing into the region from all over the "Krajina". The reinforcements had not come from the Croatian "Krajina" only, but from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the SR Yugoslavia as well. In the "Pocket" itself there were volunteers from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.³⁴¹ In other instances, Canadian soldiers witnessed an enormous amount of the most advanced generation of tanks and modern armour Serb forces were armed with. Some M-84 Serb tanks that were close to the Canadian positions had occasionally opened fire. *"The next 72 hours (three days, September 12th, 13th and 14th – authours note) the Serbs fought a pitched battle. The counter-thrust was successful in blunting the Croat offensive, and both sides began digging in along their new frontlines."*³⁴² Here the Croatian intentions and plans were misjudged. The Croats stopped on the line already taken up to 13:00 hours on September 9th. On September 10th they were only defending those lines. (Sources: Bobetko, Ministry of Defence archives, "Globus Military HQ", UN liaison office dated September 10th). The offensive did not last until September 14th, but there was a Serb counteroffensive in which the Serbs tried regaining their lost positions in three villages. The Maslenica experience taught them that if they were not successful in it they could start counting the moments of the beginning of an end of the "RSK." The Canadians seemed to show constant sympathy of the Serbian side, "backing the Serbs", the "understanding" for blows they had received and a wish for the Serbs to succeed in returning "their land" (Serb territory). In the Maslenica Operation, one could sense this sympathy, but in the Medak Pocket these feeling were quite obvious. The one-sided nature was visible in the behaviour of UNPROFOR's military officers. For them the former JNA officers were real soldiers, as opposed to inexperienced Croatian Army officers. General Cot often met Serb General Novaković. The last time he visited when leaving the UNPROFOR commander's post, he allegedly received a Serb citation. In the beginning of the Medak Pocket crisis, Cot sent Novaković his special emissary. Later he had talks with him in Knin (as he talked to Bobetko in Zagreb, after Bobetko had refused to receive Cot's emissary, considering him a lower rank). In this way Cot treated as equals the "paramilitary" Serb commander and the Head of the Main Staff of a sovereign state's army. He sent his emissary to Gospić. In several instances Calvin refused to talk to the Croatian side. "He didn't like Croats", but he had to communicate with them professionally. His troops sympathies were with the Serb side. The Serb assessment about whether or not their counterattack did not succeed consequences, and they did not regain their lost ter-

territory, had been proven. In recently published RSK Army documents, and in General Milisav Sekulić book, we learn that soon after the Medak Pocket Operation the Serbs started training a civilian population evacuation. In 1993 they became aware that militarily they stood no chance against the Croatian Army and state's growing power.³⁴³ They trained and prepared an evacuation from the Krajina territory that was put into practice in the summer of 1995, during the Croatian military/police action "Oluja". Proof of this is found in documents confiscated after "Oluja"³⁴⁴.

As the military situation of September 14th became stable, the UN put pressure on the belligerent sides to agree to a ceasefire. The foreign press demanded the Croatian "attackers" retreat to their pre-September 9th lines. In order to increase the pressure, in the afternoon of September 14th the Serbs launched a Soviet missile Frog/Luna on one of Zagreb's suburbs. A larger calibre rocket fell in the field in the suburb causing no grave damage, but the Croats had decided to make a swift pull-out of the Medak valley. "The buffer zone" formed should have been taken by UN forces³⁴⁵. French General Jean Cot, the Sector South commander

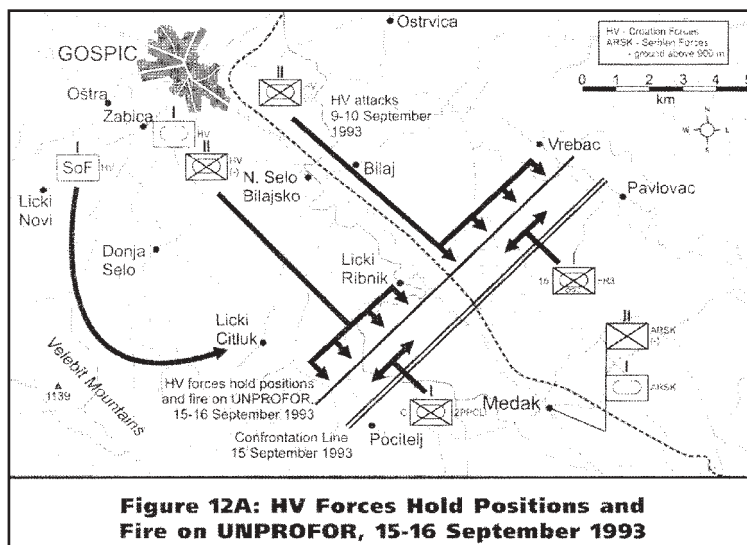
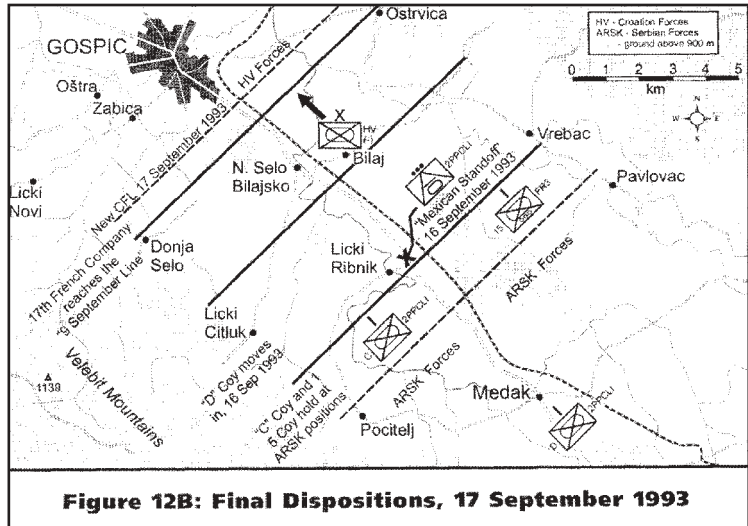


Figure 12A: HV Forces Hold Positions and Fire on UNPROFOR, 15-16 September 1993
 Picture 19: Graphic map - "Chances for Peace" Sean M. Maloney & John Llambias

(also incorrect data, General Cot was the UN forces commander – commander of all UN military in the region) knew that for the ceasefire agreement to hold depended on a quick deployment of a strong military force. Therefore, he decided to oversee the operation himself, without mediation from Sector South's HQ. This is possibly what led the author to conclude that Cot was Commander of the Sector South forces. Lt. Col. Calvin and his

(2.PPCLI) battalion were ready to move within 24 hours. In order to reinforce his two infantry companies (Charlie and Delta) already positioned in front of the Medak Pocket, Calvin was to be



Picture 20: Graphic - map "Chances for Peace"

joined by two French armoured infantry companies. One of them was under the command of General Cot's son.

