

**Rough Transcript**  
**Col (Ret'd) Roy Boehli, 41 Svc Bn/41 CBG HQ (14 July 2016)**

**Deployment(s):** Bosnia 2002, CENTCOM 2006, Afghanistan 2011

**Interviewer & Transcriber:** LCol M.C. Vernon

***Note: Quotations are not 100% verbatim***

<b>Timecode</b>	<b>Content</b>
0:15	First time he decided to go overseas was 2002. In succession to be CO of 41 Svc Bn. Figured he should know what others had done, in order to be a better CO when his turn came. Slated to be liaison officer for the Multinational Division, SFOR (Stabilization Force). Deployed in Fall 2002 with Op Palladium Roto 11. Most time in HQ in Sarajevo, but also worked in Banja Luka. Essentially "the division's eyes and ears in HQ SFOR".
1:30	LOs are essential to clearing up problems between formations, higher headquarters. This was post-9/11 so people were "uptight, not fearful, but maintaining a cautious posture." He quickly realized during his handover that "not all allies are created equal." He briefed the JOC daily on the div's operations. He expected people to be doing smart operational briefs, but other divs' LOs were simply reading from lists. He went into Staff College mode and prepared more detailed brief. "As a Canadian, this is pretty standard," but others had never seen it before.
3:50	They focused on Op HARVEST, collecting weapons. Also human trafficking, PFWC (Persons Indicted for War Crimes). Near the end of tour during an inspection of a weapons cantonment site they noted some things missing—including aircraft—just before invasion of Iraq. Village of Prijedor was a key site for PFWC. They spent two weeks planning an operation. He was impressed by the availability of resources—such as US patrol planes in the Mediterranean. They corralled "a lot of folks" out of Prijedor and one hotel in particular.
6:15	When he came back, they did so on a civilian aircraft on their own. Met by "my wife and kid." Returned to civilian job a week later.
6:50	In civilian job, people's problems seemed so miniscule by comparison to what he'd just done. Also missed the sense of cohesion he'd experienced during the mission. "Plus the fact we were doing something that mattered." Came back in March 2003.
8:10	Family's thoughts? He was 42 at the time. "My wife was worried. Knew it would come sooner or later. Not too keen. But knew what to expect." His children were 12 and 14, boy and girl. Daughter wasn't too affected, but son was having some challenges at school. His principal was a company commander in the Calgary Highlanders during WW2 and his homeroom teacher was an army brat, so they knew and

	could relate to the family situation. They sorted him out within weeks.
10:20	He came home at Xmas for his HLTA, but he wouldn't do it again. "All that stress from the beginning of tour started all over again. It upset the apple cart. In hindsight, I wouldn't do that again. She had it all up and running, then I come home for two weeks and upset everything."
11:30	With Brits and Americans, we talk the same talk, understand each other. Brits still think we're colonials, but we're close enough in doctrine to mix in. In the JOC, other nations were represented. After briefings, music videos were played, which confounded him. After the SFOR commander changed, there was an incident about a civilian building his own armoured vehicle. New general came into the JOC for a briefing. "Where's this alleged armoured vehicle?" The JOC watchkeepers didn't know, but Boehli showed him. "It was a note to myself: When I get into an organization, make sure watchkeepers understand their responsibilities and the their importance."
14:25	Expectations? None going into it. More of a duty. Lots of experiences in it, however. Validated his training. The importance of face to face relationships and forming them. Especially when you want/need something done with minimal friction. "Walk down the hall and talk to him face to face." Seeing the resources available and the ability to project force also made an impression.
16:00	Another impression: the state of Bosnia, once the scene of the Olympics, and what happened to it "when things go wrong". The place was "lousy with mines. It took me 6-8 months before I could mow my lawn. Self -preservation." Professionalism and the need to be professional is what sticks.
17:30	Circumstances around second deployment in 2006? He was Reserve Directing Staff at the Staff College in Kingston. Opportunity to be the Canadian LO to CENTCOM HQ for Op ATHENA. Col Ian Hope was supposed to move in, but he needed more time after commanding the 1 PPCLI battle group in Afghanistan. Boehli was essentially the chief of staff (?). Several other Canadians. He relieved an air force navigator. He was expecting more warfighting. It was described as info passing to CENTCOM. He'd read the Canadian situation reports from Afghanistan and brief CENTCOM on them.
20:00	After three weeks, he noticed the National Support Element was reporting it was running short of M777 155mm ammunition, but he didn't see that anything was being done about this. He was directed to notify Canadian Expeditionary Force Command (CEFCOM). The desk officer there reassured him a solution was in process. Then the sitreps became "these natures are now critical". He checked again with his boss.
21:40	Then the Monday of the Labour Day weekend he got a panicked phone call from CEFCOM. "They're out of ammunition and can't get it from the Americans in theatre. Can you do something?" He went to his J4

