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Date: 24 July 1995
To: COS
Info: SMIO UNMOS, ICTY
From: G2 *[Signature]*
Drafter: G2 (Air)
Subject: DEBRIEF OF UNMOS FROM THE SREBRENICA ENCLAVE

INTRODUCTION

1. A debriefing session for the 3 UNMOS from the Srebrenica enclave was held on 22 Jul 95 between 09.45 and 11.30 hrs in the UNMO HQ building. Representatives from UNMOS, G2, civil affairs and humanitarian affairs were present. There were no trained debriefers present and the meeting was held in an informal atmosphere.
2. The 3 UNMOS were from The Netherlands, Ghana and Kenya. The Dutch officer had kept a detailed daily journal that he offered for future translation and use. The Ghanaian had several type written sheets and the Kenyan officer seemed to have no written records. The Dutch officer opened the session, taking the information from his diary, the other 2 filled in details as the report continued. From the start of our discussion of the refugee situation the Kenyan officer took the lead role. The UNMOS seemed to work together all the time and agreed with each others assessments of the situation, therefore no attempt has been made to ascribe specific comments to specific people.
3. The following notes were taken at the time of the debrief and written up immediately afterwards. Where possible the exact wording has been maintained, although it has been 'translated' from direct speech of a conversational nature in a situation where English was not the mother tongue. Notes in italics are for clarification only and were not reported by the UNMOS.

REPORT

4. The start of the main attack came on 3 Jul 95 with the

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attack on OP'E'. The BSA gave 3 warnings that they were going to attack the OP if it was not cleared, it was not cleared and they then attacked without further warning. They used mortar, SA and LMG fire in a very efficient attack, although not much ammunition was fired. OP'E' was down a slope from the BSA position and the BSA took the slope and then threw a hand grenade into the OP. The Dutch soldiers were allowed to get out of the OP, into the APC and drive off without being fired on. OP'E' was important because it overlooked the one of the main bends in the east-west supply road into the enclave. The road also lead to the Bauxite mines which are of great economic value to the area. It had been a long term goal of the BSA to control this road.

5. At the bottom of the slope, about 300m behind the OP, BiH troops stopped the APC because they wanted OP'E' to be held. The Dutch troops tried to set up a new OP, OP'U' but immediately established OP'S' to prevent BSA troops from entering the Swedish Shelter Project which held about 4,000 refugees near the village of Slapovice. After OP'E' had been taken negotiations with the BSA were started to try and get the OP back into UN control, attempts were made to speak to Major Nicolec (BSA) but were unsuccessful. Throughout the attack on OP'E' the UNMOs were being used constantly by Dutchbat and the BSA to try and reach an agreement. The BSA had not expected Dutchbat troops to put up any resistance.

6. The next BSA move was to ensure that the whole area could be held and this meant that OP'F' had to be taken. OP'F' was 2-300m north of OP'E' and further up the slope (possibly on an adjacent hill). The capture of OP'F' was a very good military operation. Two tanks were used and they had a clear view of the OP. They were clearly aiming at breaking down the defensive wall of the OP rather than hitting the area where the Dutch troops were. The UNMOs had a clear view of this attack and were sure that no attempt was being made to attack the troops directly, but the defensive wall was harder to break down than expected. Eventually artillery was brought in and the wall collapsed. On the eastern side of OP'F' there was an open area before the woodlands started. BSA troops came out of these woodlands waving white flags but the OP HQ said they were not to talk to the BSA. The BSA troops then ran across the open ground into the OP and told them they had 10 minutes to leave. The Dutch troops were told to leave by their HQ so they got into their APC and drove down the hillside.

7. The Dutch from OP'F' were then stopped by BiH troops at a barricade. At this stage the APC commander, the driver and the observer were outside the armour of the vehicle. The commander told the driver to drive over the barrier, the BiH troops became very angry at this and the commander told the Dutch crew to get into the vehicle. The commander and the driver managed to do this but before the observer could get behind the armour a BiH soldier threw a grenade and the observer was hit in the head by a piece of shrapnel. The doctor later said that he must have been killed instantly.

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8. The UNMOs could not tell which regiments the various soldiers came from, there were many different patterns of uniform being worn. The soldiers who took OP'E' were recognizable as being different than usual but no details were given. The soldiers who captured OP'F' may have been from the elite Arkan Brigade (not a brigade formation in the usual sense) of the BSA because the capture was a very smooth operation.