Imposing the Ceasefire – Calvin's Plan

"The Croatian verbal agreement of September 13th 1993 led the written Medak Pocket withdrawal Agreement on September 15th. The Canadian Battle group had the task of making sure all sides honoured the agreement. Up to that moment 2.PPCLI played a passive role." Many already quoted Canadian sources conclude quite the opposite - that the Battle group had played an important role, even before the implementation of the agreement. "That soon changed... on September 15th, two hours after the planned 12:00 noon "H hour", Lt. Green gave the order for his APC's to advance into the "killing zone". Throughout the previous night they had been briefed in detail on their objectives. That morning they had mounted their APC's and moved forward through the Serbian positions to the frontline. As they rolled slowly forward, Green's men realized just how close the Serbs had been to losing the town of Medak itself. The battle debris and bodies indicated that at one point the Croats had even managed to establish foothold in the northern most buildings, before being beaten back."³⁴⁶

In his book, "Professionalism under fire: Canadian implementation of the Medak Pocket agreement," Lee A. Windsor explains the plan's elements and the Canadian battle group's role in the implementation of that agreement. *"On September 14th 1993 at 16:30 Lt. Col. Calvin held the orders group meeting with subordinate and warrant officers in order to explain the plan of the future operation. The new withdrawal agreement should be implemented in four stages. The first stage was to start on September 15th 1993 by 2.PPCLI "Charlie company" and one by the French company taking Serb forward front positions. In the second stage, the "Charlie company" under the vigilant eye of one anti-armoured platoon would establish the crossing point on the "no-man's land" between the belligerent sides, on the main tarmac road along the valley floor. Third stage: "Delta company" and the second French company FREBAT 3 will advance up the road through the secured crossing point until they take the Croat forward front positions. The Recce Platoon of the 2.PPCLI and the battalion's tactical HQ will follow "Delta company". The fourth (and final) stage would be overseeing the Croatian forces take their pre-September 9th positions. After that, the separation of forces would be done and the new demilitarized zone would be established.*³⁴⁷ The Patricia, Alpha and Bravo companies that just arrived from Sector West would during the operation reinforce the rest of the CANBAT 1 area of responsibility. Canadians had to manage without 81mm mortars. As the battalion was to return home at the beginning of October, mortars had already been sent back to Canada.³⁴⁸ What would have happened if the Canadians had their mortars at their disposal? They might have probably used them and this would provoke a conflict with Croatian forces. This would pull Croatia into a large-scale conflict with the UN/international community, further punishing the country for the break-up of Yugoslavia. A few hours before the Medak Operation started (the morning of September 15th), General Cot personally flew into the Medal area in order to speak with Lt. Col. Calvin. Cot took command himself: *"...the future events were too serious to allow any disruption in the chain of command or misunderstanding about what was going on. The mission was clear and the stage in the area was set.*"³⁴⁹ They went over planned details. Calvin's plan was for a broad, two-axis advance push up the valley. The Canadian company would provide the left-hand column, and the French Army was to match their progress on the right. *"Lt. Green's 9th platoon was the central unit of C Company with the 7th platoon on the right and 8th platoon on the left. The plan was for Major Drew's D company to follow up Charlie's advance. They would then take up positions to prevent any subsequent Serbian advances.*"³⁵⁰ The Croatian forces, according to that plan, had to withdraw to their old September 8th positions, and Serb forces

were to stay on their present ones, in front of them the Battle group was to be positioned. "On the afternoon on September 15th 1993 Leblanc was projecting a C-9 light machinegun as A platoon advanced toward the little village of Čitluk. Well off on their right flank they heard the developing firefight between Green's men and the Croat defenders. Leblanc's section, under the command of Sgt. Rod Dearing had just reached a low hedgerow when platoon commander Cpt. Dan MacKillop signaled for them to halt. MacKillop had heard Green's situation report on the company radio net, and he spotted the Croat rifle pits about 200 metres to his front. Word was passed for them to start digging in. Fire team partners took turns shovelling a shell scrap, one digging while the other remained in a position to provide cover fire. Leblanc was pumped up, the adrenaline flowing as the sound of gunfire continued to erupt across the Medak valley floor."³⁵¹

Fierce Fighting

"It was obvious the Croats did not intend to let the Canadians in. Charlie company and the front FREBAT 1 company were stopped on the first suitable defence lines, mostly along the former Serb fighting line. During the next 15 hours the Croats used small arms to fire on Canadian and French forces." It is important to add that at that moment, UN soldiers were intermingled with Serb soldiers, who on their part kept shooting on the Croats ahead. How could Croatian soldiers distinguish between UNPROFOR and Serb soldiers? And when the unnerved peacekeepers joined the shooting – it was even more difficult to make such a difference. "From all the arms used by the Croats against the advancing UN forces, only the deadly T-72's known to be in the vicinity were not in sight. The Croatian officers may have known the TOW anti-armoured rocket's quality and did not want their precious new vehicles damaged."³⁵² It was too weak of a reason to prevent the Croats from using their tanks in such a serious fight. The anti-armour systems used by the Serbs (and JNA) – for instance Osa, Maljutka or Fagot – were equally mighty weapons as the Canadian ones. That did not discourage and prevent the "Vukovi" from using tanks in the Medak Pocket. No, the TOW rockets would not make them refrain from using their superior armour. The range of the tank cannon surpassed the range of a TOW projectile and if Croatian tanks crews wanted to engage in a duel with the Canadian armour, the Canadians would probably be closer to losing such a battle. By all accounts it looked as if the Croats did not have the intentions attributed to them by Canadian analysts – to attack and cause the UN forces such casualties, forcing them to flee the Medak Pocket. They only wanted to be sure that the Agreement would be imple-

mented to the letter – and that Serb forces hiding behind Canadian and French troops would not return. The Croats did not consider fire-fights to be as serious as the conflict they had with the Serbs during which they had used their tanks and had lost one of them. *“MacKillop yelled to Dearing that combat engineers were on the way with heavy equipment to assist with the trench-digging. A Croat machinegun burst cut short MacKillop’s comments. Dearing immediately took cover behind his APC and started pumping rounds back at the next hedgerow. The big burly sergeant had an air of confidence as he plied his trade and his example was infectious. Young Scot Leblanc switched his C-9 fire selector to automatic and let loose a long withering burst toward the Croat muzzle flashes.”*³⁵³ With such an uncontrolled and emotional reaction a Sergeant, a professional soldier, in the Medak Pocket started the duel between Canadian and Croatian. If that Sergeant had not returned fire that would have made other combat soldiers refrain *“from his infectious example”*. Canadian soldiers in their accounts claim that the Croats had merely answered the Serb provocations. As the Serb positions were close by. Answering a provocation, a warning shot, a near miss or an irresponsible shot from a Croat marksman - a barrage of fire was the Canadian answer. As if Canadians could hardly wait, or was it already decided by the more liberal ROE interpretation to shoot when shot at? Had they only waited for such a provocation from the Croatian side or did an order from General Cot precede to impose UNPROFOR’s credibility and create respect by force? The show of force in that complicated situation could be called the lack of real military professionalism and effectiveness. And would not the fire in an organized army be opened only after the superior officer’s command? From the description above it seemed that soldiers had opened fire by their own will or according to their own judgement. Return fire in organized armies was not just opened at one’s own will. Had CANBAT not become equal to the Croatian and the Serb side, which they had considered to be those governed by anarchy and lack of discipline? It was probable that Cot and Calvin gave their soldiers a *“carte blanche”* to open fire and respond decisively when fired upon. Even that would have been better than if the firefight started at one’s will. The Canadian firing was caused by earlier Serb provocations. From documents it is clear that the Canadians had asked the Serbs to withdraw and to refrain from provoking the Croats.³⁵⁴ The Serbs have done that with reluctance. *“At dusk Major Dan Drew shouted for warrant officer Matt Stopford to prepare a section of soldiers. Calvin had just received a phone call from the local Croatian general and it appeared the Colonel wanted to negotiate a UN forces passage through no-man’s land. It was agreed they leave a protection party at the Croatian lines. Calvin had*