	<p>contacts. He needed to get a three-star general to approve. He went around the HQ for the better part of a week. He was close to “decking” the J4 Multinational Logistics... the Friday before a long weekend. (Labour Day?) He got a name for someone in the Pentagon to approve. Now CANOSCOM is also involved, concerned. He asked if anyone in CANOSCOM knew the Pentagon contact who’s the key to unlocking the puzzle. But the general commanding CANOSCOM knew him from his time at CDLS and called him. Within an hour, he got the release authority for the ammunition, fuzes, charge bags. “We went back and forth on this for a week. Really? There’s got to be an easier way.” He ensured the critical email was sent to all players. It was a success, but “I didn’t think it should have to be that way.”</p>
25:50	<p>This was summer 2006. CENTCOM was fighting on two fronts, in Iraq and Afghanistan, with bits and pieces all over the place. His impression: “Iraq was the Big Show. Afghanistan was a sideshow. So I can understand it in a way.” Operating by email, he wouldn’t have got the answer he needed. Had to go to faces.</p>
27:10	<p>What was Canadian mood that summer? He didn’t get much of a sense of that from his vantage point. But going back to first principles, “How do you let your natures get to a level like that in the first place? We’d forgotten a lot of stuff that had to be relearned.” When Hope finally got to CENTCOM, Boehli asked him about the supply chain. No echelon, had to rely on the NSE. “Luckily I still had some warrant officers with Germany experience who still understood the old echelon system. They rebuilt the A1, A2 and B echelons. Rather than the Forward Supply Group variation.” He took this lesson back to the staff college. Doctrine is there as a framework, then adjust. “Maybe a war isn’t the time to try out a new concept.”</p>
29:50	<p>Impressions of Hope? They only had a week together. “He looked like a tired guy.” Physically, he looked healthy, doing his PT in the heat of Florida. He saw him a couple of years later. “I think I understand why they sent him there. You’ve done the heavy lifting, now take it easy. From one extreme to another. But you need to be cautious that it’s the right place for him.” He wasn’t actually there that long before heading to the War College at Carlisle, PA.</p>
31:40	<p>He’d go to briefings. CENTCOM J2 was a BGen Custer, a distant relation of the cavalry general. Limited access to the intelligence briefings (US, Brits, Canadians, Australians). “Canadians are doing this, this, this, this...” The general asked, “Are the Canadians the only ones doing the business over there? We need to get on this!”</p>
33:30	<p>His final matter of business before handing over to Hope: BGen Fraser had decided he wanted tanks in Afghanistan and Boehli had to work on finding a way to move a squadron plus other vehicles to Afghanistan. He gave preliminary request to the Americans. Next day, first lift was “approved” already. Requests “overlapped”... Boehli’s info copy for</p>

	staff planning and the actual formal request. That's how he left.
35:50	He was also involved in the Counter IED working group, the weekly CENTCOM briefings to the commander. A very quick three months. The Danish general said, "You've just unveiled the elephant in the room. Everyone else has been thinking about this, but you did it. [Bring in tanks]." He doesn't know how Fraser justified the need for tanks, but reading other documents he knew "a 105 tank round could breach mud walls better than a LAV."
37:45	Americans were focused on their own troops. But he noticed that air and sea components seemed to paint "an unduly rosy picture". Prior to operations Canadians participated in, he was impressed by the amount of resources that could be diverted to assist, like the repositioning of two carrier battle groups and their airpower.
39:55	Afghanistan? Family reaction? When he asked his wife, she gave a quick OK. "When you went to Bosnia, I had a bad feeling in my stomach. Now I don't have that." He got the opportunity to become a DS mentor to the Afghan Staff College in Kabul. It was supposed to be a technical assistance visit, but became a short tour instead. Five DS went over; he was the team leader. The college was set up by US contractors who tried to teach the doctrine of Air Land Battle.
42:05	They flew in via Kandahar, to Kabul to Camp Suter. They mentored the syndicate DS. He noticed "These guys are not learning." The Afghan LCol, assisted by a major who didn't question him, just fed them information about "how to do it. No questions. Then he'd natter at them some more. They were trying to produce a staff product, for the sake of producing a staff product. There was little analysis or thinking." He knew he couldn't embarrass the senior in front of his subordinates.
44:25	Walking through a cloth model exercise and speaking via a talented interpreter, he determined several guys shouldn't be there. But there were four or five "who got it, but were afraid to ask a question. It was like training a private recruit, not a staff officer." When the syndicate leader got called away, Boehli stepped in and walked students through the processes of operational planning procedure and other components. "A real quick start-over." The students had a range of experience at the tactical level he could draw on as he explained the concepts. "You need to solve the problem, not just fill in the blanks. How would you attack this position?" The info started to flow from a former mujahedin fighter. "They were risk-averse in their learning. Unfortunately the Afghan syndicate leader returned and resumed ranting."
49:10	This time Boehli called on students to think, to question, which they did with some reluctance. "If they'd been run this way from the start, we would have had more success. But I was confident the bright guys could do a staff officer's job in a battalion. The others, not so much."
50:30	At the graduation, "it was just like the inside of a sultan's tent. Generals

