

Two Somali men sit on the tarmac at Belet Huen, Somalia, 19 December 1992, as they wait for a Canadian Forces transport to be unloaded. The death of Shidane Arone at the hands of Canadian soldiers 25 years ago is often remembered as one of the darkest moments in Canadian military history.

25 Years after Somalia: How it Changed Canadian Armed Forces Preparations for Operations

by Howard G. Coombs

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The CARBG [Canadian Airborne Regiment Battle Group] was not operationally ready, from a training point of view, for deployment to Somalia for Operation Deliverance.

"Chapter 21 - Training," "Dishonoured Legacy" (1997)1

Introduction

n late-1992, the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battle Group deployed to Somalia, during which time a series of negative incidents took place. These events far overshadowed any of the successes attained by the Battle Group in fulfilling their mandate. The best known of these undesirable happenings occurred in 1993 while the Regiment was based around the town of Belet Huen. The situation was desperate among the civil population in that area. There had been many attempted thefts from the Canadian camps, and orders were given to apprehend, and in some cases, to abuse intruders. Subsequently, on 16 March, one such intruder was captured, tortured, and murdered by Canadian soldiers. This killing of Somalian teenager Shidane Arone sent shock waves throughout Canada, and resulted in not only the punishment of the perpetrators, but also to the still-debated disbandment of the Canadian Airborne Regiment.²



Canadian Airborne Regiment members on patrol in Somalia, 1993.

It must be noted that these occurrences were not the only unfortunate experiences associated with Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)³ deployments during this period of time. Separate occurrances in Rwanda and the disclosure of incidents at Bacovici in the former Yugoslavia during 1993-1994 created a great amount of public and private introspection in Canada regarding the nature of both the profession of arms and of peacekeeping in general. In all cases, when details of the aforementioned events were

made public, they negatively affected Canadian support for its military.⁴

Nevertheless, it was the incidents in Somalia that received the greatest attention. They resulted in the "Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of the Canadian Forces to Somalia," or, as it is more popularly known, the "Somalia Inquiry" (1993-1997). The Somalia Inquiry reaffirmed that in a tumultuous security environment, general-purpose combat training (GPCT) was the foundation of peacekeeping training. This statement was tempered with the ideas that (1) Canadian peacekeepers would need to be trained and educated in functions applicable to a cross section of peace operations, (2) centralized oversight and direction was required for pre-deployment training, and (3) Canada needed to assist with peace operations training in other countries as part of its' contribution to peacekeeping.5 These thoughts, along with direction that had already been put in place by the Department of National Defence and the CAF to maneuver in a changing operational environment, irrecoverably changed how the Canadian military would prepare for peace, and other, operations. In turn, they would also lead to a re-professionalization of the CAF.6

Given the current Canadian government's renewed commitment to United Nations (UN) peace operations, most recently evidenced in the Defence Policy

Review, how the CAF prepares to conduct 21st Century operations continues to be a subject of debate. Indeed, some, such as peacekeeping researchers Walter Dorn and Joshua Libben, have questioned the ability of Canadian military units to effectively train and educate for peacekeeping. They argue that the CAF has become focused upon non-peacekeeping operations, and this operational perspective has been matched by a diminuation of peacekeeping specific professional education and training. Along with this are



A Canadian medical technician dresses a Somalian woman's eye.

few opportunities for CAF members to study peacekeeping as an academic subject.8 For that reason, to better comprehend the lessons of the last 25 years that enable the CAF to conduct more effective peace and other operations, it is necessary to understand what has taken place since Canada's military was first committed "in the service of peace," and the subsequent changes wrought by the "Somalia Affair."

Public Perceptions

E ven today, when Canadians visualize 'peacekeeping,' they tend to picture an iconic image of soldiers wearing the UN 'blue beret' interposing themselves between warring factions to bring a peaceful resolution to ongoing conflict.¹⁰ In 2010, Canadian academics, Jocelyn Coulon and Michel Liégeois

argued that this image has, in part, been created by the public rhetoric of successive Canadian governments who utilized it as an element of national identity; they actively reinforced the national myth that "...Canada is a country of peacekeepers." While one can argue that this idea did not have as much prominence during Canadian deployments to Afghanistan, this mythic image has been brought back and reinforced by the current government. Despite the popular national perspective of peacekeeping and 'blue berets,' the past few decades have been characterised by activities that are more challenging and complex than 'traditional' peacekeeping. These modern peace operations are normally non-permissive, favour one side or another, and might not be limited in their use of force. On top of this, a political resolution is not always easily attainable.