returned to his battalion HQ while Stopford set up a duty roster for his six soldiers by his two APC's which were right in the middle of the road."³⁵⁵ What follows is Stopford's dramatic description of the events in the night that followed, and the witnessing of an attempt to poison a warrant officer because of his aggressive leadership style. The Croats, according to him, had immediately moved into firing positions around the Canadian detachment. At almost point blank range they set-up heavy machine guns and Russian made anti-tank missiles. He was worried about the situation as he could see distant flashes of tracer fire being exchanged in Čitluk between Sgt. Dearing's men and the Croat forces. But more troubling for him was the activity of Croat troops to his immediate front. *"They appeared to be some form of a special forces unit, unlike anything he had seen thus far in the Balkans. Well-equipped with a wide range of modern weaponry, these guys were all young, fit and extremely intense. The men Stopford was observing were part of the new regular force of the Croatian Army – equipped and trained by US advisors."*³⁵⁶ Stopford was impressed by these "new Croatian soldiers." At the same time he was angry at them for not being an organized bunch of parasoldiers and freelancers. Now they were equal to the Serb military, even better, because they had beaten the Serbs. And Canadians should have been aware of them, as the Croats were trained by American military advisors. They knew how to "engage in modern warfare". These Croats did not focus their attention on the Canadian soldiers. In the valley muffled explosions could be heard. From the cluster of buildings just to his front Stopford heard a scream, punctuated by a burst of gunfire. A moment of silence was followed by laughter. Seconds later a nearby explosion shook the ground and a farmhouse burst into flames. *"A couple of minutes later"* one of the Croats *"came out of the house and wobbling drunkenly approached Stopford with a pair of blood-soaked panties on his head. For an instant, Stopford wanted to kill the Croat so badly but could not bring himself to commit the act. Then he raced back to his APC and radioed HQ. In a voice cracking with emotion, he explained that Croats had begun an "ethnic cleansing" of the Medak Pocket."* *"You've got to move now!"* he shouted. *"They are killing people! We cannot wait!"*³⁵⁷ *"Calvin didn't need Stopford's report in order to understand what was going on. Fires were visible across the whole valley. He radioed the news to the UN HQ in Zagreb and requested permission to advance immediately. He was ordered to remain at the location. The official order was for the peacekeepers to gather as much evidence as possible for use at a future war crimes tribunal."*³⁵⁸

At 12:00 noon on September 16th Major Drew's D Company began to roll forward to the designated crossing site. *"The long line of white APC's bristled with rifles and machineguns as the*

infantry sections rode topside with the cargo hatches open. Big blue UN flags fluttered from the radio antennas. For the tired, embattled soldiers of C Company the impressive armoured column was a welcome site. However, the Croat defenders were not so easily impressed. Their Special Forces Company concluded their extra-curricular activities and took up fire positions to block the main road. Somehow, the Croatian General's agreement had not been passed along to his forward troops. The Croat company commander was adamant that any attempt to cross his lines would be resisted with all available force.³⁵⁹ From the transcripts of tape-recorded talks the Croatian and Canadian officers held, (Calvin was present as well as UNMO chief Lt. Colonel Nielsen), it was clear that UNPROFOR and military observers had exerted pressure in order to have the Canadians pass the crossing site as soon as possible. The Croatian soldiers had refused to let the armoured column through until their commander, Major Zlatko Rogulj showed up. He demanded Calvin's Canadian and French soldiers turn the muzzles of their guns towards the Serb positions; otherwise he would not let the column through. His demand was based on the international war conventions and procedures "gun muzzle of a tank approaching in peace should be turned backwards!"

The tense conversation was led with only one purpose – for UNPROFOR to prevent the return of the Serb forces.³⁶⁰ Calvin promised he would turn his guns from the Croats towards the Serbs when he takes over the entire area. Rogulj was not persuaded. He repeated his request several times. He felt that the Canadians had to turn their weapons towards the Serbs and show their decision to deter any Serb attempts at dishonouring the agreement. An UNPROFOR member could hardly grasp the importance of such a demand. The UN force never understood the true nature of the Croat-Serb relationship, nor the reasons for their mutual mistrust. The historical experience full of deceit and broken promises had forced the Croatian Army to demand that the smallest details be observed when the retreat and re-deployment of forces was concerned.³⁶¹ Not a single promise or a single word would be as good as a gesture showing that UNPROFOR (the Canadians) would not be lenient towards the Serbs and hostile towards Croats. When Calvin finally agreed to the Croatian demand, there were no further difficulties in the Agreement's implementation. This was confirmed by SITREPORT's that stated "the Croats have stalled", but the "Croatian constructive and truthful approach" was also pointed out. But Canadians in their reports pointed out that villages were "systematically and thoroughly destroyed, buildings that still stood were flattened and livestock was slaughtered."³⁶² First they "discovered seven human corpses they handed over to local Serb authorities. Three Serb soldiers were found alive, and were handed over to the Serb military, while

more than an estimated 100 soldiers had been cut off and could be expected to arrive in a couple of days."³⁶³