9. Whilst firing on OP'F the BSA were firing on the town of Srebrenica as well, this caused a lot of confusion about where they were going to enter the town. The main attack was aimed at paralysing and confusing the enclave and pushing the inhabitants into the centre, leaving them no chance to get reinforcements. The constant shelling of the town should have led to a high number of casualties, the UNMOs were not sure why there were, in fact, so few.

10. The BiH were confused by a lack of leadership and arguments over who was in charge. Zufo was leading the Bandera triangle area but many troops were too scared of him to join him. Ramiz, the COS, was also trying to take the lead but the orders given were different from those the troops expected and they were confused. The soldiers were very fatigued by walking from one side of town to the other while trying to follow orders. The weather was very hot and there were no vehicles for transport. The BiH were so fatigued and confused that they presented no defence.

11. The BSA knew of this weakness in the chain of command and timed their attack to exploit it. The BSA knew that about 2 weeks earlier a helicopter carrying Ramiz had crashed and he was one of only 2 survivors and had been severely wounded in the leg.

12. The civilians were very confused by the situation and expected a lot from UNPROFOR ie: not to be killed or taken as prisoners of war. The civilians also had a problem with the Opstina organisation which was new and fighting with itself.

13. There were allegedly no stores of food and the civilian population was getting very unruly because of this. In fact there were many smuggling routes that brought in food every day. OP'K' reported 40-50 horses bringing in food each day from Zepa. Occasionally the BSA ambushed the trail but it still went on. There was some payment going on at a high level between the BSA and the BiH to allow this transport. UNMOs were not allowed to see inside the Opstina storage area to check food stocks.

14. After OP'F' (3 Jul) was attacked an ambulance APC was sent out to pick up the injured Dutch soldier. QRF and D coy were sent south to set up a blocking position. The BSA used so many heavy weapons, MLRS, AAA and tank fire that the blocking position could not be held and the Dutch withdrew 100m at a time and eventually reached the southern edge of the town. The BSA troops got into the first houses of the town

but the shelling of the town continued. One shell landed in the D coy compound which was full of refugees and many people were killed and injured.

15. There was no movement of local people until the shelling started. In the early days of the assault the shelling was thought to be a softening up technique to frighten the people from surrounding settlements into Srebrenica itself. However even when all the people had moved into the town the shelling continued and even increased with the use of rocket launchers. The main target was the town once the villages had been emptied. It started with a combined attack from the south and from Potocari, with a definite plan to cause maximum civilian casualties. Inside the town people were told to stay in shelters by the UNMOs who described as miraculous many of the escapes from injury and death that they saw. The UNMOs lost count of the number of shell that were falling each day. One of the first actions of the assault was to fire 6, 120mm rockets into the Dutch compound to get the Dutch soldiers in the bunkers before the shelling started on the town.

16. The UNMOs could not get a meeting with the BSA because their interpreter had been told by the BSA not to help, therefore they only had contact with the BiH.

17. On the second day (4 Jul?) the BSA used the same weapons to shell the town. However even though they were in clear line of fire the UNMO HQ was not targeted, though 2 shells went close overhead because they were in the bottom of the building that housed the BiH HQ. After 2 close misses the UNMOs decided to leave their accommodation but did not because they did not want to break their links with the BiH.

18. The shelling had developed into a pattern, about 10 rounds would be fired and then it would stop for 1-2 hrs, during this time people would come out of the shelters and then the shelling would start again. It was a calculated technique to lull people out of their shelters and it was particularly difficult to keep the children inside. Despite the continuous shelling not much damage was done to the buildings of the town. The shelling became a routine occurrence from 08.00-22.00 for the next 5 days, until 11 Jul 95.

19. MSF did a great deal of work bringing the injured in to the hospital. One woman was driving alone through the streets in order to pick up casualties. Once the shelling pattern was noted the UNMOS also went out to pick people up.

20. On 11 Jul 95 the BSA managed to push 2 tanks into the town from the south. Dutchbat sent out 2 APCs to block them but the shelling was then directed to the Dutchbat compound so the APCs were told to retire. A group of civilians formed around the D coy compound to stop the Dutch leaving until they escorted the civilians out to Potocari.