The Ratification of the Treaty of Münster (Westphalia), 15 May 1648, by Gerard Ter Borch.

This public perception of peacekeepers developed from the missions produced by the relatively stable international system produced by the Cold War, and relied upon the Westphalian notion of the primacy of the state. In this context, states are the arbiters of conflict and are allowed to pursue any means to ensure the stability of the international system.¹³ These concepts were firmly rooted in a post-Second World War international system based upon balance of power relationships that allowed for peacekeeping in a UN setting grounded in Chapter VI mandates. 14 One can contend that these ideas persisted until the end of the Cold War, and the fragmentation of the relative stability established within the bi-polar balance of power relationship between East and West. Today there is no doubt that operations are conducted in a post-Westphalian world. In this setting, the sources of conflict and power wielded are not limited to state actors, and consequently, threats to peace are difficult to detect, discern, and resolve.

The peace operations of the Cold War were typically carried out under the auspices of the UN. These missions were divided into categories corresponding to the relevant articles of the UN Charter, either Chapter VI "Pacific Settlement Of Disputes," or Chapter VII "Action With Respect To Threats To The Peace, Breaches Of The Peace, and Acts Of Aggression." The purpose of Chapter VI missions was the resolution of disputes endangering international peace and security. Generally, under this chapter,

military contingents are deployed once negotiation, mediation, or arbitration have led to some form of agreement, and the parties involved in the conflict agree to allow a UN force to monitor the agreement. Canadian examples of such Chapter VI operations include contributions to the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) (1964 – present), and the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) (1974 – present), located in the Golan Heights. Those participating in Chapter VI deployments wear the blue beret to visibly demonstrate their status as peacekeepers.

Chapter VII of the Charter allows for actions pertaining to threats to stability, transgressions of an established peace, or in reaction to acts of aggression. This chapter allows the UN to impose or enforce peace, by any means required – both military and non-military – with the goal of these activities bringing about the restoration of international peace and security. Examples of Canadian participation in Chapter VII operations include the Unified Task Force (UNITAF) in Somalia (1992 – 1993); the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led Implementation Force in Bosnia (IFOR) (1995 – 1996); the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) (1999 – 2000); the NATO organized International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (2003 – 2014); and *Mission des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en Haïti* [UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti] (MINUSTAH) (2004 – present). ¹⁵

CFJIC/DND photo HSC92-849-314



A Bison ambulance in Somalia during Op Deliverance.

Somalia

he mission in Somalia commenced with a desire by the LUN to assist with humanitarian aid in a country torn by civil war and famine. This changed over time into an attempt to help stop the violence and rebuild the country into a functioning nation-state. The United Nations Operation in Somalia I (UNOSOM I) was initiated on 24 April 1992 to meet the initial goals of the UN, and grew from its originally small commitment of 50 observers, to thousands of troops. This included a commitment from Canada to provide an infantry battalion. By July 1992, this role was assigned to the Canadian Airborne Regiment, which had already been earmarked and prepared for a previously-postponed UN mission in the Western Sahara (Operation Python). 16 The unit started to prepare anew for the Somalia mission almost immediately, and training commenced in ernest during September 1992 after the posting cycle, reorganization, and initial equipping with armoured vehicles. The latter proving to be an ongoing and problematic process.

During this period, support of UN activities could not be gained from key Somalia warlords and turmoil continued, impinging upon relief efforts. Consequently, on 2 December, UNOSOM I was temporarily suspended. Almost immediately, the United States-led multi-national coalition Unified Task Force Somalia (UNITAF) was approved by the UN Security Council to create a secure environment and to facilitate UN humanitarian operations. The United States invited Canada to participate in this coalition. After Cabinet debate on 4 December by the ad hoc Committee of Ministers, utilizing advice from the Department of National Defence and External Affairs, it was decided to switch the Canadian commitment from UNOSOM I to UNITAF. By the end December, the CARBG was deployed and enmeshed in operations. With this change, the CARBG deployment in Somalia changed from a Chapter VI to a Chapter VII mandate. After months of operations, the unit returned to Canada in June 1993, leaving behind a sector that was considered "stable."17



A Canadian serviceman 'giving five' to a Somalian child at a refugee camp.