It was raining all night (September 16th/17th) while some Canadian UN soldiers left in no-man's land waited for either the Serb or Croat counterattack. On the drizzly morning of September 17th UNCIVPOL teams finally arrived "to probe the smouldering ruins. Rotting corpses were catalogued and then turned over to UNPROFOR soldiers for burial. The emotional impact on Canadian soldiers was horrific. They saw a number of decomposed bodies, while the previous night they had helplessly stood by and listened to them die. However, news of the Croatian casualties inflicted by Canadian peacekeepers boosted the Battle group's morale. Officially the Croats listed 27 of their soldiers as having been killed. Unofficially that number was 30 dead and over 100 wounded. Canadians had only four wounded and not a soldier killed."³⁶⁴ During the days that followed, a take over of the area continued. Problems emerged however with setting the demarcation lines. The Canadians first bulldozed Croatian barricades, and then admitted their mistake later. Fifteen Croatian soldiers, who found themselves within the demilitarized zone perimeter, were disarmed. The re-supplying of Croatian soldiers on the Kamenjuša ridge was prevented. Two more incidents happened when Canadian and French soldiers were wounded in minefield incidents, which, with a little restraint and professionalism could have been avoided. General Bobetko warned General Cot of minefields set by the Serbs, but this warning was not taken seriously. Cot had wanted to use the confusion about the wounded soldiers against the Croats and had accused them of shooting at the UN forces again.³⁶⁵ The Croats by then had been guilty of everything. Calvin would not attend the meetings with the Croatian side where technical problems would have been resolved. He stalled and humiliated Croatian officers. Finally on September 22nd in Gospić, the demarcation line was agreed upon and the borders of UNPROFOR's demilitarized zone were set. Both sides considered the situation to be tense. The Canadians, because of the Croatian offensive and the destruction committed during it, the Croats because of the Canadian arrogance. At one particular moment the situation grew so tense that the Ministry of Defence liaison office for UN/EU in a report signed by Colonel Pleština suggested to the Croatian President and the Defence Minister to ask the UN for Calvin to be relieved of his duties.³⁶⁶ But Lt. Col. Jim Calvin and his Battle group would by the end of September finish their 6-month mandate, and were to leave Croatia. Thanks to politicians, diplomats, and military efforts, the situation had calmed down.

The intention to accuse and demonize Croatia and its army, because of the events in the Medak Pocket had become blatant.

When “The CANBAT 1 Final Report on the Medak Pocket Operation”³⁶⁷ and the “Memorandum” signed by Colonel Maisonneuve³⁶⁸ were handed in, they were immediately published in order to become public knowledge. The events generally called “The Medak Pocket Operation” thereafter became a crime and nobody tried to explain the causes, reasons and the real magnitude of it. In the Report’s conclusion, Lt. Col. Calvin recommended the experience taken from the Medak Pocket to be studied in a future UN limited Operation undertaking.

High-ranking bureaucrats in the Canadian Ministry of Defence in Ottawa could not make the political assessment of that Operation’s result. There was no point in attracting media attention to a situation which, because of Canadian soldiers active involvement in somebody else’s war, could easily be turned against them. The elections were coming and the ex-Minister of Defence Kim Campbell was now a candidate for the Prime Minister’s position. *“So Medak was left only to memories – no publicity, no finger pointing, no official reports. Except for the Canadian soldiers who were the protagonists, “Canada’s largest scale conflict since the Korean War” – had not occurred at all.”*³⁶⁹

The renewed interest in the Medak Pocket Operation and Canada’s role in it was initiated by reporter David Pugliese, the parliamentary commission for national defence, and a military veterans debate in April 1998. During the debate, apart from Calvin, the floor heard other participants from the Medak Pocket event requesting more money and benefits for the troops that had taken part in that action. Finally, these were granted to the troops on December 1st 2002.

Foreign Intelligence Members in Croatia, their Role and Intelligence Assessments

As all other member states of the UN peace force had, so too did the Canadians have their intelligence services on the ground. These were used to assess “the enemy” and the situation in the area. UNPROFOR also gathered relevant information from its field units in co-ordination with: UN military observers (UNMO), EU Military Observers (EUMO), the UN and its civil police (UNCIVPOL), UNHCR, and other non-government or government organizations, which were situated on the Republic of Croatia’s territory, and co-operated with the UN, via embassies and their staff. All these organizations had either openly or secretly engaged in information gathering in Croatia. Each country that had its contingent stationed in the Republic of Croatia or in Bosnia and Herzegovina had, independently from the UN, collected its own intelligence for their military or governments’ behalf, in order to

define their policies towards the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and to promote their particular interests. The most secretive intelligence and special operations were done by special secret teams. One of these, the SAS,³⁷⁰ was attached to the Canadian troops in the Medak Pocket. They shared a bunker with Lt.Green.³⁷¹ The traces of foreign intelligence services' work, no matter what their cover for secrecy was, could be seen in that "large theatre of operations" and were confirmed by various sources.³⁷² The SAS has been operational in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its role was important in preserving the Goražde enclave. They had been positioned in Srebrenica and Sarajevo. They were under their ex-commander Sir Michael Rose's special protection and engagement orders. *"While the shoot-and-scoot counter-terrorism tactics of these elite soldiers struck fear in the warring Bosnian factions, they also escalated the scale of the conflict and prompted retaliation against the UN. Since the standard line units lacked the training and mobile flexibility of the special forces teams, their more vulnerable and static troops were the most likely to pay the price."*³⁷³ General Rose, during the Croats and Bosnian government fiercest conflicts, road blockades, Serbian threats and hostage takings had tried to create such a situation in which he could legitimately use NATO air strikes as a demonstration of the UN's firmer attitude towards peacekeeping in Bosnia. After the Russian representative in Sarajevo, Viktor Andrejev agreed, *"I (Rose) decided it would be best to air strike the Croats and not the Serbs."*¹²⁷ In explaining the reasons why air strikes would better be used on the Croats and not the Serbs, Rose's British slant towards the Serbs was revealed. The partiality instead of impartiality was to be a renowned UN peacekeeper characteristic. *"The Croatians were not that important to us, and if they reacted to air strikes by closing their roads, they would not be able to persevere in it for long, because of the numerous Croats in the Lašva valley depending on UN help."*¹²⁸ Rose not only spoke of Croats with contempt: *"Croats are scavengers"*³⁷⁶ but mentioning the air strikes to punish Croats he wanted to give Serbs a message of what would happen to them if they continued to endanger UN troops. Where was the logic in this? Rose would not threaten the Serbs but fiercely strike the Croats instead.³⁷⁷ The indications about foreign intelligence services, their special role in cases like Ahmići, Mostar's old bridge and even Srebrenica, had been so obvious that a special case study or an analysis should be dedicated to them alone. SAS and SBS (Special Boat Services) were not the only services to be present on the former Yugoslav territories. The spectacular action of saving F-16 pilot O'Grady whose plane went down in Bosnia and Herzegovina, his search and rescue operation was done by a special American marines unit, stationed on the aircraft carrier in the Adriatic. Canadians