21. One or two days before the end the UNMOS left their HQ

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which by then was being directly targeted by a tank that they could see. On their way out of their position they met the President of the Opstina who told them they could not leave. The UNMOS explained that they would still be reporting on the situation but from Potocari. The President still refused to let them go and the UNMOS were told by their HQ to hold further discussions. They held a meeting through a period of shelling, during which the President of the Opstina was crying and said the UNMOs were to tell the world that the BSA were using chemical warfare and were going to kill everyone. There were no chemical weapons used at any time during the offensive.

22. The UNMOs moved to Potocari and on the journey were targeted by shells, some of which missed them by the narrowest of margins. It was not clear whether these were very cleverly aimed to miss or the UNMOs were very lucky, but the feeling was with the latter option.

23. On Sunday or Monday (9/10 Jul), towards the end of the attacks, D coy was still in the town but was being forced back by the BSA. A group of UNMOs and Dutch soldiers went out to speak to the BiH but their vehicles were targeted. It became clear that D coy would have to retire in the next 24 hrs.

24. The compound in Potocari was not fired on at all although it could easily have been. The only firing was with AAA, MLRS and tank fire onto a hill to the west of the compound to keep people in. The people kept in the bunkers for most of the day anyway.

25. The situation got worse in the town on Tuesday and 3,000-3,500 people started to walk out of the town. However the factory at Potocari was already full and they had to stop 100m outside the compound. This was not seen as a problem because it was already noted that the BSA were not firing on the area. It had now become clear that there was a massive refugee problem to deal with.

26. On Wednesday (12 Jul) the main evacuation started and the entire road space was taken up with refugees. A meeting was held with the BSA who got hold of several trucks and buses. Between 1400 and nightfall on Wednesday refugees started to be moved to Kladanj, 5000-6000 were moved that day. The rest of the refugees were moved on Thursday (13 Jul) when the BSA turned up with 50 trucks and buses. The temperature was about 35°C and people were fainting because of the heat. All the Dutchbat water supplies were shared out and the hospital was working 24 hrs a day. All the people on the road had been moved on Thursday morning and all those in the compound were moved out by the end of the day. The situation in the camp was devastating, worse than a pigsty, with excrement and fleas everywhere.

27. All the trucks and buses were arranged by General Mladic and it was clear that everything was planned including the evacuation. Mladic made a very good show for BSA TV cameras,

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he provided bread and water and a case of beer for the refugees and once the fighting was over the BSA troops were handing out cigarettes quite freely.

28. There were no armed men amongst the refugees. The rumour was that they were trying to fight their way out via the Bandera triangle and between OP'M' and OP'N' to Tuzla. There was a suggestion that they would try to take BSA hostages in order to get out. The UNMOs were with the refugees for 24hrs a day and knew nothing about the reports of the killing of men of military age. Single gun shots were heard but there was nothing to suggest they were from executions. A group of Dutch soldiers said that on the first night that the men were taken they saw 9 men taken behind a house and then heard shots and the men never came back, however, on investigation there were no bodies or signs of executions.

29. On Thursday (13 Jul) the selection of men between the ages of about 18 and 65 started as people were being loaded onto the transport. General Mladic took the UNMOs to the house where the men were being questioned and there was no sign of any ill treatment but later they did hear reports of harassment of the men. There was no evidence that 4 buses of children were lost and there were no signs of ill treatment of young girls.

30. After Thursday, when the refugees had all left the town the BSA made their HQ in the UNMOs building which was in a very good position. The entire town was looted and trucks, horses, mules and wheelbarrows were all used to take furniture and household goods out of the houses. Most of the thefts were carried out by children.

31. After the refugees had left the wounded were moved to Bratunac. The BSA checked the wounded and selected 7 men and carried out some very mild interrogation of them. The ICRC took all the sick apart from the 7 men away but a Dutch anaesthetist remained in the Bratunac hospital 3-4 days longer and said that the men were well treated while he was there.

32. UNMOs returned to Srebrenica with MSF to pick up several old people, they were in very poor condition because they had had no food. D coy compound had a large crater in the middle of it which may have killed and wounded many refugees. In Srebrenica itself all the houses had been broken into and all the door were smashed. Two old women were brought by the BSA to the compound 5 days later (18 Jul?), they had been found in the hills.

33. On Thursday while busy evacuating the refugees Arkon troops, and Arkon himself, were positively identified at the scene.

34. At this point in the debrief the representative from Humanitarian Affairs asked that everyone leave the room so that the humanitarian aspects could be discussed with the UNMOs confidentially and the debrief came to an end.