While many flaws were found in the training of the CARBG, the Somalia Inquiry noted that GPCT had been the foundation of all deployments of the Cold War. The Inquiry went on to observe that general purpose combat training still constituted part of the core training, but not exclusively so, for peace operations. GPCT provided soldiers and units the ability to successfully complete a wide variety of combat functions, and to integrate them collectively

to meet larger operational requirements. These individual skills included proficiency in weapons, fieldcraft and communications, protection against biological and chemical agents, first aid skills, and the attainment of an acceptable level of physical fitness. These individual skills, once mastered, were combined in collective training scenarios at successively higher levels until the desired objective was achieved. This, along with some mission-specific training, formed the basis of Cold War peacekeeping preparations. There was a philosophy that peacekeeping would require the same skills as combat, but to a lesser degree. It was believed that training specific to the mission could be achieved in the time between the mission notification and deployment. Regrettably, this did not transpire with the CARBG and the Somalia mission.18

Indeed, that is how the separate services of the Canadian military visualized and trained for peacekeeping during the Cold War. From the beginning, there was a steady stream of Canadian casualties, starting with Brigadier-General Harry Angle in 1950, killed while serving with the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan.19 The omnipresent danger of violence during peacekeeping likely made defaulting to a training framework based upon GPCT self-evident, particularly for a military that had just participated in the Second World War (1939 - 1945), and later Korea (1950 - 1952). Reinforcing that service was

successful involvement in the first large-scale UN mission of this period, known as UN Emergency Force I (UNEF I) (1956 – 1967). After the 1956 Suez Crisis, then-Secretary of State for External Affairs Lester B. Pearson put together a Canadian proposal for an interim UN force to supervise the withdrawal of French, Israeli, and British forces, and to also monitor a cease-fire between Egypt



Canadian mechanics of UNEF's maintenance unit at El Arish, April 1959.

and Israel. This initiative resulted in Pearson receiving a Nobel Peace Prize and being perceived as the 'architect' of UN peace-keeping. Significantly, UNEF defined how the Canadian public and its military came to visualize 'peacekeeping,' in related but different fashions.²⁰

UNEF I affirmed that the core of peacekeeping training was the military skills of GPCT. Due to the deployment rapidity, the Canadian contributions had no specialized peacekeeping training. While challenges were cited regarding this Middle East peacekeeping mission, training was not discerned as one of them. ²¹ This idea was maintained in the decades that followed. At a Department of National Defence sponsored conference in 1964, representatives from the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) opined that the involvement of their services in peacekeeping differed little from normal operations. From a Canadian Army (CA) perspective, it was opined that the main requirements of the Canadian UN standby battalion were that it "...be lightly equipped, fit and hard and highly adaptable to adverse conditions." ²² Two years later, in 1966, a study of Canadian military operations supporting the UN re-affirmed that RCN and

RCAF training for these types of military activities "...is to some extent consistent with other operational commitments." It noted that for the Canadian Army, "the transition from other types of operations to UN operations is not great."²³

Successive Chiefs of the Defence Staff, Generals Jean Victor Allard and Paul Manson, reaffirmed this idea. Allard testified as follows to the House of Commons Defence Committee in 1966:

In any future peacekeeping or peace restoration mission, we must ensure the most judicious application of our forces is made...The deployment of strong, highly organized multi-purposed forces to an area of trouble does not mean that force will be used; it merely means that a deterrence to more serious types of conflict will have been achieved.

Over two decades later, in 1989, Manson supported the requirement to train as "soldiers first" to deal with the complexities of peacekeeping.²⁴



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Chief of the Defence Staff, General Jean Victor Allard, on board HMCS Gatineau in 1966.