also, based on the SAS model, had their special unit – JTF – Joint Task Force – which was commanded by Lt. Colonel David Moore. Based on his Bosnia and Herzegovina UN experience had recommended it for service in Yugoslavia. The Canadian HQ Chief had agreed and JTF's who had been trained for abductions, and hostage taking situations,³⁷⁸ had provided security for the Canadian Defence Minister's visit to Srebrenica. Many a country secret services' task was to make their countries interests in the former Yugoslavia realized, to get their players in the game of war. Apart from all possible legal ways, they used the cover of various humanitarian organizations. In 1992, 1993 and 1994 these multiplied. Another means of undercover intelligence work, data gathering and trying to affect the course of events so that they best served their countries interests, or that events developed in a manner that suited those willing to pay for such a service abundantly, was using "dogs of war" or foreign mercenaries. In the period of 1991 and 1992 many came to fight within the ranks of all the belligerent armies. Their role was important in the Medak Pocket Operation, because the majority of volunteers from SR Yugoslavia, Republika Srpska and other countries fought in the RSK Army. While some mercenaries did fight on the Croatian side. Such were the Dutch, who manned the 9th Croatian guard brigade's reconnaissance company. Their commander Johannes Tilder van Basten had in 1994 under suspicious circumstances been captured by the Krajina Serbs, questioned, and under suspicious circumstances been killed. His videotaped accounts have become ICTY evidence for most of the indicted Croat soldiers regarding crimes committed in the Medak Pocket. Although he accused his fellow fighters, foreign volunteers and mercenaries, not a single one of these had been arrested and taken to the Hague. And the majority of these soldiers live in the immediate vicinity of the ICTY and are within the Tribunal's reach. Why have none of these soldiers been indicted for crimes van Basten had accused them of? Perhaps they were sent to Croatia to execute special tasks and to report directly to their powerful employers, who now protected them. It is possible they had created the events and directed them under their employers' directives? Or had they since become protected witnesses in exchange for their immunity from the ICTY trials? The mercenary circumstances in the Medak Pocket Operation will be dealt with later. What did SAS members do in the Medak Pocket? They were not the constitutive part of the legal UN forces there. If they did anything it was done to serve their country and its interests. The evidence about the presence of secret service members and special forces being deployed on Croatian and Bosnian and Herzegovinan territories have yet been disclosed. At this point in time, because of the SAS' code of silence, these facts are still unrevealed.³⁷⁹

The Canadian intelligence assessments show that the Croats would probably try to straighten their frontline in order for the operational command in Gospić (command post Gospić) to be out of Serb artillery reach. The Serb artillery had been positioned along the Medak Pocket valley floor. Canadians assessed that the Croats also could try to open a corridor to the Dalmatian coast and thus avert the public's interest from Zagreb's domestic political conflicts. On the other hand, UN intelligence reported that Sector South, where the Canadians were deployed *"should be very quiet over the next few days."*³⁸⁰ According to their military intelligence's assessment, the Lika "Vukovi" Brigade was well armed with tanks and artillery. That armour included East German T-72 and older models of Warsaw Pact tanks as well.³⁸¹ The analysis done after the action caused intelligence analysts to believe that the *"Croatian troops were equipped with all the necessary armaments for a modern mechanized army, but used that military power in a primitive way. Artillery had made a simple barrage curtain, while the infantry and armour advanced without co-ordination. While the Croat forces advanced the light infantry had been active in the surrounding southern hills in order to close the Medak Pocket from the opposite direction. The Serb defence organized in an even worse manner, crumbling under the rough but successful Croatian advance."*³⁸² *"If the Croatians had expected their barrage of Serb positions to make the UN flee - they were wrong."* (This was the correct definition and characterization of the Croatian target – "the barrage on Serb positions" – which for most of the Canadians meant a direct assault on their positions, or the reason for Canadian involvement in the battle.) *"In two days, Serb reinforcements from the former Yugoslavia came to the Medak Pocket and succeeded in stopping the Croatian advance."* (This was the admission of the Yugoslav Army and the army of the Bosnian Serbs.) (The later had already finished because the goals of the Croatian offensive had already been reached.) *"But not before the 10 kilometre long and 5 kilometre wide "Pocket" was cut-off and the conflict line strengthened some 3000 metres north-west from Medak. The battle raged for another two days, hanging in a bitter balance, until the Serb artillery started pounding Karlovac and an earth-to-earth missile had been launched on Zagreb..."*³⁸³ *"This was not a battle, at least not by Western army standards, where an enemy position was attacked by fire and manoeuvre. There were no infantry attacks or tank advancements in order to gain ground held by the UN forces."*³⁸⁴

The military analyst Lee A. Windsor only confirmed what should have been clear to any informed professional analyst – there was no frontal conflict, no direct attack of Canadians by the Croats. The Croatian Army did not want to push the Canadians away, nor keep the ground they were pulling out from and where

Canadians were to be deployed. But in the very next sentence the author found the real reason for such a move: *“The frontal attack was not the way in which the war in the Balkans was waged.”* How could Croatian forces “reach their planned goals – in a 10 km long, 5 km wide pocket” if they did not advance quickly? *“The infantry battles in the former Yugoslavia were waged in such a manner that both sides would use maximum firepower to make the adversary’s positions unbearable.”*³⁸⁵ That claim could be true in the case of the former JNA and Serb rebel forces strategies. They applied the Red Army’s military doctrine of “masirovka” – a massive artillery barrage and then direct attack of infantry/armed forces. From the beginning, Croatia started to use NATO tactics. Being the weaker party in the war, as far as its manpower and technical equipment was concerned, the heaviest burden of the first years of the conflict was carried out by its police and army “special units”. At the beginning of the war in Croatia there were many commando units. Everybody wanted to be a member of a special unit. In contrast to the JNA’s experiences and teachings, such units had stood up to the fourth most powerful army in Europe. They endured massive artillery barrages, air strikes, and stopped the advancement of the Yugoslav Army’s armed forces. The best example of this was Vukovar’s resistance. *“As soon as the position became too dangerous to hold because it was exposed to direct and constant fire, it was abandoned.”*³⁸⁶ That conclusion was incorrect. On the Croatian side able officers like artillery specialists and x-JNA officers, Brigadier Ademi and Major Ceku rarely commanded the artillery. Their precise artillery marksmanship saved the Croatian cities of Šibenik and Gospić. On the JNA side, General Perišić’s heavy artillery attacks had been destroying the cities of Zadar and Mostar. The artillery, especially heavy 120mm mortars, was rarely operated by an able territorial defence or JNA reserve officer. The majority of these officers used artillery for terrorist – special purposes – to generate panic among the civilian population in Croatian cities. Artillery fire was rarely effective.³⁸⁷ *“Each move that included forces being exposed in an open (field) is to be avoided.”*³⁸⁸ In the case of the Croatian operation in the Medak Pocket, the opposite was true. The lightning co-ordinated manoeuvre of the artillery and the infantry was in the open. The Serb defence lines were broken in several places. The fighting was fierce. The Croats were killed during their offensive taken on the Serb fortified positions.³⁸⁹ The Serb tank company commander was killed on the outskirts of Medak. *“In that area there was an enormous amount of weaponry,”* (mostly in the hands of the JNA and rebel Serbs; even during the Medak Pocket Operation when the Croatian Army finally managed to get some armour itself). *“But there were no professional soldiers, especially trained ones.”* (Canadian soldiers speak of well-equipped young and disciplined