	talked and talked and students got their certificates. DS mentors were given the gift of a tea set.” They took a group photo and gave them out at 8x10 printouts. These were received like “a sack of gold.” They stayed back after this to pass on their critiques. Like the need to do war-gaming.
52:25	“They’ve got to know how to do this, war gaming. They eventually caught on. If you’re playing the bad guy, play the bad guy. Think of as much as you can, so you don’t get your soldiers killed.”
53:15	Camp Suter was British. They rolled out every day in full “battle rattle” to Kabul, then returned. They expected to cover action-on drills, and these hadn’t happened by day three. So they kicked up a stink and insisted on doing the drills on a weekly basis during their Friday administration day—students were off. British weren’t keen on this at first. (They had zeroed their weapons at KMTC initially.)
55:05	Suter is next to Camp Phoenix, the main American camp to the east. One week after their arrival, the front gate of Phoenix was attacked, which seemed to validate their request to review drills. They did an after action review of the attack, using video footage from a tower at Phoenix. They redid the defence plan for the college, as well as their part of the British camp. “You want to say I told you so... but left it at that.”
56:55	<p>Effect on him? “As a soldier it’s made me realize the importance of professionalism and knowing what you do at all levels, and knowing thoroughly what you do. And it’s not a matter of ‘OK I’ve done it. I’ve got the tick in the box.’ It’s the matter of you have to keep doing it and you have to keep challenging yourself professionally to be on top of your game as a soldier. One of the things I always said to my students when I was DS [Directing Staff] at Canadian Staff College in Kingston... I said, ‘I realize this is a long hard course and sometimes you question “why am I doing this?”—but what you do at the end of this, when you become a staff officer, if you’re lazy and you get somebody’s son killed because you’re lazy, and I find out you were one of my students, I said, I’ll come looking for you. We’ll have a discussion about what’s gone on. It’s that important—what you do. This is life and death. It isn’t fun and games. In the worst case scenario, it’s life and death...”</p> <p>He served for 36 years and overall wouldn’t have missed it for anything. “I came out of it, knowing I had done something worthwhile. Self-worth. The downside is that when you come back... “How do you keep them down on the farm, as far as our own soldiers are concerned, when they’ve seen the bright lights of the city? They’ve deployed on operations as a member of a full battle group. Now they’re going to come back here to a Wednesday night and a weekend a month. It’s the managing of those expectations—even at a personal level—that takes some getting used to.”</p> <p>how do you keep them down on the farm when they’ve seen the bright</p>

	lights of the big city? They've deployed in a battle group, and now it's Wednesday nights and weekends. It's the managing of those expectations, even on a personal level, that takes some getting used to. But on a personal level, I did something important, not for me." You need to adjust your expectations for the people around you, including civilians. Tried to explain it a number of times afterwards, "I could try, but unless you understand the context you won't get it." So you wind up explaining stuff like the sign on Tim Hortons: "If there's a rocket attack, we will reopen 15 minutes later."
1:01:00	"When you've experienced Third World problem, First World problems are insignificant." It's become cliché to talk about girls going back to school in Afghanistan. They're probably talking about boys, celebrities. But when you see their school with armed guards and covered in barbed wire, it's hard to explain to people in Canada.
	<b>Additional material?</b>