While GPCT was deemed appropriate for peace operations, it was evident from the Somalia Inquiry and other studies that it needed to be coupled with appropriate education and training. The requirement for professional and educated military leadership

identified during the Inquiry was further delineated by a succession of initiatives that had been coalescing either concurrently or subsequent to the Inquiry. Not the least of these enterprises was Minister of National Defence Doug Young's 1997 Report to the Prime Minister on the Leadership and Management of the Canadian Forces. This report, along with the monitoring and implementation committees that surrounded it, created a significant paradigm shift. The tools of academic education and professional education were made

relevant to 21st Century Canadian military professionals. The new policies ranged from the need for a 'degreed' officer corps and emphasis upon higher level education, to a succession of new senior staff courses to provide higher level professional competencies. Educational requirements, both professional and academic, were reviewed, and new requirements were put in place. Furthermore, the initiatives extended beyond the officer corps. Today, the Non-Commissioned Member Professional Development program

located in St-Jean, Quebec, educates the Non-Commissioned Officers of the Forces. Also, to provide institutional support to both education and training recommendations, the Canadian Defence Academy (CDA) was created in 2002, and in 2004, it

was given an official mandate "...to act as the institutional champion of Canadian Forces professional development." ²⁵

It can be argued that 'peace operations education,' as a subject of study, is not given emphasis within these initiatives. Despite that, this professional education has equipped the officer corps, as well as senior non-commissioned sailors, soldiers, and aviators, with the cognitive competencies to understand and formulate appropriate military responses in

a complex modern security environment. Education is not just specific expertise, but includes developing the ability to think critically and creatively, as well as expanding the intellectual breadth required to design and conduct military activities in all types of situations.²⁶

In addition to greater education requirements, more emphasis was placed upon training appropriate to peace operations. A Senate

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Report of 1993 acknowledged GPCT as the basis for this training, and it suggested that "...the best trained peacekeeper is a welltrained soldier, sailor or airman, one who knows his or her trade." At the same time, this Senate Report also identified that the current military training could be "...improved by adding to the curriculum subjects which are not necessarily military in character," such as mediation. 27 The Somalia Inquiry recommended that, along with GPCT, generic peacekeeping training (UN processes and common peace operations tasks), in addition to mission-specific training (theatre particular) be taught. Additionally, due to the quantity and general applicability of these topics, they needed to be integrated into the general training system.²⁸ Concurrently with the Inquiry, the Canadian military put into place systemic oversight of peacekeeping missions and standards through a series of Deputy Chief of Defence (DCDS) staff instructions and mandated training evaluation of pre-deployment peacekeeping training at the individual and collective levels. This supervision continues today with Canadian Joint Operations Command.²⁹

With DCDS direction, along with the Somalia Inquiry and other recommendations, peace operations training became mandated. GPCT still forms the foundation of mission preparedness, and over the years, it has been broadened out with areas of general and specific training that today *includes*, but is not *limited to*: cultural, religious, and historical awareness; use of force; rules of engagement; refugees and internally-displaced persons; civil affairs and language; communications, command structure and logistics; dealing with international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and regional organizations; public affairs; environment specific medical training; tactical training in operations; information gathering; mediation; negotiation; use of technology; and gender integration. Ethics material is imbued within much of this training, as is the need to support

vulnerable populations. This includes people who, individually or collectively, are at greater risk than the general population of being harmed or of having a lower quality of life imposed upon them.³⁰ Upon considering this list, which is constantly evolving, one could also argue that these skills are demanded by most 21st Century military operations, not just peace operations. On top of this, CAF peace operations doctrine created since the Somalia Report and updated within the last decade or so is still relevant and regularly scrutinized.³¹

The recommendations of the Somalia Inquiry pertaining to the institutionalization of peace operations training in Canada and assisting with peace operations training capacity in other countries were addressed through the establishment of the Peace Support Training Centre (PSTC) in 1996. The Somalia Inquiry Report lauded the formation of the PSTC, and its' connection to the Lessons Learned Centres established by the Canadian Army. It highlighted: "...that they should help to satisfy the need for coordination of training, the production of training material, and the updating of training content and standards in a more systematic manner than has been true in the past." The PSTC was mandated to not only deliver pre-deployment peace operations training, but also to provide peace operations training assistance to Canadian and other foreign organizations. Since then, the role of the PSTC has enlarged to give "...specific, individual [peace operations] training to prepare selected members of the Canadian Forces, Other Government Departments and foreign military personnel." As elements of this training, the PSTC increases foreign peace operations capacity through (1) active participation in foreign and domestic conferences, (2) dispatching instructors to other countries to support their training and build capacity, and (3) training foreign instructors and students in Canada. The training they provide is closely linked to Government of Canada objectives, and reflects



Minister of National Defence Doug Young leaves National Defence Headquarters after holding a meeting with Chief of the Defence Staff, General Jean Boyle in Ottawa, 7 October 1996.