Croatian soldiers trained by American military advisors and “armed by Germany”³⁹⁰). Lee A. Windsor cannot avoid old stereotypes of dividing Europe on “Axis” – Germany and its satellites and the “Allies” – allied forces, like they had been divided during World War II. This had been the basis for many similar foreign preconceptions. He continued that *“such a waged war could have been the legacy of Tito’s guerrilla military doctrine.”* This is an incorrect conclusion as well. Even during the later stages of the war, especially after the Serbs were defeated in “Oluja” and when their guerrilla resistance was expected – such wider “partisan” activity in Croatia and during later battles in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia did not happen. They were not used by JNA and territorial defence units who were supposed to follow the Partisan method of fighting. World War II Partisan guerrillas had influenced JNA military doctrine. The author writes: *“which had formed the core of the old JNA cadre and was taught to the lower ranking officers; later active in ranks of both belligerent sides.”* Fortunately, the old cadre officers and lower ranking commanders did not impose these characteristics to the new Croatian Army; instead they initiated it with courage and decisiveness, shown later by primarily non-professional Croat soldiers. (There were some rare exceptions of some JNA or foreign army professionals in the ranks of the Croatian Army). Characteristics of the new Croatian Army were also seen in how they fought against the old JNA schematic military doctrine. The Croatian Army won because it fought in a different manner than the JNA. The Croatian Army had been learning from Western armies and used their experiences in practice. The experience of some Croats who had served in professional Western armies, and later with the help of some Western army instructors (i.e. MPRI) helped a lot. However Windsor concluded, on the basis of such evidence, the battle had happened.³⁹¹ His main argument is that the Balkans definition of battle is the exchange of fire. Under such a definition, the firefight between the Croats and the Canadian and French soldiers really was a battle.¹⁴⁵ Windsor’s argument, when the “Balkans definition” is exempt, leads us to conclude that there was no battle, that the two sides only exchanged fire, had a skirmish. The Croats had been afraid that the Serbs would advance behind the Canadian and French soldiers. These fears were not unfounded. There were still some Serbs surrounding Divoselo and on the Velebit Mountains. The Serbs had done such things later. Their commando units entered into the Medak Pocket, behind the inexperienced Canadian soldiers’ backs and fired on Croat positions.³⁹³ The Canadians, especially young and inexperienced reservists, like all soldiers in an unknown, tense and dangerous night situation would have been firing on anything that moved. I witnessed such a skirmish in the battlefield. It happened often

when units would change shifts and new soldiers would come and take positions. To the newcomer, who had not mastered the area, any noise, shadow, movement or a flicker of light looked like imminent danger, and he would act instinctively, by opening fire.³⁹⁴ "It appeared to Sgt. Dearing that this kind of battle was waged in the village of Lički Čitluk. According to the Canadian soldiers there, the heaviest artillery fire came from less than 150 metres away." *In one instance, Croat mortars and 20mm automatic guns started firing on Canadian trenches. On several occasions the Croatian infantry tried to pass around Dearing's group, but each time they were repelled by gunfire and the "Starlight" (night vision equipped) machinegun fire. Regardless of how this action stood in comparison with other larger conflicts, the Canadians had in their history, for the Charlie company shooters – this was the war (sic.)*³⁹⁵ Had reserve soldiers been less professional? Or did all frightened soldiers react in the same inexperienced way? "Zero" losses on the Canadian side as opposed to dozens of dead and 100 wounded Croatian soldiers who, judging by the Canadians themselves, were well-trained and intense fighters? Where were the Canadian losses in that battle? We already know that some Canadian soldiers were wounded during the first day of the action – on September 9th. There were more wounded in a minefield on September 19th. But the only person killed was Captain Decoste in a road accident.³⁹⁶ During the 15 or 16 hour long battle on the night of September 15th/16th 1993, not a single Canadian soldier was wounded. It is true that Canadians were protected in their trenches. They held defensive positions. How was it that mortars, cannon projectiles or 20mm anti-aircraft guns, wounded not a single man? If that was the truth, that "several consecutive Croatian offensives were launched" or that "the Croats were to surmount Canadian positions" – the non-existence of casualties on the Canadian side is even harder to believe. If between 26 and 50 Croatian soldiers had been killed and more than 100 were wounded, it is quite impossible that not one Canadian soldier was either killed or wounded. Either the battle was not fierce enough, or somebody is not telling the truth. *"On the right flank the French company had more luck. Each of its mechanized platoons had one VAB infantry vehicle with a 20mm gun in its armoured turret. When they answered the enemy fire using that mighty and precise weapon, the Croatian forces were less ready to fire back. The firefights went on for most of the following night and morning."*³⁹⁷

The Negotiations

“During the night Colonel Jom “Mike” Maisonneuve, UNPROFOR’s chief operative officer, arrived from Zagreb in order to force the Croats to negotiate. Maisonneuve, Calvin and an older UN military observer (Lt. Col. Nielsen) had driven down the main road to talk to the local Croat commander. After a heated discussion Ademi agreed not to interrupt the 2nd operational stage and allowed the Canadians to secure the crossing point that night (September 15th/16th 1993). Operations stage 3 would commence the following day at 12:00 noon sharp, when D company would pass through the crossing point and reach the Croatian trenches.³⁹⁸ *“The Patricias woke up on the morning of September 16th to see a horrific picture...smoke...burned houses...special police had not finished with the “ethnic cleansing”.* Lt. Col. Calvin and Col. Maisonneuve asked to meet General Ademi again. Unfortunately, with only four companies deployed and without any tank and artillery support, Calvin’s forces didn’t stand a chance to engage the entire Croatian 9th armoured brigade. Even if the Canadians had the force to engage in a full frontal attack – it would have been in breach of the UNPROFOR mandate.” Windsor did not exclude the possibility of an all-out attack on the Croats because of the assumed “ethnic cleansing” in the area Canadians were to be deployed, but he was aware of the consequences. *“To return fire in self-defence is one thing, but to start an all-out attack is another. Canadians could do little more but to sit and wait for 12 noon.”*³⁹⁹ The Canadians were constantly wishing for an offensive action to start, during which they would quickly and forcefully throw the Croats out of their held positions and punish them for the evil deeds they were about to commit. The Croatian military action was legitimate. The area liberated a “Pink Zone” – which by all relevant UN decisions should have been integrated into Croatia’s territory. Croatia’s fight against terrorism and the protection of her civilian population was legitimate. To the international community, especially those states with their troops on the ground, it was difficult to admit that Croatia had the legal right to bring the so-called RSK under local administration and recognize Croatia’s sovereignty. Even before the accusations of alleged crimes, in those international community circles, including Canada’s, the antipathy towards the Croats was visible. The Croats were the guilty party, they were the disruptive factor, the ally of their ancient (German) enemy. The right of a sovereign state, to solve internal problems with all legal measure, even if that meant using military and police force to fight terrorism, and after it to peacefully solve the minority Serb problem – was constantly questioned. It might have also been caused by the wishful thinking of many that an independent national

Croatian state crumble and return to its' previous status before the former Yugoslavia fell apart? The majority of analysts find excuses for CANBAT's tough attitude and express empathy for them not being able to start an all-out attack on the Croats. But they had to obey Zagreb's UN command – sit and wait.⁴⁰⁰ The hard stand before the accusations of alleged crimes is later excused by crimes committed after the military action and withdrawal.