An upbeat presentation at the Peace Support Training Centre, Kingston Ontario, 11 September 2007.

both UN and North Atlantic Treaty Organization requirements. For instance, the "United Nations Military Experts on Mission" course is the signature course of the PSTC, and it reflects UN core pre-deployment training knowledge. This course has been certified with the UN since the late-1990s, with re-certification occurring every five years, to ensure the training reflects directed UN require-

ments. Additionally, the PSTC is the Centre of Excellence for Canadian peace operations training, as well as having the added responsibilities of Influence Activities – Information and Psychological Operations, as well as Civil-Military Cooperation. A small unit of about 60 personal that utilizes significant CA augmentation in support of its courses, the PSTC provides enormous joint institutional capacity that far outweighs its size.³²

The current Commandant of the PSTC, Lieutenant-Colonel Brian Healey, eloquently summarized the complexity of the changes, particularly with respect to CAF education and training for peace operations, that have occurred since Somalia when he observed, "The days of simply taking off your hel-

met and putting on your blue beret are gone."33 In the security atmosphere of the 21st Century, countries not only have the *domestic* responsibility, but also the *international* responsibility to anticipate, prepare for, and deal with myriad crises and conflicts. Military capabilities and forces must be used to counter a broad range of

threats and requirements, from conventional to asymmetric warfare, in addition to the gamut of peace operations. As a result, Healey's words resonate now more than ever. The CAF must be an adaptive and responsive military force that is able to work domestically or abroad in the multi-agency context required for integrated military operations. The structures developed in the wake of the Somalia

Affair for education, training, and capacity building have far greater relevance than simply addressing the needs of peace operations, but give the capability to design and execute relevant security options for Canadians and their Government while conducting all types of military activities. Despite arguments to the contrary, the changes to education and training that have occurred over the last 25 years have enabled the CAF to better deal with the ill-defined and complex problems posed by peace and other operations in the current and future security environment.34 The re-professionalization of the Canadian military and its recent experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq have produced skillfully led forces who adeptly represent Canada at home and abroad.

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- "In the Service of Peace" is struck on the reverse of the standard UN Medal. The medal ribbon from which the medal hangs is unique to a specific mission.
- 10. Peacekeeping consists of activities, normally undertaken by military personnel, predicated on "consent, impartiality and the minimum use of force" and aimed at creating a durable and lasting peace. While peace operations consist of a broad range of actions in which expeditionary military and police forces undertake to "prevent, limit and manage violent conflict as well as rebuild in its aftermath." Alex J. Bellamy and Paul D. Williams with Stuart Griffin, Understanding Peacekeeping, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010; reprint, 2011), respectively pages 173-175 and 18.

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- For discussion of conflict environments see recent articles by Matthew Fisher, "For Trudeau, a UN mission in Africa appears ever more daunting: The Liberals could not have picked a worse time to be considering a blue beret - or more accurately, a blue helmet - mission in Africa," in National Post (5 July 2017 4:00 PM EDT), at: http://nationalpost.com/g00/news/ world/matthew-fisher-for-trudeau-a-un-missionin-africa-appears-ever-more-daunting/wcm/ b020a62c-fad5-4892-ae14-72109591a7d8?i10c. referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google. com%2F, accessed 6 July 2017, n.p.; and, Lew MacKenzie, "Looking for a sweet peacekeeping spot in Africa? Don't do it" RCMI SITREP: The Journal of The Royal Canadian Military Institute, Vol. 76, No. 6 (November/December 2016), at: < http://www.rcmi.org/Library-and-Museum/ Publications/SITREP/SITREP-2015 (1)/2016-06_Sitrep.aspx>, accessed 6 July 2017, pp. 7-8.



Major Justin Schmidt-Clever, Chief Logistics Information and Reporting Officer for the still-ongoing United Nations Operation *Minustah*, shows a child from the Compassion Orphanage how to use one of the many yo-yos distributed to the children of the orphanage, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, October 2009.