The Agreement's Next Implementation Phase

"The D company had moved according to the timetable (12:00 hours), with a couple of TOW vehicles accompanying it. As soon as they moved, they encountered a Croatian road blockade. On the left side of the road there was a deadly heavy T-72 tank, a gift from Germany" (sic).⁴⁰¹ Here too the Canadian analyst could not avoid the old preconception about (the bad) Germany who was helping her old war ally. The tank in question was probably a T-72 or even a T-84, a Yugoslav improved version of the basic Soviet model, a good quality tank the Croats had already sold to Kuwait to be used in "Desert Storm". The Croatian factory "Đuro Đaković" had mastered its fabrication and some of the T-84's the Croats had captured during their previous fighting against the JNA. "On the right side, two anti-tank guns and a large number of anti-armour rocket types called Sagger⁴⁰² were aimed at the Canadian column. The Croatian infantry company, protected by an improvised mine chain, had manned the barricade. Weapons on both sides were ready for action. During the show of force, well-trained and disciplined Canadian soldiers kept cool heads while the Croats became less and less sure of themselves."⁴⁰³ Such a psychological assessment speaks of the analyst's partiality. He observed his soldiers with awe, and underestimated the force of "the enemy" who became weaker and their morale lower. The only rationale for giving the Croatian soldiers such a general psychological profile is propaganda.

The war crimes in the former Yugoslav wars had taught us that those criminal, murderous acts had been committed by special paramilitary forces or units (as in the case of Vukovar and Srebrenica) or groups of criminals.

"Lt. Col. Calvin had a heated argument with Croatia's high ranking officer Brigadier General Mezić. It was Mezić who stalled in order to give the special police enough time to cover the evidence of "ethnic cleansing". D company moved in at 13:30. Calvin's inspired idea, (to summon the improvised press conference in the middle of the road – authour's remark), did not prevent ethnic cleansing...but had enabled the "blue helmets" to enter three villages before all the traces of the Croatian crimes

were destroyed."⁴⁰⁴ Later, the CANBAT Battle group had (un)fortunately been stopped by higher ranking UN officials who insisted the exact timetable to enter the "Pocket" be observed." On September 17th UNPROFOR soldiers had access to the entire area. They found 16 bodies. Later a mass grave was discovered with 50 bodies in it." This data was never confirmed. Ten years later in Obradović Varoš, ten corpses were discovered. "The Medak Pocket had provided the world with the first proof that Serbia was not the only perpetrator of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans."⁴⁰⁵

When all the pieces had been put into the puzzle, it seemed that this was the objective most analysts tried to reach. The decisiveness with which the Canadian peacekeepers wanted to fulfill the UN mission, their aversion of the Croats, their shock caused by crimes and their wish to prevent them by force before they happened, became even more clear and hid the motives of the Canadian Army's actions. Its goal was to make Croatia equal to Serbia, to balance both parties' blame, to make both countries shoulder the political responsibility for the war. Its purpose was to clear the international community's conscience, to acquit it of the co-responsibility for crimes, (during the peacekeeping mission in Croatia in the UNPA zones 600 people had been killed by Serbs paramilitary and official armed forces)), and the international community's ineffectiveness in dealing with the wars in the former Yugoslavia⁴⁰⁶. This was underlined by the leniency Canadians had shown to the weak Serbs and their Krajina while under attack, the antipathy towards the Croats, "we didn't like them", who were aggressors on their own land. Many an interpretation of the Medak Pocket events, not only Canadian ones, reveal a bias when referring to some "sources" and the "impressions of some witnesses". Analysts have jeopardized the truth. By fabricating the events, they question the right of freedom and existence of a people in whose country UN soldiers were stationed. By magnifying and dramatizing the situation, by demonizing only one side, such an analyst creates a myth, a virtual and false painting of the events that took place in the Medak Pocket. In that way he rearranges not only Croatian but also their (military) history.⁴⁰⁷

"The Canadian action in Medak had reinstated some respect for the UN forces, which they had lost in Maslenica." By the end of September, Canadian officer Colonel George Oehring took over the command of Sector South and felt the consequences of Medak best. He witnessed that the credibility of UNPROFOR was returned, the talks between the belligerent sides resumed, and led to an unofficial ceasefire in November (1993) This led to a wider, official ceasefire on Christmas and to a very comprehensive, bilateral general ceasefire agreement signed on March 29th 1994,⁴⁰⁸ also known as the Zagreb agreement. "We (Canadians)

were in September of 1993 (before the action) hated by everybody. They threw stones at me and threatened me before I left for Zadar to meet the Croatian commander (General Ante Gotovina – authour’s note). Medak changed all this. The Serbs had, up to the moment of my departure, a year later, spontaneously been mentioning Canadian courage and honesty shown at Medak, while the Croats, reluctantly at the beginning but later with more readiness, started to respect Canadians in Sector South.⁴⁰⁹ Oehring concludes: “The community of international peacekeepers, in 1993, had not yet been ready to take decisive steps as were taken in Kosovo.” This kind of balancing of Serb guilt of genocide committed in Kosovo with the guilt of military/police actions in Croatia implied that the Croats had committed genocide on the Serbs in 1993 and should have been punished. How? Was the international community to hit Zagreb with air strikes, its planes bombarding Croatia and its army? Was it to defeat Croatia in an infantry battle, force it to surrender and occupy it with peace forces? Should they have punished Croatia by annulling its membership in the UN, by taking away its international recognition and placing it under a protectorate? With minimal knowledge of the nature of the conflicts in Croatia, it is ludicrous to so equalize Croatia and Serbia. The Serbs had ethnically cleansed Kosovo of its’ Albanian population. In their own country, the Croats had tried, after peaceful measures had failed, to prevent Serb terrorists from attacking civilian targets. The Serbs had refused to return under the legislative Republic of Croatia’s constitution. The Serbs had in that obstruction and refusal of Croatian sovereignty been greatly helped by political games and the international community’s interests, which up to Kosovo helped Milošević and the Serb policy of hegemony.⁴¹⁰

*“The Medak Pocket Operation had happened at the beginning of the UN peacekeeping transitional period. The Canadian Battle group had great firepower, and had shown it’s readiness to use it. However, many other UNPROFOR contingents were totally unprepared as far as their equipment, training and political will was concerned, to involve themselves in such an action the Canadians had involved themselves at Medak.”*⁴¹¹ Lee A. Windsor’s professional analysis ends in a way that best suits the Canadian military and political establishment – praising its military forces. *“They have in spite of scandals in Somalia, Cambodia and Croatia,”* (the full report about “Operation Harmony” and 2.PPCLI speaks about an attempt to poison warrant officer Matt Stopford, soldiers involved in brawls allegedly exposed to radiation, involved in an attempted rebellion, their incompetent military commanders are mentioned – Minister of Defence and Canadian chief of the main staff army HQ), *“remained to be the serious generator of security and promoter of Canada’s foreign policy. The*

organization able to produce soldiers who will under ever-changing conditions such as Medak, show efficacy and not collapse as easily as someone would think."⁴¹² In the conclusion of Windsor's study, one can clearly see what the purpose of remembering the Medak Pocket Operation was – to rebuild the damaged confidence of the Canadian Army, due to a number of its commanding officers' misjudgements, scandals and mistakes, it had been at its lowest point, and nearing its own "collapse". Citations to heroism and professionalism shown were to restore some of that old Canadian Army's glory and the trust people had in it. But why at the expense of the Croatians? I will conclude this review of the Canadian Medak Pocket interpretation with two Canadian reporters accounts. *"Thirty C company soldiers were positioned in a two-storey concrete building in Medak, the city held by the Serbs. The UN was afraid 400 Serbs in four unprotected villages in the Medak Pocket would be slaughtered."* The Croatian assessment of the number of Serb soldiers deployed in the Medak Pocket was the same: 400 soldiers. Where were the civilians and how many were there? The civilians in Divoselo, Počitelj, and Lički Čitluk had been organized into a territorial defence. They continued to live on their land but at the sound of an alarm they would take arms and go to war. These villages had obviously been protected by a reserve force in Medak, a tank company, and 80 to 100 soldiers of the 103rd Lapac light brigade deployed there. *"During the next five days, the Medak Pocket was attacked by more than 2500 Croatian soldiers (the number is overestimated) and helped by tanks, rocket launchers and artillery. The Serbs had finally stopped the Croat forces' advance on September 12th."*⁴¹³ *"At noon on September 15th 1993, about 250 Canadian and 500 French soldiers engaged the Croatians in 20 separate firefights, using light arms. The Croats retreated with about 30 of their soldiers killed. The Canadians and the French had one killed and four soldiers wounded. The medal for bravery was awarded to a Canadian soldier for saving his French colleague from a minefield."*⁴¹⁴

A Summary of the Peace Imposing Operation in Accord With The Medak Pocket Agreement

August 6th 1993 – the Canadian Battle group HQ in Camp Polum near Daruvar in Sector West was abandoned. By the end of July, Lt. Col. Calvin had transferred two companies in Sector South, and the rest of 2.PPCLI forces followed.⁴¹⁵ C company, (recce group), took the old French positions in Medak, situated in an old schoolhouse, only 200 meters away from the Serb HQ (sic). After the first artillery preparation, Sgt. Green found a new

building some 100 metres away and ordered Sgt. Tronholm's units to move into it. The evening of September 9th an incident took place involving some drunken Serb soldiers, who during a scuffle between two of their own units, fired a grenade at each other. Later they fired at Canadian soldiers and the Canadian soldiers answered.⁴¹⁶ The Croatian offensive started with the advancing of the 2.PPCLI through the Serb occupied area from Gračac to Medak. On the morning of September 9th, the Canadians were under heavy Croat barrage fire. The Canadian position received about 500 shells. At 06:05 hours the Croatian artillery preparation started ("Tested Mettle"). Medak was their prime target. The Serb HQ was situated in it and it was also the transport junction. The Canadian battalion HQ (CANBAT – Calvin) had been situated in Gračac. The fierce battle between the Croats and the Serbs lasted for the next three days ("The Ottawa Citizen"). On the evening of September 11th the tide of the battle turned. The large Serb counteroffensive was on the way. For the next 72 hours the adversaries were fighting a pitched battle. The ceasefire and the withdrawal agreement were signed on September 15th. On September 13th only a verbal agreement had been reached that preceded the agreement's signing.

On September 14th the military situation in the area stabilized. In the afternoon, the Serbs launched a Luna rocket (known as a "Frog" by NATO) on a Zagreb suburb. Lt. Col. Calvin received an order to enforce the agreement regarding UNPROFOR entering the zone between the belligerents. At 16:30 he held a meeting with his subordinate officers in order to explain their future operation. The plan consisted of four stages: Stage one – On September 15th take the Serb forward front positions; Stage two – establish crossing points in no-man's land; Stage three – the Canadians and French were to advance along the road and take the forward front Croatian positions; Stage four – to oversee the Croat forces withdrawal to their pre-September 9th positions and form the demilitarized zone.

On September 15th General Cot flew to the area of Medak and spoke with Lt. Col. Calvin. The Canadians and the French started entering the zone between the Croats and the Serbs. At 14:00 hours, the Canadians entered the war zone, where they were stopped by the Croats. At dusk, Colonel Maisonneuve, Lt. Col. Nielsen and Lt. Col. Calvin held talks with Brigadier Ademi in Gospić's command post HQ.

On September 15th and 16th the Canadians engaged the Croats in 20 separate firefights. The battle lasted for 15 hours (according to General MacKenzie), 16 hours (according to Lt. Col. Calvin in an address to the Canadian Parliament). Canadians were situated in the old Serb trenches near Lički Čitluk, opposite the Croatian 9th mobile guard brigade. The Croats "at

several times charged Canadian positions.” Canadians admitted that the causes could be Serb shooting at the Croats behind the Canadians’ backs. Early in the morning of September 16th the Croats engaged the Canadians for the last time. They withdrew with 30 dead. (sic) (The UNPROFOR report dated September 16th 1993 – at 22:15 stated the Croatian Army engaged the Canadian battalion who returned fire – the only official UNPROFOR report I could acquire⁴¹⁷) On the morning of September 16th the Canadians saw gunfire and smoke behind the Croatian lines.

At noon on September 16th (phase three), the Canadians advanced, but the heavily armed Croatian company stopped them with T-72 tanks. Lt. Col. Calvin had a heated discussion with Brigadier Mezić. The tense break lasted for 90 minutes, which the Canadians started entering the Medak Pocket, where they found the first killed.

On September 17th at 18:00 hours the Croatian forces withdrew to their agreed positions.

On September 18th a new misunderstanding about the demarcation line, a new meeting and new drawing of maps followed. The Canadians reported being threatened by armed Croatian soldiers.

On September 19th a mine incident occurred, (Shannon Boyd, UNPROFOR spokesperson’s statement, accused the Croats because of alleged firing on the “blue helmets”).

Canadian soldiers hit a mine and disarmed a group of Croatian soldiers in the demilitarized zone. General Cot protested to the Croatian side because the peacekeepers were attacked. Misunderstandings concerning maps and demarcations between the Croatian and the Canadian side continued. Croatian soldiers were cut-off at Kamenjuša and were not allowed to be re-supplied.

On September 22nd the final agreement on the demarcation lines and borders of the UN “buffer zone” was reached.

On September 26th a new incident arises regarding mines and Croatian soldiers allegedly shooting Canadian and French soldiers. There is a mutual exchange of serious accusations between General Cot and General Bobetko.

On October 3rd General Cot sends a letter to General Bobetko about mounting tensions and efforts to reach a lasting peace.

On October 4th General Bobetko replies.

On October 7th 1993 CANBAT 1 (UNPROFOR’s) final REPORT on the Medak Pocket Operation – destruction, carnage, slaughter and burning – “scorched earth” and “ethnic cleansing” are underlined.

